

James 1:5-8

Doubting Your Doubts and Believing the Believer

Main idea: Can we believe, without having any doubt?

What's the strangest thing you've ever seen? Have you ever seen anything and thought, "I can't believe my eyes! I can't believe what I'm seeing!" I'm not talking about something you were incredulous about. Certainly we've all been offended by things we've seen in the news in the past year, or even the past week. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about seeing something that you thought was impossible, like something insanely weird. Have you ever had that kind of experience?

And, when you think back on it, could you believe your eyes? Looking back, do you think that what you saw was real, or is it possible that your eyes were merely playing tricks on you?

When I was around 6 years old, I thought I saw what looked like an alien spacecraft. It was late at night, and it was hovering off in the distance, just above the treeline. If you would have asked me, for several years, I would have sworn to you that I saw a UFO. I could draw pictures of it. It was the shape of a frisbee or an orb with bright lights. And about a week later, I remember seeing exactly what I saw that night on the show *Unsolved Mysteries*. I was convinced!

Now, years later, I have serious doubts about what I thought I saw that night. I don't know what it was. It was probably just a helicopter that I couldn't see well because it was too far away. Or it could have been the moon peeking through a weird cloud formation. Or it could have been what I ate for dinner. I don't know.

But I tell you this story simply to say that our perceptions of reality aren't always reality. Studies show that we often can't trust our own memories because our sight and especially our brains can play tricks on us.¹ So it's good and healthy to have a degree of doubt about what we see and remember, if for no other reason than to be humble.²

And I think one of the things that we all need a little more of in our society and political climate today is humility.³

But what if you have the opposite problem? What if you struggle not to have a healthy degree of doubt, but to have faith?⁴ Let me know in the chat. Do you struggle more with doubt, or with faith?

Imagine a person who had no faith. A person without faith would have no hope because faith gives us hope of better circumstances.⁵ A person without faith would have no love because love is born out of a faith that the person or thing you love is somehow either in need of or worthy of your love.⁶ And a person without faith would have no reason to do anything because they wouldn't believe in anything.⁷

So I think to wake up and to live displays that we all have faith in something. But what or who you have faith in will determine what consumes your life,⁸ and even determine the subject of your doubts.

¹ <https://www.popsci.com/story/science/unique-memory/>

² Romans 12:16

³ John 3:30

⁴ Matthew 21:21

⁵ Hebrews 11:1

⁶ Galatians 5:6

⁷ Ecclesiastes 1:2

⁸ John 5:24

So do you have faith, or doubts, or both? And if you have doubts, what do you do with them? Our Scripture passage this morning helps us to answer these kinds of questions.

James 1:5-8.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8)

Father, help us not to have doubts, but to have faith. Help us to believe. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Corrie ten Boom was a Christian during World War II who helped to save the lives of around 800 Jews by smuggling them to safe places. She once wrote about a conversation she had with her father about fears and doubts. She wrote:⁹

When I was a little girl, I went to my father and said, "Daddy, I am afraid that I will never be strong enough to be a martyr for Jesus Christ." Her father said, "Tell me, when you take a train trip to Amsterdam, when do I give you the money for the ticket? Three weeks before?"

Corrie responded, "No, Daddy, you give me the money for the ticket just before we get on the train."

"That's right," her father said, "and so it is with God's strength. Our Father in Heaven knows when you will need the strength...He will supply all you need just in time."

We often feel like we lack in this life. Among other things, we feel like we lack faith and joy. We talked last week about being perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Trials give us opportunities to practice faith in Jesus, which increases our joy and makes us mature. And the ultimate fulfillment of that is heaven, where because of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, we will have complete and perfect joy forever, never lacking anything.

But for now, we lack. We lack faith.¹⁰ We lack joy.¹¹ And verse 5 this morning introduces the possibility of also lacking wisdom. Verse 5.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (James 1:5)

It starts with the word "if." If any of you lacks wisdom. And I just had to wonder, who doesn't lack wisdom?

I mean, really, let me know in the chat if you think you lack wisdom. Are you ever just stumped about how you should live, or what you should do, or even what you should believe? If you're ever confused about anything, let us know. And if you think you never lack wisdom, I'd seriously wonder if you have any wisdom at all.

Of course, we all lack wisdom, at least from time to time. So, the Bible says that if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God. So let's pray.

⁹ https://libertytothecaptives.net/ten_boom.html

¹⁰ Mark 9:24

¹¹ Romans 15:13

God, give us wisdom. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Now, the Bible says that if anyone asks God for wisdom, it will be given to him, because God gives generously to all without reproach. So, now that we've prayed, do you feel more wise? Well, maybe you do. But I kind of think that if you feel like you're wise all of a sudden, you might need to gain a little more wisdom. But more likely, even after we prayed for wisdom, I'd guess that you probably still feel like you're lacking in wisdom.

So, did we do something wrong? If we read on, it says in verses 6 through 8:

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:6-8)

So, when we asked just now for wisdom, did we not have enough faith? And how do we ask in faith, with no doubting whatsoever? Is that even possible?

James compares the one who doubts to a wave of the sea that's driven and tossed by the wind. And I think that sounds about right. That sounds like life. I'm sure we've all felt that way.

It's interesting how much the ocean can change.

[Video of calm waves]

When there's little to no wind, the ocean can look so calm and stable and peaceful. But have you ever watched the waves of the ocean during a storm?

[Video of waves during a storm]

Huge waves can form, and they can violently crash into one another and into ships, and it's unstable in all its ways.

And this is how the Bible describes us when we have doubts. We're double-minded. Sometimes we believe, and appear calm, but sometimes we doubt, and are tossed by the wind. And James writes that when we're like this, we should not suppose that we will receive anything from the Lord.

So, can we really not expect for God to answer any of our prayers, because we're double-minded and unstable?

Because I think maybe the best we can do is say, "I believe, help my unbelief."¹² Today, I think this prayer characterizes pretty much all of our lives, and I think it's a very interesting thing to pray. It's saying to God, "God, I have faith. Help me have faith." Does that sound strange to anyone else? To me, it sounds double-minded and unstable, and yet maybe it's the most stable, honest thing we can ask of God. It's saying to God, "I know that You are the source of all faith. So I know that I can't possibly have genuine faith unless it comes from You!" And I think James is saying that wisdom is exactly the same. To ask God for wisdom is to recognize that God is the source of all truth and wisdom.

So, in other words, how can I have the wisdom to ask God for wisdom?

¹² Mark 9:24

True wisdom can only come from God. So, if you have the wisdom to ask God for wisdom, it didn't come from you. God gave you the faith and wisdom to turn to Him for more faith and more wisdom.

So when we prayed for wisdom a moment ago, even though we didn't feel like we became more wise, we didn't do anything wrong. We actually did something very, very right. In praying for wisdom, we displayed that God is working to give us wisdom as we believe in Him. He was answering our prayer even as we prayed it.

I envy those who say that they never have any doubts. My thoughts are often plagued by doubts. I don't know the future. I can't accurately know the past. Heck, I often don't even know the present! Sometimes I forget what I'm doing as I'm doing it!

So if I have the attitude of "I believe, help my unbelief," it's not so much that I doubt God, it's that I doubt myself. I doubt my own attempt to examine all the evidence and come to the right conclusions.

So I think the question isn't, "How do I stop doubting God?" At least that's not the only question. The question, at least in part, is, "How do I stop doubting myself?" Or at least, "How do I doubt my doubts about God, and start believing what God has clearly promised?"

And check out what God promised in this passage. It says at the end of verse 5 that "God gives to all generously without reproach." That means that He gives without looking down on us with disapproval. Even while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.¹³ Even when we're lacking, God loves us. He gives us wisdom when we lack wisdom. He gives us righteousness when we lack righteousness. And He gives us faith when we lack faith.¹⁴

I generally don't say it this way because I think it sounds a little hokey and even borderline heretical, but I think it's not untrue to say that God believes in you. 1 Corinthians 13:7 says:

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:7)

And 1 John 4:8 says:

God is love. (1 John 4:8b)

So love believes all things, and God is perfect love. So I think that means that if you have faith, any faith, that's God in you, believing.

When you receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit comes into your life.¹⁵ God the Spirit is somehow with you, and in you, and even part of you, united with you,¹⁶ so that even when you have doubts, the Holy Spirit is in you continuing to believe the truth.

And maybe you don't always feel like that's true, but you can know that it's true. 1 John 3:20 says:

Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything. (1 John 3:20, NLT)

¹³ Romans 5:8

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:8-9

¹⁵ Ephesians 1:13

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 1:22

So who will you believe? Will you believe yourself, often unstable and tossed by the wind, or will you believe God, who knows all things?

You see, I think the fact that we have doubt today even after receiving Jesus isn't a slap in the face to having faith in God. I think it just means that we're only just beginning to believe.

And I'm not sure doubts that you take to God are really doubts. If you take them to God, it sounds more like faith. It's saying to God, "I don't understand this, but I know that You do. I believe. Help my unbelief." So that, also, sounds less like doubt, and more like the beginning of faith.

Jesus said in Matthew 17:20:

Truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you. (Matthew 17:20)

And that's with the tiniest amount of faith. So the person who has no faith has no reason to do anything, but the person with even the smallest faith can do everything. The person without faith has no hope or love, but the person with just a mustard seed of faith begins to rest in God's hope and love, and therefore hopes all things and loves his neighbor as himself.

And the more you turn to God and ask Him for wisdom, the more you begin to doubt your doubts and believe the Believer, the One who believes in you.

And take comfort in the truth that in eternity, our faith will be sight.¹⁷ We will not have any doubt. We won't need to doubt ourselves because we'll see the object and source and perfecter of our faith, who is Jesus.¹⁸

Do you have faith in Him? Even the smallest amount of faith? The Bible calls Jesus the wisdom of God. Maybe you've prayed for wisdom many times, but never realized that what you really need is Jesus. Jesus died and rose again so that all our sins would be forgiven, and so that we could be made perfect and complete, lacking nothing. So invite you this morning to begin to trust in Him.

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:12

¹⁸ Hebrews 12:2