

FOREWORD BY SAM ALLBERRY

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BECAUSE FAITH IS HARD

CHAPTER THREE

Feed Your Faith, Not Your Doubts

Have you ever noticed that when you focus on one specific problem in your life, the normal things you deal with every day tend to fade into the background? For example, not too long ago, multiple warning lights on my car's dashboard popped on during a road trip I was taking with my wife and kids, including the dreaded "check engine" light. I couldn't think about anything else other than the fact that my car needed maintenance as soon as possible. It was difficult to focus on the subject matter my family was talking about throughout the rest of the day, I couldn't enjoy my lunch, or even be excited about my destination at the end of the trip. All I could think about were those warning lights.

You've probably experienced something like this before too—maybe not the exact car-related situation I just described, but surely someone or something has captured your attention with such strength that it has pushed nearly everything else in your life to the back burner. Human nature tends to obsess over negative or potentially negative thoughts and ideas in a way that's difficult to escape.

Doubt Scenario

Let me break down a doubt-related scenario for you that has occurred in my mind and heart a few times in the past. See if you can relate to this line of thought:

1. An article, blog, podcast, or video posted online makes a strong argument opposing the validity of Christianity.
2. I read or watch said post.
3. I can't retort in a way that can act as a logical counter to what I've seen or heard, because I don't know enough or haven't studied as much as the person who posted.
4. I begin to wonder if the argument they've posted can be answered in a satisfying way. I don't have the answer, so maybe nobody has the answer.
5. There's a tremor in the foundation of my Christian belief, and I begin to assume this argument against Christianity might be legitimate.
6. If this argument is accurate, maybe others against my faith are correct too.
7. I've based my belief system on something that might be false. I'm doubting the authenticity of Christianity.
8. If Christianity isn't true, maybe the Bible isn't either. Maybe God doesn't exist.
9. The world and everything in it explodes.

Okay, that last one is a bit of an exaggeration, but I think you get my point. I'm not saying this happens every time I've seen a well thought-out post online that's made me doubt, but perhaps this was (at least in part) something curiously similar to what you've experienced at some point in the past too.

The progression of thought here is important. Things start off relatively normal at the beginning (#1–3), but the more attention I pay to doubtful thoughts, the more they're nurtured by my mind and heart. As they're fed, they develop and expand into other, more illogical doubts and negative thoughts. The first thought domino falls, and I choose not to stop the subsequent tumbling downward to despair.

Feed your doubts and your faith will starve.¹ It's an almost inevitable outcome. As I mentioned in the introduction, it's similar to a child who constantly seeks the attention of his parents.

Doubt demands more and more of the spotlight the longer you linger on it, and it can easily transform into something ugly (like the world blowing up) if you allow it. When you allow your mind and heart to regularly become preoccupied by doubt, your faith gets neglected and becomes spiritually malnourished.

Think about This

Conversely, if you feed your faith, your doubts will starve.² So what is feeding your faith? Well, if you're intentional about dwelling on the beauty of God and his Word, doubt will have no room to fester in your heart and your faith will grow. Consider what the apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8).

When we actually think about these things, an inevitable coinciding action will follow—the seeds of God's peace will flood your life (4:9). When we actively dwell on Christ Jesus instead of our recurrent doubts, it produces a life that is in step with God—a relationship unlike anything else we've ever experienced.

A life that is in step with God is a life lived under the authority of his rule. It's a life that yields to the Holy Spirit and his instruction about what to do, what to say, how to live, how to think, and overall who to be.

When we become Christians and receive the gift of God's payment for our sin through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God the Holy Spirit (the third person of the Trinity) comes to live inside us. He dwells inside our bodies and gives us the power to live the Christian life.

Yielding to the Spirit and walking with God moment by moment is a lifestyle. It's learning to depend on the Holy Spirit for his abundant resources as a way of life. As we walk in the Spirit, we have the ability to live a life pleasing to God (Galatians 5:16, 25), along with the fact that we experience intimacy with him

and all he has for us (Galatians 5:22–23).³ By faith, we experience God’s power through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16–17), giving us the ability to feed our faith instead of our doubts.

Obedient Feeding

Jesus once said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Not all things, not some things, not even a few things—apart from Jesus you can do *nothing*. He is the One who makes it possible, through the power of his Holy Spirit inside us, to live the Christian life and focus on our faith instead of our doubts. He is the One who makes it possible to walk with him on a moment-by-moment basis and rejoice in the relationship we have with him because of his sacrifice on the cross. He is the One in whom we abide—not only in our faith but also in our seasons of doubt.

Yes, we must trust in him in order to see this happen, but abiding isn’t just about living a life of faith and remaining passive. Abiding is also a call to godly action. The chorus of the old hymn “Trust and Obey” gives us a good idea of what it means to feed your faith by abiding in God:

Trust and obey,
For there’s no other way
To be happy in Jesus
But to trust and obey.⁴

Faith is the starting point (trust), but the obvious next step afterward is obedience. Both elements are like two wings on a plane; each must be present in order for flight to be possible. When we obey God, we aren’t only displaying that our hearts belong to him, but we’re providing tangible evidence to the fact that God’s Word is the place from which we take our marching orders. Obedience to Scripture isn’t a requirement for a relationship with God, but rather an indicator that we already have a relationship with God. We aren’t saved through obedience, but instead bear the

fruit that shows that the roots of our hearts are already anchored in salvation. Where there is continual fruit, there is also root.

When we feed our faith, we spend consistent time in the Bible because we long for God's Word; it's an act of obedience. When we feed our faith, we spend time praying, not as a box to check off but because we love being in communion with our Maker; it's an act of obedience. Good nourishment and health depends on your food source, so where does your soul go to eat?

Feeding your faith and not your doubts is all about relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, living in obedience to Scripture, and leaning on him whether things are amazing or horrible. If your doubts seem to be smothering you, go to him in both the good times and the bad, and ask the Holy Spirit to give you the power to feed your faith. Ask him to give you passion for devouring God's Word on a daily basis, because the Bible is the food that feeds and nourishes our souls.

By the power of his Spirit, don't obsess over your doubts so that they easily turn into insurmountable problems leading you into despondency. Instead, walk by the Spirit's power, trust that apart from Jesus we can do nothing, and live a life characterized by biblical obedience.

Feed Your Faith, Not Your Doubts—Reflection

Questions

1. In the past, how have you allowed your heart and mind to become preoccupied with doubt? How has that affected your faith?

2. What does intimacy with God look like in your life, and how can yielding to the Holy Spirit lead to greater intimacy and connection with Jesus?

3. How would your daily routine be different if you practiced feeding your faith and not your doubts?