

What's My Next Reasonable Step of Faith?

Ben Deaver @ Tallgrass Church on 7/1/18

Get your questions ready! I don't wanna spoil your Lord's Supper but I'm going to be handing out Cuties and candy bars for engagement. The first one's free!

What's the Tallgrass Church Mission Statement:

Because God first loved us, we exist to love God and love our neighbors.

Four Questions:

1. Why believe in God?
2. Why believe the Bible?
3. Why believe in Jesus?
4. What's my next reasonable step of faith?

1. Why believe in God? Name one of the four clues we covered.

Clue #1: Origin of the Universe—Are you gonna put your faith in NOTHING or GOD?

Clue #2: Fine-Tuning of the Universe—Are you gonna put your faith in the MULTIVERSE or GOD?

Clue #3: Morality—Are you gonna put your faith in HUMANITY or GOD?

Clue #4: Love & Beauty—Does love and beauty come from EVOLUTION or GOD?

2. Why believe the Bible? Three questions

Question #1: Hasn't the Bible been changed? Nope.

Ancient Document	# Manuscripts	Gap from Original to Earliest Manuscript
The New Testament	~25,000	50-150 years
Homer's Iliad	643	500 (1,600*)
Tacitus	20	1,200
Plato	7	1,200
Sophocles	193	1,400
Aristotle	49	1,400

Question #2: Isn't the Bible filled with historical inaccuracies and contradictions? Nope.

- Archaeology – Old Testament
- Archaeology – New Testament
- Alleged Contradictions?
 - Out of Context
 - Presuppositional Discrepancies
 - Limited Reference (number of people present...)
 - Archaeological Solutions

Question #3: Isn't the Bible just another holy book? Nope.

- Claims to be God's Word: Bible is nearly Unique!
- Manuscript Evidence: Bible is Unique!
- Historical Corroboration: Bible is Unique!
- Fulfilled Predictive Prophecy: Bible is Unique!

3. Why believe in Jesus? Five historical facts

Five things that support historical claims:

- Multiple, Independent Sources
- Attestation by an Enemy
- Embarrassing Admissions
- Eyewitness Testimony
- Early Testimony

Five historical facts:

1. Jesus Died by Crucifixion—Biblical and extrabiblical sources
2. The Disciples' Believed Jesus Rose and Appeared to Them
 - a. Early Creedal Statements
 - b. The Gospel Accounts
 - c. Early Church Fathers' Writings
 - d. Disciples' Willingness to Suffer and Die for their Claim
3. Paul was Suddenly Changed
 - a. Luke's account in Acts 9
 - b. Paul's own Testimonies in Acts 22 & 26
 - c. Conversion multiply attested by Clement, Polycarp, Tertullian, Dionysius of Corinth, Origin
 - d. Died a martyr attested by Clement of Rome, Tertullian, Origin
4. James was Suddenly Changed
 - a. Identity confirmed in Gospels & Josephus
 - b. Unbeliever in Jesus confirmed in Mark 3, 6, John 7
 - c. Jesus appeared to James after his death attested in Early Creedal Statement in 1 Corinthians 15
 - d. James identified as leader of Jerusalem Church afterward in Acts 15, Galatians 9
 - e. James died a martyr attested by Josephus, Hegesippus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius
5. The Tomb was Empty
 - a. Jerusalem Factor
 - b. Enemy Attestation
 - c. Criterion of Embarrassment—Women were the first witnesses!

Most reasonable explanation of the facts?

1. Fictitious Story
2. Legendary Embellishment
3. Myth Derived from other Religions
4. Fraud
5. Jesus Wasn't Really Dead
6. Mass Hallucinations
7. Jesus had an Identical Twin Brother
8. God Raised Jesus from the Dead

We've piled up all these clues and facts so now what? Why doesn't everyone believe in Jesus? Why do those of us who do believe in Jesus still act so inconsistently with that belief at times...wait, often? Why?

DOUBT! DUH, DUH, DUH...

PRAY

Dealing with Doubt

Doubting is part of the human condition.

- Jude 22 "And have mercy on those who doubt..."
- Mark 9:24 "I believe; help my unbelief!"
- It's encouraging to me that at the end of Luke we have some disciples who are doubting, even after spending significant time with Jesus.
- Jesus doesn't say, "Just believe!" He meets them in their doubt with evidence.
- **James 1:5-7** ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶But 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. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.
 - The author, James, Jesus' half-brother, was well acquainted with doubt. Remember his story?
- C. S. Lewis, was an ardent atheist during his early teaching at Oxford University. He confessed that he sometimes experienced doubts about his faith after he became a Christian. But, he added, in the days when he was an atheist, there were times when the Christian faith appeared to be "terribly probable." No matter what you believe, Lewis says, you will doubt at some time. The more important matter is, how will you deal with the doubt when it comes? (Mere Christianity, Macmillan, 1952, pp. 123-124).
- Madeleine L'Engle—"Those who believe they believe in God, but without passion in the heart, without anguish of mind, without uncertainty, without doubt, and even at times without despair, believe only in the idea of God, and not in God."

Three Kinds of Doubt:

1. Factual Doubt
2. Emotional Doubt
3. Willful Doubt

1. Factual Doubt

- Some may call it Intellectual Doubt.
- We all put our faith in something. God isn't asking anyone to blindly put their faith in Jesus. Put your faith where the most evidence is. What is the best overall explanation for the human experience?
- Let us get some solid resources in your hands.
- **Acts 1:3** He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

What is faith?

- Not wishful thinking—Belief in something that you don't really think is true.
- Faith is a reasoned response based on evidence. Growing assurance/conviction based on evidence
 - Cumulative case built by evidence
- We are to take a step of faith rather than a blind leap of faith.
- 100% certainty is not attainable. But a growing and reasonable basis for faith in God is.
- Doubt is normative to the human experience. In fact, without any doubt there is no place for faith.
- Faith is cumulative. Faith grows over time. Faith grows in the context of commitment.
 - Seesaw of decision. 51% belief.
 - **ILLUS:** I trust that Maris is the right woman for me more today than I did on November 26, 2005.
 - **ILLUS:** International students expressing belief in percentages
 - Acts 1:3 ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.
 - I am more certain that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life today than I was when I was 7 years old, kneeled in the back of my parent's old Chevy Caprice when I asked Jesus into my heart.
- "Faith is when we trust our experiences or reason enough to act on them." –p. 8
- **ILLUS:** When will you place a bet on a sports team? How much will you place that bet for?
- **ILLUS:** Dr. prescribing pills vs. a friend suggesting a pill
- "With God too, I don't need proof or certainty before I exercise faith. I do need a reasonable basis—some level of plausibility that causes taking a step of faith to make sense." –p. 8
 - Coming to Tallgrass Church this evening may have been your next step of faith. You had gathered enough evidence to warrant taking the risk of showing up this morning. You may not have enough evidence to take the risk of trusting Jesus yet but you're here...and that's something.
 - How do risk and desire factor into taking action? If risk is high, I'm less likely to act. If desire is low, I'm less likely to act. But if the risk is low and the desire is high, I'm more likely to act.
 - The risk in taking a step towards God is low and hopefully the desire is high. In fact, if God is real then the risk is much greater in not taking a step towards Him. If He isn't real, then the risk is low in taking a step towards Him since nothing will happen.
 - If you're already following Jesus but not really sure about jumping a bit more all in then the same thought process should follow.
 - What will it take to risk commitment?

Factual Doubters:

- **Neighbor Joe** –
- **Thomas** – "I gotta see it to believe it!" (Jn 20:24-31)
 - **John 20:24-31** ²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." ²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.
 - He stays in community long enough for Jesus to show up!
- **Disciples**
 - **Luke 24:36-43** ³⁶ As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And

he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and **why do doubts arise in your hearts?**”³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

- **Matthew 28:16-20** ¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but **some doubted**. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
- **John the Baptist** – Go give John the evidence. Jesus doesn’t say, “Just believe.”
 - **Matthew 11:2-5** ² Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” ⁴ And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.”
 - Jesus said there has arisen among those born of women no one greater than John the Baptist even while he doubted that Jesus was the Messiah. Is doubt always sin? Not necessarily. If it is, forgiveness abounds because of the cross.
- **Jewish leaders** – Jesus won’t always respond to doubt positively. If you are involved in Volitional Doubt (willful doubt) He may say, “No more signs for you.”
 - Refuses to believe. “I can’t believe in a God who...”
 - You need to repent!
 - Didn’t keep giving them signs. Matthew 12:38-42 – “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” They had enough facts. Their wills were opposed to Jesus. They wanted to control Jesus and He wouldn’t be controlled.
 - They were trying to come across as Factual Doubters but they were really Volitional Doubters – They weren’t gonna believe no matter what kind of evidence Jesus gave them.
- **The brothers of the rich man in the Luke 16 story**
 - **Luke 16:27-31** ²⁷ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

2. Emotional Doubt

- Usually the emotions are negative. Most painful but least serious. I’m so sorry that you’ve experienced great pain.
- Most often “What if _____.” questions.
- These doubts often come out of painful experiences. “I can’t believe in a God who would _____.”
- The most painful things in life are not what people do to you. The worst kind of pain generally speaking is caused by how you deal with what is happening to you. How do you handle it? What do you say to yourself?
- My story—Grew up pretty much always believing enough to try to follow Jesus.
 - In high school began to wonder, “What if I had grown up in India or China or the Middle East? Would I follow another world religion because of my family? Is this stuff really true?” These types of thoughts continued and intensified into college and intensified when I began interacting with more and more people from all over the world – Chinese, Japanese, Saudis, etc.

- What if I'm not good enough to get into heaven?
- What if this is too good to be true?
- Will you allow Jesus to be right? Who knows best? You or him?
- He gives them His presence. He eats with them.

Emotional Doubters:

- **Neighbor Joe** – “I know what Christianity is all about. Hypocrisy!” “Tell me more, Neighbor Joe.” “I went to a church when I was a boy and it turns out the pastor was having an affair with my mother! Christianity isn't for me. I want nothing to do with it!”
- **Disciples** – Luke 24:41-42 ⁴¹ And while they *still disbelieved for joy* and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.
 - “What if this is too good to be true?”
- **Father Abraham** – Waiting for the promise of Isaac to be fulfilled.
 - **Romans 4:20-21** ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.
- **King David** – “How long will you forget me?” “Why do my enemies succeed?” “Why do the wicked prosper?”
 - “I will hope yet again.”
- **Paul** – emotional doubter; thorn in the flesh; in prison
 - “My grace is sufficient for you.”
- **Peter** – emotional doubter after he denied Christ three times
 - Speak truth to each other. Even more difficult, speak truth to yourself.

3. Willful Doubt

- Some may call it Volitional Doubt.
- When we proclaim the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus to people we are giving the most substantial thing they could ever put their faith in. Don't be sheepish about this. Don't hang your head and feel like you need to apologize for the enigma of the Gospel.
- Habermas Illus: Single guy and his list of desired attributes. He refuses to take the step of marriage. He doesn't want to be married.
- Refusal to take the next reasonable step of faith that you know should be taken.

Willful Doubters:

- **Neighbor Joe** – “I've read all the books. I just want to have a good time doing whatever I want with my life.”
- **Father Abraham** – Waiting for the promise of Isaac to be fulfilled. Taking matters into his own hands. Emotional doubt giving way to volitional doubt, full-fledged sin!
- **Pharisees and Sadducees** – They had seen plenty of miracles and heard plenty of compelling talks. And yet they refused to follow Christ.
- **Judas Iscariot** – He had all the same info as the other disciples. And yet he refused to follow Christ.
- **Humanity—Romans 1:18-23** ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Reflection Questions:

1. What questions remain?
2. How have you experienced factual/emotional/volitional doubt?
3. How have you engaged with your doubt?
4. How have you engaged with others' doubts?

Scary Steps of Faith:

1. Consider the evidence, believe in God, believe in the Bible, and believe in Jesus as Lord.
 - a. **Acts 17:11-13** ¹¹ Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹² Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. ¹³ But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds.
 - b. **Acts 17:32-34** (Three Responses) ³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." ³³ So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.
2. Gain confidence in your faith.
 - a. **Hebrews 2:1** Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.
 - b. **Hebrews 11:1-3** ¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation. ³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.
 - c. **Hebrews 11:6** And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
3. Grow in your ability to talk about this with others.
 - a. **1 Peter 3:14-16** ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.
 - b. Engage with your kids about these things. Talk through them. Practice them.
4. Consider how you need to more fully align your life with Jesus as Lord (and take steps of repentance).
 - a. Jesus gets to be right!
5. Stay in community...even with your doubts...just like doubting Thomas!

Resources:

- *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, Tim Keller—\$10
- *Discovering God: Exploring the Possibilities of Faith*, Dennis McCallum—\$FREE.99
- *Evidence Unseen: Exposing the Myth of Blind Faith*, James Rochford (www.evidenceunseen.com)
- *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis
- *Jesus Among Secular Gods: The Countercultural Claims of Christ*, Ravi Zacharias and Vince Vitale
- *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, Gary Habermas and Mike Licona
- *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*, Lee Strobel
- *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell
- *Dealing With Doubt*, Gary Habermas—\$FREE.99 online
 - http://www.garyhabermas.com/books/dealing_with_doubt/dealing_with_doubt.htm
- *The Thomas Factor: Using Your Doubts to Draw Closer to God*, Gary Habermas—\$FREE.99 online
 - http://www.garyhabermas.com/books/thomas_factor/thomas_factor.htm
- *The Myth of Certainty: The Reflective Christian & the Risk of Commitment*, Daniel Taylor

Lord's Supper

- Jesus staved doubt in the face and chose to put His faith in His heavenly Father. He went to the cross to absorb the wrath of God that was directed at us for all of our willful doubting of His goodness.
- **Luke 22:41-46** ⁴¹And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴²saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." ⁴³And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ⁴⁵And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, ⁴⁶and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

PRAY