

It's Up to You 2023 (Week 3): How can I reconcile having doubts with childlike faith?

**Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less**

1. We came at this question from three different angles yesterday, the first of which was to show that, while Jesus does use children as a living, breathing illustration of what the Kingdom of God is, He never asks us to have "childlike faith."

2. What Jesus actually extols is childlike "humility," a willingness to come to Him just as we are, however tentative, however doubtful, which marks a major "change" for adults who tend to outgrow this kind of humility (Matthew 18.2-4).

3. Thus, doubt is not our greatest spiritual enemy, disconnection is; too often, it is our own discomfort or embarrassment or denial about our questions/struggles/doubts that keep us from God.

4. As Father Joseph Neuner advises, "There is no human remedy for your doubts. You are not responsible for fixing them, God is. As it reads in 2nd Timothy 2.13, 'If we are faithless, God remains faithful - for He cannot deny Himself.'"

5. We also considered the famous story of Peter asking Jesus to call him out onto the water of a stormy Sea of Galilee (Mt. 14.22-31), the point of which is NOT to make us look down our noses at Peter but to realize that we're all like Peter.

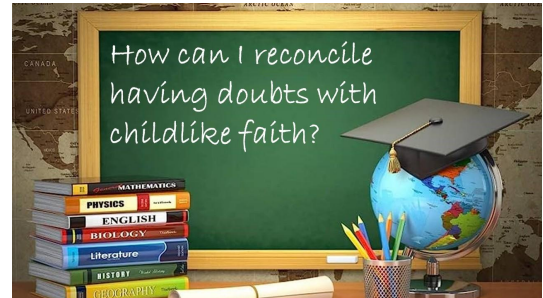
6. We overestimate our faith until we come face to face with overwhelming fears or doubts. Moreover, it is far easier to claim doubtless faith in the boat than it is out on the stormy waters of the real world. From time to time, everyone loses sight of Jesus and panics; every so often, doubt overwhelms everyone, so much so that only Jesus can save us from it.

7. The best any of us can hope for is the famous line from Mark 9.24: "I believe; help my unbelief."

8. Our last approach to our question for the day was to look at Jude's pastoral instruction to "have mercy on those who are doubting or wavering" (Jude 22).

9. To have mercy is to a) be aware of and see someone's distress, in this case due to their doubt, b) feel their distress (that is, empathize with them), and then c) show compassion and kindness toward them because of that distress.

10. Those who doubt need our love and understanding, not our judgment, and that includes how we treat ourselves when we doubt. Acting with mercy is the first prerequisite - it is the soil out of which answers and faith will grow.



## Quotes to Ponder this Week

A. W. Tozer:

Now, as always, God discloses Himself to those willing to be like children and hides Himself in thick darkness from the wise and the prudent. We must simplify our approach to Him...We must put away all effort to impress, and come with the guileless candor of childhood. If we do this, without doubt God will quickly respond.

Brian McLaren on how to help others who doubt:

In short, instead of providing easy answers for doubts and questions, try to come alongside that person as a companion in the search for good things – truth, honesty, justice, and all the rest. And this is perhaps the most important step – try to help them keep praying through the process – because ultimately, faith isn't just about answers or concepts. Faith is about admitting that many of life's greatest truths are going to remain mysteries to us, due to the limitations of our tiny brains that weigh less than a cantaloupe. Faith is about reaching out to God to guide us, and asking for His help so we can be honest, good-hearted seekers...Faith is reaching out to Someone who knows more than we do.

From the World Council of Churches:

Why are we so easily frightened by the doubts that arise in our hearts? Truth be told, we envy those who say they have never doubted. We'd like to have such certainty, however much of a stubborn illusion it may be. But honestly, we see so much in our world that makes us question Your power and care, oh God.

It takes courage and trust to befriend doubt. We need to be prepared to journey. Apathy, inaction, complacency, and self-centeredness are the opposites of faith - not doubt. Help us continue to follow the way of Christ, for it is only in following that we find the answers, it is only in action that faith finds us.

Only by faith can we live the questions. We are all witnesses of the unpredictable breakthroughs that lie obscured from our view on the other side of doubt.

Uphold us in our perpetual fear, lift us from our crippling insecurities veiled as conviction, strengthen us in the face of adversity, and encourage our meager faith.

We praise You, oh God, for the reassurance of Jesus, who promised us that every time we reach out to Him, however timidly, we will discover Him right beside us, amen.

## More to Explore

We've talked about doubt and childlike faith before - you can revisit those sermons and the resources recommended in their respective Monday Memo emails by following these links:

Weeks 3 and 4 of our "Come to Jesus" series, entitled "Doubting John" and "Faith Like a Child":  
[Sermon Series "Come to Jesus" - KirkWood Presbyterian Church \(kirkwoodpcusa.org\)](http://kirkwoodpcusa.org)