

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, March 19, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

THE MAGNIFICENT JOY OF TRIALS Without a Doubt

James 1:2-4 & 5-8, Genesis 2:15-17 & 3:1-1, Luke 1:5-25 & 1:57-66

“Consider it pure joy, my brother (and sisters) whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” –James 1:2-4 (NIV)

“The Magnificent Joy of Trials”... sounds irrational... maybe a little bizarre, or at least a little cynical that trials should ever be counted a “joy”, we have discovered that development of our faith and growing to a complete (or whole, full, mature) faith includes times of trial... sometimes even very challenging trials., but without times of trial we may never really develop... and nobody, it seems, ever escapes this process... of growth through trial. We simply cannot become the people God intends us to be without some real struggles and challenges along the way. Just for review we have discovered that when times of testing and trial come we can respond to them in a couple of different ways:

2 Possible Responses to Trials:

- 1. Trials can anger us** - In other words, we can allow our trials and struggles to defeat and embitter us, and push us away from God... make us angry at Him and at life. Often when “trial of many kinds” (as James calls it) come our way, whatever that trial may be (failure, loss, discouragement, heartache, disappointment), it may catch us so off guard, so unprepared, that it knocks the wind out of our sails. It may leave us reeling, perhaps hurting so deeply or so confused and bewildered that we find ourselves growing angry... sometimes even mad. We get mad at God, mad at the world and mad at others. We can lash out and allow our pains and disappointments in life to literally defeat and stifle the life out of us and defeat us. We may grow anger, bitter, and out of touch with God.
- 2. Trials can advance us** - That’s what James says. He is telling us that for a believer, the trials we experience in this life can actually serve to mature us and advance us in our faith. They can actually grow us in the faith so that our faith is complete and not lacking anything. Those trials may actually cause us to draw closer to God than we have ever been in greater dependence and reliance on Him.

So the question is how do I advance in my faith rather than become angry and bitter when the trial of life overwhelm me? How do I develop and mature in my faith rather than wilt and die in despair and bitterness when I’m hurting? How do I turn moments of struggle, and hardship, and

difficulty into opportunities to develop my faith? James mentions *“trials of many kinds”* and we have explored a couple of these different types of trials that God may use to grow us in our faith the past few weeks.

Where We Have Been: (4 trials we have explored the past few weeks)

1. **The trial of waiting** – What do we learn from the trial of waiting? We learned to wait, rest and trust in God.
2. **The trial of failure** – What do we learn from the trial of failure? We learned that failure doesn't have to be final... that we learn from our failures and that sometimes failure gives us a greater dependence on God.
3. **The trial of discouragement** – What do we learn from the trial of discouragement? We learned that we are not alone in our discouragement... that discouragement is not a sin and that many of our great heroes of the faith faced discouragement. God is faithful in our discouragements, to see us through, to strengthen us and provide for our needs in the midst of it, and encourage our hearts with his presence and provision.
4. **The trial of fear** – What do we learn from the trial of fear? We learned that fear itself is not a sin, yet it can be stifling to our faith if we let it. It can stop us in our tracks and even cause us to retreat. Perhaps, nothing is more paralyzing to our lives than fear. Maybe you've never thought of fear as a trial, but isn't that exactly what it is. Fear should cause us to have a greater reliance and dependence on God... a greater level of trust and leaning upon God.

The Christian life is an overcoming life. Even though we will definitely have problems and personal struggles in this life (trials of many kinds), we will be able to overcome because of Jesus. Because of Him, we have victory over the world, including sinful habits, bitterness, loneliness, guilt, fear, and discouragement. God desires for you to live an overcoming life! Jesus, Himself, said in John 16:33, *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* And in 1 John 5:4-5, *“For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”* Christians are overcomers and truly are to live victorious Christian lives every day, but let's be honest, there are many trial and struggles, heartaches and difficulties along that way that can daily steal our joy and paralyze our faith, destroy our relationship and weaken our walk... trials of many kinds that can embitter and defeat us if we let them.

Last week we looked at the enemy of “fear” and it's paralyzing effect on our lives as believers. This week we want to turn our attention to another trial that we may encounter in life that can be equally as destructive to the life of a believer, the trial of “doubt.” The great preacher, **Charles Haddon Spurgeon** said about doubt, *“Doubt discovers difficulties which it never solves; it creates hesitancy, despondency, despair. Its progress is the decay of comfort, the death of peace. “Believe!” is the word which speaks life into a man, but doubt nails down his coffin.”*

And I might add that doubt defeats and disillusion the lives of many professing believer and keep them from enjoying the full benefits of their faith and the victorious Christian life that Christ died to give them. But not only that, our ultimate enemy, the devil will use our doubt to cast doubt in the minds of many who would perhaps come to Christ, but all they see in our

doubts instead. As **Dr. John MacArthur says, “Every temptation, directly or indirectly, is the temptation to doubt and distrust God.”**

“There’s an old fable that says the Devil once held a sale and offered all the tools of his trade to anyone who would pay their price. They were spread out on the table and each one labeled... hatred, malice, envy, despair, bitterness, lust, fear, and anger - all the weapons that everyone knows so well. But off to one side lay a harmless looking old and wooden shaped instrument marked “doubt.” It was old and worn looking but it was priced far above all the rest of the tools. This puzzled one of the buyers there, so he asked the reason why the unreasonable price, for such a worn-out, old tool. To that the Devil replied, “Ah-ha, that is the most prized tool in my chest. It is worn because it is often and so successfully used. I can use this one so much more easily than the others. No one knows that it belongs to me, so with it I can open doors that are tightly bolted against the others. Once I get inside a heart with this tool I can use any tool that suits me best.” That is doubt!

How do we deal with the trial of doubt? When life gets hard, and doubt assails us, what are we to do? Let’s take a look at this particular trial that we may all face from time to time, and see how we can grow and mature in the faith even in the face of the trial of doubt.

I. DOUBT EXPOSED

Doubt is an experience common to all people. Even those with faith in God struggle with doubt on occasion and say with the man in **Mark 9:24, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”** Some people are hindered greatly by doubt; some see it as a springboard to life; and others see it as an obstacle to be overcome. The Bible has something to say about the cause of doubt and provides examples of people who struggled with it, but before we get into that let’s expose the world’s way of looking at doubt a bit.

2 Worldly Interpretations of Doubt:

1. **Classical Humanist Thought** – Classical humanism says that doubt, while uncomfortable, is absolutely essential for life. Famous Philosopher, **René Descartes** said, **“If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as possible, all things.”** What is he saying? Is he right? What may be wrong with that thinking?

Observation: *I think at least a part of what Descartes is saying is that the way you learn is to question things, ask questions of why it’s true, what is real about it. Discovery! If that is what he is saying he may be right on some level, however there are certain things that must be accepted by faith... there may not be any human logic to prove it, no earthly facts to really back it up. Remember that God is not threatened by our doubts and questions about Him. It doesn’t shake Him up for us to have doubts.*

2. **Pagan Religious Thought** - This is similar to what the founder of **Buddhism** who said, **“Doubt everything. Find your own light.”** What is that quote saying? Is it right? What may be wrong with that thinking?

Observation: *This is another interesting quote on doubt... and there may be an element of truth to this, that we need to satisfy our own doubt... find out for ourselves... struggle and wrestle with things before we are able to fully embrace it, but doubt everything... seems a little skeptical, a little incredulous, a little cynical*

and pessimistic don't you think. Again, to doubt everything is to have faith in nothing... because faith is "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see..." according to Hebrews 11:1 – "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

PERSPECTIVE: If we take their advice, we would have to doubt what they said, which seems rather contradictory. Instead of taking the advice of skeptics and false teachers, we will see what the Bible has to say.

II. DOUBT DEFINED

So what, exactly, is doubt? How do we define it? Let's get a better understanding of what we are talking about by exploring some definitions of doubt.

4 Good Definitions of Doubt:

1. **Webster's Dictionary** – "An uncertainty of belief or opinion that often interferes with decision-making."
2. **Acrostic Definition** –

D – Did God really say that?

O – Or maybe He didn't.

U – Unless I see it, I won't...

B – Believe it! I'm thus...

T – Tempting God rather than trusting Him!

Did God really say that? Or maybe He didn't. Unless I see it, I won't Believe it!
I'm thus Tempting God rather than trusting Him!

3. **Quote Definition** - "Doubt and unbelief are two sides to the same coin. It means to waver in opinion or judgment; to question; to deem uncertain; to distrust. It is a lack of belief or faith in God and His provision." - Harriet Bond
4. **Word Study Definition** – **Dubious, to give rise to uncertainty, to be unsettled or unsure.**" We get our English word doubt (which originally was "daut") from the Latin "dubitare or dubius... from which we get our other English word "dubious." The English word "dubious" may give us a good understanding of the word "doubt." The word "dubios" means "to give rise to uncertainty, to be unsettled or unsure."

III. DOUBT EXPLAINED (Various Scripture)

The very first expression of doubt in the Bible is in Genesis 3, when Satan tempted Eve. Let's look at it and see what it teaches us about the enemy of doubt (Genesis 2:15-17 & 3:1-13). God had given a clear command regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and had specified the consequence of disobedience. Satan introduced doubt into Eve's mind when he asked, "*Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"* He wanted her to lack confidence in God's command. When she affirmed God's command, including the consequences, Satan replied with a denial, which is a

stronger statement of doubt, “You will not surely die.” Doubt is a tool of Satan to make us lack confidence in God’s Word and consider His judgment unlikely.

GENESIS 2:15-17 & GENESIS 3:1-13

3 Things Doubt Does According to the Garden Account:

1. **Doubt gives rise to the enemies ability to mislead and deceive us** – Genesis 3:1 says, “*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”*” Do you see it? Satan placed a questioning doubt in the woman’s mind and was thereby able to craftily mislead and deceive her.
2. **Doubt causes us to question God and His goodness** – Again Genesis 3:1 says, “*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”*” Here the Enemy raises a doubt about God and His intentions to keep Adam and Eve from something God, and it works. Notice what Eve says in verses 2-3, “²*The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”*” I don’t know if you noticed it by she buys into doubt about God’s goodness. She says He will kill us if we eat from that tree. In verses 4-5 the Devil goes on to say, questioning God’s goodness, “*You will not surely die,*” *the serpent said to the woman. ⁵“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*”
3. **Doubt causes us to miss out on God blessing and promises** – Not only was the relationship between God and Adam and Eve (man) broken (see vs. 8), but they were banished from the place of God’s blessing and provision... the garden. Verse 23 says, “*So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.*”

Observation: *Lest anyone doubt, doubt has devastating effects on the life of a child of God. It opens the door for a whole host of missed blessings and opportunities, and cripples our relationship with God.*

Lest we think that we can lay all of the blame on Satan, the Bible clearly holds us accountable for our own doubts.

LUKE 1:5-25 & LUKE 1:57-66

Take your Bible and go to the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke, and I want you to notice with me the story of the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5ff). When Zechariah was visited by the angel of the Lord and told that he would have a son (Luke 1:11-17), he doubted the word given to him. He logically assumed that he and his wife were too old to have children, and in response to his doubt, the angel said he would be mute until the day God’s promise was fulfilled (Luke 1:18-20). Zechariah doubted God’s ability to overcome natural obstacles – many people today share the same doubt. Any time we allow human reason to overshadow faith in God, sinful doubt is the result.

3 Things Doubt Does According to the John the Baptist Account:

1. **Doubt blinds our eyes us to the possibilities of what God can do** – Did you notice in the story that although God revealed what he was going to do through Zechariah and Elizabeth, Zechariah couldn't see it? Verse 7 tells us that Elizabeth was barren and well advanced in years... way past her child bearing years. Notice verses 11-18, *"¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.^[a] ¹⁶ Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."* In other words, "God, I can't see this happening! It's just too impossible!" Remember nothing is impossible with God.
2. **Doubt closes our ears to the voice of God in our life** – Essentially, Zechariah's doubt said, "I can't even hear this! This voice can't be real!"
3. **Doubt silences our mouths as a witness for God to our world** – Literally, Zechariah's mouth was silenced for the entire pregnancy of this child. For 9 months, he didn't get to bear witness for God, which remember was his job!

JAMES 1:5-8

Contrary to the humanistic view that doubt is essential to life, the Bible says that doubt is a destroyer of life. I want you to turn with me to **James 1:5-8**. James tells us that when we ask God for wisdom, we are to ask in faith, without doubt. If we doubt God's ability to respond to our request, what would be the point of asking in the first place? God says that if we doubt while we ask, we will not receive anything from Him, because we are unstable. *"He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind"* (James 1:6).

"⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."
 –James 1:5-8 (NIV)

3 Things Doubt Does According to James, the Half-Brother of Jesus:

1. **Doubt cuts off the flow of God's generous and gracious blessing to our lives** – Verse 5 reminds us that God give generously to all who ask, even without finding fault. That speaks of grace. But according to verses 6-7, doubt interferes with that

generous and gracious flow. “⁶ *But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.* ⁷ *That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord;*”

2. **Doubt causes us not to be able to see things clearly** – Think about what James is saying in verse 6 when he says, “⁶ *But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.*” Think about what happens when someone is blown around, jostled, tossed about, spun around and around in a boat in the middle of the sea. He or she become disoriented, confused, and unable to see where they are going. That is the certain effects of doubt on the life of a believer. It causes us to lose our bearings.
3. **Doubt creates an uncertainty and unsteadiness in our daily walk and life** – Verse 8 says of this doubt filled one, “...*he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*”

IV. DOUBT DEFEATED

So the question is how do we overcome the trial of “doubt” in our lives in order that we may grow and mature through our doubts and not be defeated and weakened by doubt? Let me give you, in conclusion some sure-fired remedies for doubt.

Remedy for Doubt:

1. **The Word of God (Romans 10:17)** – Remember that faith is the remedy for doubt. Well where does faith come from? Here it is in **Romans 10:17** “*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” God gave us the Bible as a testimony of His works in the past, so we will have a reason to trust Him in the present. Psalm 77:11 says, “I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago” In order for us to have faith in God, we must study to know what He has said. Once we have an understanding of what God has done in the past, what He has promised us for the present, and what we can expect from Him in the future, we are able to act in faith instead of doubt.
2. **The Body of Christ (Hebrews 10:19-25)** – Listen to **Hebrews 10:19-25**, “¹⁹ *Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,* ²⁰ *by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,* ²¹ *and having a High Priest over the house of God,* ²² *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.* ²³ *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.* ²⁴ *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,* ²⁵ *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*” We have to deal with any doubt and unbelief; and we do this by surround ourselves with people of like faith. We have to shut off the road to unbelief, by taking care what you hear and watch.
3. **Through Much Prayer and Fasting (Mark 9:17-29)** – There is a story told in Mark 9:17-29 that helps us to understand the place of prayer and fasting in the life of a child of God, especially when doubt prohibits from being all that God has called us to be. Listen to it, “¹⁷ *Then one of the crowd answered and said, “Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit.* ¹⁸ *And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down;*

*he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.”*¹⁹ *He answered him and said, “O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me.”*²⁰ *Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth.*²¹ *So He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood.”*²² *And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”*²³ *Jesus said to him, “If you can believe,^[a] all things are possible to him who believes.”*²⁴ *Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”*²⁵ *When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: “Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!”*²⁶ *Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, “He is dead.”*²⁷ *But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.*²⁸ *And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?”*²⁹ *So He said to them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.”^[b]*

We can have enough faith, but it’s the unbelief that will negate your faith. Jesus rebuked His disciples when they could not cast out the dumb spirit out of the boy, and said that it was because of their unbelief, and He tells them that “prayer and fasting drives out unbelief”. We must be a people of much prayer and the lost art of fasting to deal successfully with the doubts that are sure to flood our life.