

There is a spectrum of doubt that ranges from moments of uncertainty about what we believe, through skepticism to cynicism and finally to complete unbelief. In the story of a troubled man who brings his possessed son to Jesus, we hear perhaps the most eloquent cry of the believer who is in doubt – “**I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief!**”. Doubt, the space between belief and unbelief is a source of frustration, confusion and even guilt for many Christians. How does Jesus respond to our doubts?

**Mark 9:14-35**

<sup>14</sup>When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. <sup>15</sup>As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. <sup>16</sup>“What are you arguing with them about?” he asked. <sup>17</sup>A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. <sup>18</sup>Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” <sup>19</sup>“O unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” <sup>20</sup>So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. <sup>21</sup>Jesus asked the boy's father, “How long has he been like this?” <sup>22</sup>“From childhood,” he answered. “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” <sup>23</sup>“If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.” <sup>24</sup>Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” <sup>25</sup>When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” <sup>26</sup>The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He's dead.” <sup>27</sup>But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. <sup>28</sup>After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn't we drive it out?” <sup>29</sup>He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

<sup>30</sup>They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, <sup>31</sup>because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” <sup>32</sup>But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. <sup>33</sup>They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” <sup>34</sup>But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. <sup>35</sup>Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

**Matthew 17:19-21**

<sup>19</sup>Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn't we drive it out?” <sup>20</sup>He replied, “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” <sup>21</sup> But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”

**2 Corinthians 13:4-6**

<sup>4</sup>For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you. <sup>5</sup>Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test? <sup>6</sup>And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.

**Questions**

1. As the father brings his son to be healed by Jesus, we see that he is uncertain that Jesus can help him (verse 21). How has adversity in your own life brought doubt to your mind and to your relationship with God?
2. In verse 28, we see the disciples expressing doubt about their effectiveness to heal the boy. Discuss similar doubts you have about your own effectiveness as a Christian. What does Jesus’ response to them tell us about this in verse 29 and Matthew 17:20?
3. The disciples and the teachers of the law were engaged in an argument as Jesus arrives (9:14) and amongst themselves (9:33-34). What are some difficult or controversial issues that are a source of doubt in your relationship with God and how can we encourage each other in this regard?
4. In an age where extremists and terrorists seem to show no doubts about their beliefs and actions, what does 2 Corinthians 13:4-6 say to you about the positive role that doubt can play in your life?

Discussion Guidelines: **1.** Allow everyone a chance to speak. If you are bursting with ideas and tend to share a lot – great – but occasionally pause a bit before you go, sometimes the quieter ones are just waiting for their chance and they need a little space before they go. **2.** Respect the opinions of others, and refrain from giving advice. **3.** Keep discussion focused on the material being studied. **4.** Maintain the confidentiality of personal things shared within the group.