

We can move through doubt to a greater, richer, more compelling, more existentially satisfying faith – Douglas Groothuis

Doubt is a problem Christians tend to hide. But are honest, soul-searching questions really something to be afraid of?

Douglas Groothuis, professor of philosophy and director of the Apologetics and Ethics MA program, Denver Seminary, said at the opening plenary of the 2015 Defend the Faith conference, Jan. 4-9, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, that doubt *can* lead to a more vibrant faith.

“We can move through doubt to a greater, richer, more compelling, more existentially satisfying faith,” Groothuis said. A committed, rational faith is the ideal state, but doubt, if addressed properly, can be the medium for further growth, Groothuis said.

“Doubt can be an agitation for further growth, deeper knowledge, and greater conviction,” Groothuis said. “We shouldn’t waste our doubts and we shouldn’t condemn those who are questioning and wondering.”

Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple Inc., came to his pastor as a young teen troubled by deep suffering in the world, Groothuis said. Because the pastor refused to acknowledge the question, Jobs walked away from his Christian upbringing.

Christians who experience doubt should not be burdened further by placing more guilt and shame on them, Groothuis said. Groothuis compared it to a donkey bearing a heavy burden that falters on an uphill climb. Beating the donkey only makes it worse. For those feeling doubt, “We need to lighten the load.”

Drawing from Matthew 11:1-11, Groothuis pointed to John the Baptist, a “credentialed” follower of Jesus who experienced a moment of doubt.

Groothuis reminded the audience of John’s “credentials” as a committed believer: his ministry was foretold in prophecy and revealed to his parents; he was a prophet and oracle of God; twice, he identified publicly Jesus as the Messiah; he was courageous and stood up to Herod Antipas. Yet, John the Baptist struggled with doubt, Groothuis said.

Jesus employed an apologetic technique in responding, Groothuis said.

When Jesus told John’s disciples to report back six types of miracles being performed (the blind see, the lame walk... the dead are raised), he was citing evidence for his Messianic identity by showing that prophecy had been fulfilled, Groothuis said.

Jesus gave a rational response using tangible evidence, Groothuis said.

"If someone does these six things, then he is the Messiah. I am doing these six things, therefore I am the Messiah. This is the deductive form of argument called *modus ponens*," Groothuis said.

Significant, as well, is the fact that Jesus did not belittle John for his doubt, Groothuis said. "Jesus gave John more reason to believe and then he praised John," Groothuis said. "John the Baptist did not forfeit his testimony. He addressed it honestly and he received an answer."

When Doubt Comes: the wrong way to respond

Doubt is not the same as unbelief, Groothuis stressed. Doubt is questioning and looking for more information and a proper response from fellow believers is urgent.

Wrong Responses to a Christian with Doubts:

1. "*Don't think about it.*"— Hiding doubt goes against human nature. Humans were created to have confidence in beliefs. Doubts need to be tended to, rationally and lovingly.
2. "*Just believe.*"— Belief doesn't work that way. Beliefs cannot be "willed," they have to be cultivated. Example: a lifeguard would never say to a drowning victim, "Just swim."
3. "*Have blind faith.*"— Then why not have blind faith in Buddhism, or Islam, etc.? Blind faith is not biblical faith.

When Doubt Comes: the right way to respond.

Faith must **not** be separated from reason, Groothuis stressed. "Biblical faith is a subjective response, by faith, to the objective truth of God," Groothuis said.

Belief must be cultivated through study, the reading of pertinent material, and through interaction with experts, Groothuis said. He encouraged the audience to study with "intellectual patience," saying strong faith comes from in-depth study.

Edward John Carnell, [1919-67] apologist and former President of Fuller Theological Seminary, once said, "Faith rests on the sufficiency of the evidence," Groothuis reminded the audience.

When doubt comes, **act immediately**, research, study, talk to experts and pray, Groothuis said. "Jesus did not turn away John the Baptist when he had questions," Groothuis said. "He will not turn you away."

Groothuis shared with the audience the following about his faith journey:

*I have found in the toughest times of life I sometimes do not experience the presence of God. God seems to be distant. **But what I come back to is that Christianity is true. There are reasons to believe it.***

And in my ministry, my career, I have tried to study every major worldview, reading primary sources, writing, debating, and having conversations. That was a process. It didn't happen all at once. I didn't attain a high level of certainty the minute I became a Christian. That had to develop through questioning, through investigating, through conversations.

But I am a living example of someone who knows too much to walk away. Especially in the last year I have experienced some rather acute crises and suffering...But as bad as it gets and as angry as I can get at the Lord, I can't deny that the Gospel is true. The Gospel has a firm and unyielding hold on me and I'm a Christian by the grace of God.

To learn more of Dr. Groothuis' ministry, visit www.DouglasGroothuis.com. For information on evidence for the Christian faith, visit defendthefait.net.

Recommended Reading by Dr. Groothuis:

1. Os Guinness, *God in the Dark*. (Crossway, 1996). "Wise counsel on various facets of doubt and how to address them. Revision of the longer work, *In Two Minds* (InterVarsity, 1976). Find this one if you can. It is out of print," Groothuis wrote.
2. Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (InterVarsity Press, 2011).
3. J. P. Moreland, *The God Question* (Harvest House, 2009). "The case for living a full Christian life, intellectually engaged and spiritually passionate.
4. J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, 2nd ed. (NavPress, 2013).
5. John Piper, *Think* (Crossway, 2010).
6. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith* (Zondervan, 2000), *The Case for Christ* (Zondervan, 1998), and *The Case for a Creator* (Zondervan, 2004). "A journalist interviews experts on the issues. Generally good as an introductory work," Groothuis wrote.