

LIVE IN BELIEF

Tentative steps aren't uncommon in the dance of belief. No matter our level of maturity or the strength of our faith, at times we doubt. There we stand in the middle of the dance floor, pretending we are confident in our steps, when deep down we wonder if we are able to follow God's lead. At times we even wonder if He'll let us fall.

Belief vs. doubt is a common struggle for me. I want to say I don't doubt God—I doubt me: Did I actually hear Him? Is my mind playing tricks on me? What if I fail? Will I let Him down? Those are the questions I ask, but the hidden questions are these: Can God clearly communicate to me what He wants me to do? Is God bigger than my imagination? What if He fails me? What if He lets me down?

We began *You. Are. Loved.* with the enemy deceiving Eve. He caused her to doubt what God had said and His motive behind His insistence that she and Adam not eat that one particular fruit. Ultimately, the serpent's crafty use of words caused Eve to doubt God's love and whether or not He had her best interest at heart. Like all of us now and throughout the ages of God's people, we think we can choose better for ourselves than God can choose for us. We doubt His Word. We doubt who we are to Him. We doubt who He is to us.

The sower of the seed of doubt is always the serpent. Never forget, if the enemy can get you to doubt God's love, then he can paralyze you in most every area of your life.

In the chapter *Live in Safety*, I referenced the account of Jesus' time in the wilderness as recorded in Matthew 4. Just this past week, the Spirit has taught me something new, a way of looking at this passage through the lens of my own areas of doubt.

Stop here and read Matthew 4:1-11, even if Jesus' wilderness account is familiar to you.

Notice the first seeds of doubt planted by the enemy: "If you are..." (vs. 3); "If you are..." (vs. 6). What I see is this: By leading with "If you are..." statements, Satan tried to get Jesus to doubt who He was. The devil knew if he could get Jesus to doubt that one thing, His Son-ship, then he would undermine the very foundation of who Jesus was.

I would like to use Jesus' experience as a loose model for our own common experiences. Since the enemy has no real new tactics, we can know he does the same with us.

Real Father

"If you are..." in our case refers to a child of God. Countless people I've known over the years have expressed doubt over their salvation. There are cases where people answer altar call after altar call, just hoping to "feel" something that will convince them they are, indeed, a child of God. You have to nail this down: Is God your Real Father? Were you adopted into the family of faith through your belief in what Jesus did for you on the cross?

If you are one of those people who constantly doubts your place as a child of God, you are likely hobbled in almost every area of your faith walk. Only a secure child will step out in faith, confident that her Dad has her firmly held in His arms.

In my own situation years ago, I heard a visiting pastor explain to us that some people have their baptism on the wrong side of the cross. He used intriguing imagery to say that some people have been baptized before they were actually converted. I was new to all the Christian terminology back then, so when he said that, I became convinced that I needed to be re-baptized. I will never regret that second baptism since I was baptized with my oldest son, but all these years later, I don't believe my initial baptism came before my actual salvation.

Because of the sinful life I lived after my salvation as a little girl, I had become convinced that I must not have been saved. I didn't understand then what I know now, how

a person can sear the Spirit to the point of not knowing His presence or hearing Him at all. From a more mature perspective, I can look back at my kids' Bible from when I was saved and see the shaky line drawn by a little girl's hand. I circled: "For those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13, Children's Living Bible).

I, as a child, called upon the name of the Lord. Unless that verse lied, then I was saved. I was sincere then. It was real. Maybe you need to look at your own salvation through the simplistic eyes of a child. No matter your age when it happened, did you call upon the name of the Lord? Did you sincerely ask for forgiveness of your sins? Do you acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, the One who died for your sins? If so, then you were saved at that moment. Your feelings lie. The serpent deceives. Stop eating the fruit of doubt he's trying to cram down your throat.

Sanctification – a big word meaning the work that God is doing inside of you through the Holy Spirit – takes time. While some people give accounts of miraculous transformation at the time they invite Jesus to be their Savior, I think the vast majority of us don't feel or experience anything miraculous that we can actually point to as confirmation. Yes, a miracle occurs, the Spirit coming to live within you is a miracle of Biblical proportions, but it may not be a miracle that you can actually put your finger on and see proof of right away. That's where faith comes in, and you have to trust God's Word, which says, "Those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

If I can give you one piece of advice in conclusion to the topic of your status as a child of God, it's this: Get yourself grounded deep in the family tree. Trace your roots. Go back and look at what you believe was your salvation experience. If it was a sincere moment, then it's time to get beyond the doubts over whether or not you're His and you're saved. Remember who it is that sows doubts about who you are, and refuse his evil accusations.

Cling to this: You are God's child. He is your Father. When you get beyond the major hurdle of doubting your Paternity, you will be free to dance a new Father-Daughter dance. Belief in who you are to your heavenly Father reminds you that you are the daughter of The King. What kingdom perks come with that title! For one, you are free to move about the kingdom as an heir (Romans 8:17).

If this is something you struggle with, I strongly recommend you research more on this topic beyond what I will provide in your Takeaway. There is no way I can do this topic justice in the space allotted. Who you are is the very foundation of how you will live out your life. A daughter of God, well cared for and protected, lives an entirely different life than a poor orphan girl, left out in the world to make it on her own. No more "If you are..." You are!

Good Father

I will take a leap onto the opposite ledge of this canyon of doubt. Your concern may not be whether or not you believe you're a child of God. Maybe your deep-down feelings expose the hidden truth: You wonder if God is a good Father to you. If you've been let down by your earthly dad, it's natural for you to doubt your heavenly Dad. I just had a conversation with someone who is grappling with that question: What if He doesn't plan good for me? That's a loaded question, one that doesn't have a quick or easy answer.

I struggled to give her the answers she wanted to hear because of the term "good" and because we see God's good for and toward us differently than He does. He *is* good and can only do good. From our perspective, though, we want what makes us happy and comfortable here and now. The kingdom perspective from which God views our lives is more concerned with our ultimate outcome and who we become. His goal is to make us more like Jesus, the model of perfection.

If I've learned anything in my walk of faith it's this: The easy road is rarely the road that leads to the deepest growth. The road filled with high hills and deep valleys is where our

faith muscles are strengthened and our knowledge of our Walking Companion is deepened. No matter the difficulty of your journey, He is a good Father and only allows into your life what will be used for your ultimate good. No one wants to hear that, especially when we're deep in a valley, struggling with the worst this world can heap upon us.

I'm sure you've heard it said that nothing comes into your life except that which first filters through God's hands. I see it as a more intimate allowance. I know nothing happens to me that doesn't first filter through God's heart – my Heavenly Dad's heart. I can trust that even in the worst of circumstances only because I've come to know Him as good.

You may have a question similar to my friend, especially if you are presently enduring a difficult or traumatic circumstance in your life. Even when you won't say it aloud, it crosses your mind and you wonder if God has good planned for you. Just as with my friend, the answer is yes, but His good may not be evident until years down the road. His good may only be seen when you're standing face to face with Him. Your questions are real and can be answered by your real Dad. Go to God. Tell Him through honest and open dialogue that you're struggling with doubts.

The goodness of God can best be seen by His character and His actions. Who He is and all He has done for us is constant proof of His goodness. His offer of His Son qualifies Him as good if nothing else does. Who does that? Who would send His Son to die for evil mankind, especially when they often spit in His face in response to his unequalled generosity? Only true and pure Goodness would do that, good to the core of His very being.

If you need something to hold on to, start with that one irrefutable proof of His goodness. When the waters rise and never subside, when the one you love dies or leaves no matter your prayers, when you lose that house after waiting for God to intervene, when He didn't show up when you needed Him most, how can you believe in His goodness? Consider these three words: faith, history, and future.

Faith: At times in our walk of faith, it's just that – a matter of faith. We choose to believe He is good even when our eyes don't see the proof (2 Corinthians 5:7). Yes, faith is a choice.

History: Another way to hold on to His goodness is to look back at your history with Him. Cling to the times He did come through and hold unswervingly to the fact that He is just as good in your worst moment as He was in your best.

Future: This isn't just church-speak here. This is truth. You have no way of knowing what good He will make come of your worst. You can't possibly know that in the middle of the disaster and sometimes not for many years to come. You can know this, though, He will make all things work together for the good of those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). That's a mega verse for a reason. We need to believe He's got a plan to make it turn out good, even when no good appears to be on the horizon.

Faithful Father

You may not doubt who you are to Him or His good plan for you. Maybe you fear what He will do if you get it wrong. Will He stop loving you? What if you step off the path and blow it? Is the god you know one who would slap you for your misdirection or mistake? Or is the God you know the One of whom it is said, "His mercies are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:23)?

If anyone has deserved to be zapped with a bolt of lightning from above, it's me. You may identify with me if you have a checkered past.

I'm hoping this exercise will help. Whether or not you have kids, this will work for you. You may have to use your younger siblings or nieces or nephews as your example, but try this: Think of a special young person in your life, then think of something they've done wrong, like, the very worst they've done. Now ask yourself if you still love them. Think of

anyone you love and something terrible they've done, even if not done directly to you. Do you still love them?

I know you answered yes to that. Fact is, we don't stop loving the people we love just because they get it wrong. God doesn't either.

Years ago, when my oldest son was in his teens, life was pure craziness with him. He was making many bad decisions, and I couldn't seem to get through to him. That was during the time when I was recovering after my own fall and just getting to know the next-to-me Jesus. Even now I consider that one of the sweetest seasons with Him. Each time Adam would blow it, I would hear this soft voice ask, "Do you still love him?" To which I would reply, "Of course I do." Then the words would come, emphatic and sure, "That's how I love you."

The Lord taught me more about His love for me through my love for my son than I could have ever learned through any Bible study or sermon series. Jesus was there with me through every difficult experience and decision. His was a day-to-day, moment-by-moment presence that never left me without guidance and care. His faithful love was proven by His faithful arrival every day.

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

His love for us far eclipses any love we can feel for our family or friends. So, why then do we think we love our loved ones more? That screams our misunderstanding of who Jesus is. He is Love. Isn't it smug of us to think we can somehow love more faithfully than God?

Consider three questions: Am I His child? Is He a good Father? and Will He stop loving me? These can all be answered by getting better acquainted with God and understanding who He really is.

I know this is a controversial issue based on denomination, but I'm going to throw out my belief on the idea of losing our salvation. It comes down to this one fact for me: God can't un-Dad His child. This isn't social media where He can unfriend or unfollow a person or a page. A dad is a dad for life. In the physical realm, the death of a child doesn't take away the title of a dad or the reality that he is a parent. Neither is a dad any less a dad if his child rebels. It's the same in a spiritual sense; God is a forever Dad.

Once you are adopted into His family through faith in Jesus, when your salvation is real and sincere, you are a child of God the Father for all of time and eternity. Your Heavenly Father will never stop being your Father. He will never stop loving you.

Word Nerd Alert!

I love words, which I'm sure doesn't surprise anyone. You can't imagine how often I look up words, even ones I already know. By doing that, I often gain a deeper understanding of something I'm reading or studying.

A few years ago, I was looking at one of my favorite verses.

"No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you." (Joshua 1:5)

My focus was on the last part, that He will never leave me nor forsake me. I knew what forsake meant, but I wanted a better understanding, so I looked it up online. It meant abandon or leave. That was curious to read since it made me read the verse again this way: He would never leave me nor leave me. That made no sense. I decided to dig deeper and looked up both words in a concordance.

Come to find out, the word often translated as leave actually means fail, so the original way this was written was: He would never fail us nor forsake us. I have no idea why fail got changed to leave in some translations, but the more true-to-the-original translations use fail rather than leave.

All that to say, one of my favorite verses reminds me He will not fail me. That's changed my entire perspective. Will He ever fail me? No. Will He ever leave me? No. He. Is. Faithful.

This may have been word nerd torture for you, but for me, someone to whom words truly matter, I was glad to know that God planned thousands of years ago to give me a specific word against doubting Him. Basically He has said, "Don't doubt me. I won't fail you. I'll be right here."

Am I the only one who needs that reminder more often than I should? Not likely. I'm sharing that discovery with you so that you can go to your Bible, look up that verse, and strike through *leave* and replace it with *fail*. Seriously, do it. Put it on an index card and stick it on your fridge. Write it on your bathroom mirror in lipstick. Just do something to remind your mind and heart that He will never fail nor forsake (leave) you. He's got you.

Now, time for your Takeaway. I'm not sure I will ever stop saying this: Do the work. Open your Bible. Spend time with Jesus. Time spent is where transformation happens. Time spent is how you get to know the One who calls Himself your real, good, and faithful Father.

LIVE IN BELIEF TAKEAWAY

LOOK WITHIN:

In general, is belief vs. doubt an issue for you? What areas of your faith walk are most impacted by doubt?

What doubt-filled questions do you ask?

Of the three areas of doubt we covered, Real Father, Good Father, and Faithful Father, which do you most struggle with and why?

In what ways have you questioned God's goodness?

Do you ever fear losing God's love if you don't measure up?

KEY POINTS:

- Real Father: "Feeling" saved may not come right away. The serpent will try to convince you that you're not.
- Good Father: God's good for us may look different than what we expect. Hold to faith, history, and future hope.
- Faithful Father: God will never un-Dad you. He loves you no matter your failures.

PRACTICE THE DANCE:

How can you apply the Key Points of this section to your day-to-day life and to your day?

LEARN THE LYRICS:

Real Father

- Read Romans 10:9-13

In order to nail down when God became your real Father, give an account of your salvation experience (how old were you, where were you, etc.).

Good Father

Faith:

- Read 2 Corinthians 5:7.

In context this verse is talking about our future in heaven, but no matter the usage, the message is the same for any situation: Faith is often blind, meaning we just keep going even when we can't see what God is up to. What situation are you facing now that requires you to walk in faith, not by sight?

History

- Read Joshua 4:1-7.

List a time when God showed up on your behalf and parted the waters, so to speak.

Future Hope:

- Read Jeremiah 29:11-13.

How does this verse settle the matter that God has good planned for you?

Faithful Father

- Read Joshua 1:5 and Romans 8:38-39.

If you struggle with the fear that God will turn from you or stop loving you, how can these verses combat those doubts?

NEXT STEPS:

- Spend some time reading and studying Romans 8:14-17. We are called joint heirs or co-heirs with Christ, a term that highlights our relationship with God the Father. Pursue what that means to you personally.
- Create your own Memorial Stones, reminders of times when God acted on your behalf.

STRIKES A CHORD:

What have you learned through this topic that requires further reflection?

SING YOUR OWN SONG:

Use Joshua 1:5 as your jumping off point for prayer today.

I know You will never fail me or forsake me. I trust You with... I trust You to...
