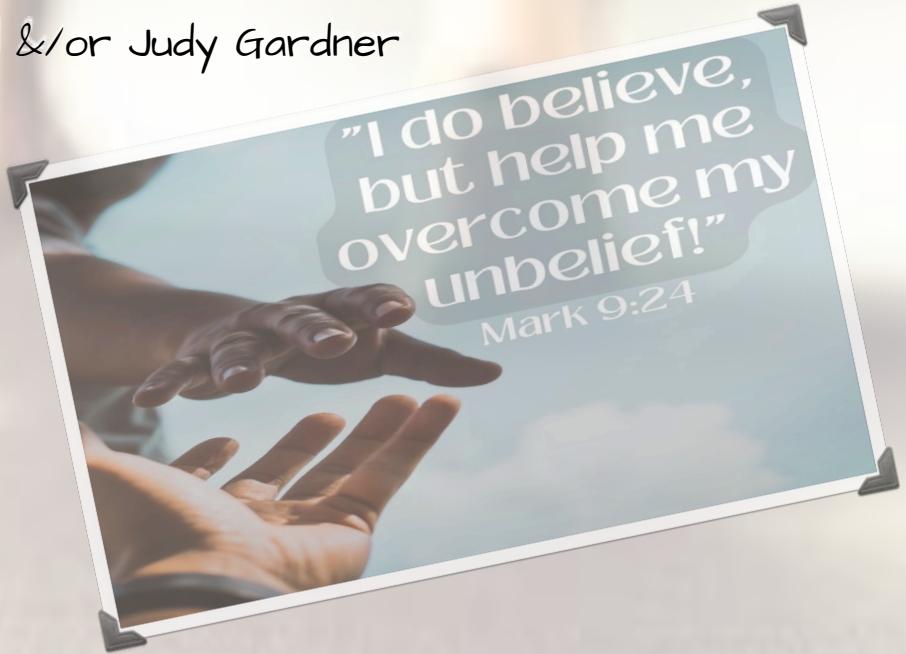


August 12-16, 2024 Edition

Following
The Year(s) Of ^Jesus Part 137

How Much Faith Is Enough
-or-
How Much Doubt Is Too Much?

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner



August 10/11, 2024

When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday

Monday Reflection: So for this week we're looking at the question of how much faith is enough and how much doubt is too much? What exactly is "faith" and what exactly is "doubt"?

So let's start out looking at why this question seems so important to me by recalling something James said about wisdom (remember this is the year of wisdom series at Riverside after all) that we focused on a couple of weeks ago:

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not doubt. James 1:5-8 (NLT)

We spent so much time focusing in on what exactly James was inviting us to a couple of weeks ago- what does it mean that God will give you wisdom and what exactly are you asking God for when you pray for wisdom- but we didn't spend much time on one of the prerequisites for wisdom in James' mind- faith.

So what exactly is faith? Turns out it's a pretty important concept. The word that we get "faith" from in our English translations of the Bible is found almost 500 times in the New Testament. That's the most used conceptual word in the New Testament. Sure, words like God, Jesus, Lord, the, a and and (I know my English teacher would cringe at me wording that sentence like that- and and- it makes me happy just to think about it and the discussion I would have had with him after he marked my essay down for doing it and getting him to admit that it's not technically wrong but is awkward which I would then remind him is pretty much a description of my entire existence but I'm digressing here so let's get back to faith, shall we?) are used more often but when it comes to descriptions of concepts faith is the clear winner. In fact the next most often used word in the New Testament is only used 230 times. Any guesses what that word is? If you guessed love you are correct. Are you as surprised as I am that faith is used almost twice as often as love in the Bible? It must be a pretty important concept for us to understand then, wouldn't you think?

Now if you grew up in church like I did then you might think (like I did) that you've got a pretty good grip on what faith is. I was certain I knew exactly what faith means but then as I'd read through the Bible I'd get this uneasy feeling like my definition was anemic. Like my definition only scratched the surface of what faith truly is. And because of that I didn't really understand what passages like James 1:5 was getting at where I'm invited to pray for faith and receive it from God as long as I have "faith" and do not "doubt". So this week we're going to pour over this word and try to at least scratch the surface of what this word that is so central to the New Testament and the Christian faith (see there it is again!) is all about. So why don't we spend some time today reflecting on what our definition of faith and doubt is.

Tuesday Reflection: So what exactly is faith? Well that's a tricky question. The word we see pop up as "faith" so often in our English Bibles is a tough one to nail down. So much so the same Greek word is translated at least 4 different ways into English- faith, believe, trust and commit. Faith and believe are pretty close in meaning in English but trust takes faith a step further than our typical English definitions and commit blows that definition out of the water. So just like we had to do with humility and other Bible words that are tough to define

in English we're going to have to wrestle with this word to get a full definition of it. So let's start by talking about what you always thought the word faith or believe means when it comes to the Bible. I always knew it was pretty important:

It is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God. Romans 10:9 (NLT)

God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NLT)

Two pretty famous passages of scripture talking about the importance of faith/belief in salvation. I've known that faith/belief was integral to salvation for about as long as I can remember but I never gave much thought to what faith/belief was. For me I always thought it was pretty much about what I believed to be a fact. If I had faith or believed in God then I agreed that He was the Creator of the universe, the King of everything, the Father of Jesus Who is the Son of God, the Savior of all mankind. I figured that when Jesus said that "everyone who believes in him will not perish" He was saying that everyone who accepted as a true fact that He came to this earth, lived a perfect life, died on the cross, was buried in the tomb for three days and then was resurrected on the third day, ascended to heaven 40 days later and now is on His throne and one day He will return. I thought that John 3:16 must be talking about agreeing on facts.

But it's so much more than that. Why? Because simply agreeing on a set of facts doesn't necessarily change anyone. I mean think about it, I can believe that exercise is good for human beings. I can agree that it's a fact that it will increase how long a human lives and increase his/her quality of life. But it doesn't mean I'm going to exercise. I may believe that eating healthy foods and avoiding junk food is good for human beings. But it doesn't mean I'm going to follow my beliefs. Why would I think that simply believing in Jesus would change anything? He didn't think that which is why in addition to believing in Him He always invited people to follow Him. Walk in His footsteps. Why? Because belief is about WAY more than what I think. In fact what I believe cannot be separated from what I do:

The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd. Hebrews 11: (MES)

Yes, faith has to do with what we believe to be a fact. But it's much more than that. Biblical belief isn't just about what I think it true- it goes beyond that and asks if what I think is true is changing the way I live my life. I like that in the scripture we just read from the Message paraphrase that it's called an act-of-faith. Because faith can't be separated from how I live my life. James is going to really get into this in chapter two but for today let's just think a little bit about Hebrews chapter 11- the most famous chapter on faith in the Bible. In that chapter we find the Biblical hall-of-faith. The people held up as heroes of the "faith" (there's that word again). If you've ever read through that chapter of the Bible you know that listed are people like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses & Rahab. Then if you go back and read their stories in the Old Testament you'll find they all have two things in common (besides the faith they are praised for)- they're all flawed, weak human beings and

they all made tons of mistakes. Any yet they are called heroes of our faith. Great men and women of faith held up as inspirations to us.

What does that tell you about your ability to live a life of faith. I remember thinking that there was no way I could ever be a great man of faith. I could never be like the heroes in the Bible. Maybe you've thought the same thing. Then go read about how after the flood Noah got drunk and naked and passed out in his tent. Hmmmm... maybe you could be like Noah after all! Of course I'm being silly but Abraham was a liar, Sarah was a manipulator, Noah was a drunk, Isaac was a liar just like his dad. Guess what? So was Jacob. In fact Jacob was a cheat. Moses was a murderer and Rahab was a prostitute. All that to say this- our flaws and our weaknesses don't disqualify us from becoming great men and women of faith. The only thing that will prevent you from becoming a great person of faith is not making it your life's goal to follow Jesus. Not just to "believe" in Him but to actually start walking behind Him in His footsteps. Do that and maybe one day we'll be reading about your great journey of faith in spite of your flaws and weaknesses. So maybe spend some time today reflecting on what would be written about you in Hebrews chapter 11 and ask yourself if you're ok with that being your legacy.

Wednesday Reflection: So if faith isn't just about what I believe then what is it? To get to the bottom of this question let's spend some time looking at the Greek word that we've spent so much time talking about this week- the word "pistos". I'll never forget the first time I heard that word said out loud in ancient New Testament Greek class. There may or may not have been a quiet snicker from my side of the room (heh heh... he said pistos... heh heh). And my professor may or may not have asked me what was so funny. And I may or may not have said, "nothing that I want to share with the class". And he was ok with that- to be fair most of the time he'd prefer I not share what I considered to be funny about the Greek words he said out loud and how sometimes they sounded funny to me but I digress again. I try to only do that once a day so there's my one opportunity for Wednesday I guess.

So where were we? Oh yeah- pistos. What does that word mean? Well I think we'd be getting warmer if we'd go ahead and add in the fourth English equivalent of the word translated as "faith" or "believe" or "trust" and talk about it a bit- commit. To have faith or to believe in something/someone brings up a fairly common concept in my mind. To add the word "trust" starts to round it out and brings it one step closer to the Bible's concept of faith/belief. But without adding in the final English definition of "commit" we will miss the richness of the Greek word, pistos. How does adding in the definition of "commit" change the way you understand this word? For me it was a spin of the kaleidoscope and changed every verse I would ever read that talked about having-faith or believing-in Jesus. Now when I look at that word I can't help but see that beyond just agreeing that something is a fact faith means committing to a certain path.

But just because I believe in (commit myself to) Jesus that doesn't necessarily mean I will have 100% certainty in my thinking. In other words, just because I've committed myself to following Jesus it doesn't mean I won't still struggle with varying degrees of doubt. Faith and commitment do not equate to 100% certainty and that's just part of being human and living by faith since faith by its very definition is unprovable:

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. Hebrews 11:1-2 (NIV)

You can't prove faith. And in my experience if you can't prove something beyond a shadow of a doubt you will always have fluctuations in your confidence/certainty levels (your results may and probably will vary). The good news is that Jesus doesn't cast us out into eternal darkness where there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth (oh how I wish I hadn't already used my one digression into things that have no real bearing on the reflection for the day but make me chuckle a bit to myself of I'd tell you all about how much my dad loved that phrase and quoted it often but since I've already used up my one rabbit trail for the day I won't do that) just for a fluctuation of certainty/confidence. If He did the disciples would be toast right about now (literally). There's the time in John chapter 6 when Jesus has just preached a really freaky sermon about how if you were going to follow Him you'd have to eat His flesh and drink His blood. We have the benefit of hindsight and knowing His words during the Last Supper about how the bread represents His body broken for us and how the cup represents His blood poured out for us so we kind of get it. But the people listening to Him in John chapter 6 didn't have that benefit. So what happened? Thousands of His disciples left Him. And then this happened:

Then Jesus gave the Twelve their chance: "Do you also want to leave?" Peter replied, "Master, to whom would we go? You have the words of real life, eternal life. We've already committed ourselves." John 6:67-69 (MES)

These are not words of a 100% certain individual. This is not a ringing endorsement. This is the hesitant affirmation of a human struggling with his certainty and confidence level but sticking with his commitment. Notice Jesus doesn't chastise Peter for this anemic response. Based on what I got out of the teaching of the church I grew up in a response like that would lead to the words, "be gone, unbelieving reprobate!" But not with Jesus. With Jesus this response was enough and so Peter's story continued (thank God). And this is not an isolated example. There was also the time on the day of Jesus' ascension when the disciples who were eyewitnesses to the resurrection were gathered together with Jesus one last time:

Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted! Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:16-20 (NLT)

The Christian faith is bi-polar- it has been from the very beginning. Disciples live their lives between worship and doubt, trusting and questioning, hoping and worrying all the while trying to figure out what a life of total commitment looks like within the context of all that uncertainty. Some of the disciples stood on that mountain with a man who had overcome death itself and somehow found that their ability to doubt had survived the miraculous things they had experienced. And Jesus looks at these worshipping/doubting humans and basically says, "All of you go! You doubters, go. You risk your lives for Me. You change the

world for Me. And I promise you will find that as you go it is your own doubts that will be healed. You doubters are included too. Disciples are not people who never doubt. We doubt and we worship. We doubt and we serve. We doubt and we help each other with our doubts. I always thought doubting was as bad as it got in the Christian "faith" (that word keeps popping up this week!) but look at what another one of Jesus' brothers wrote in the shortest book in the entire Bible:

Be merciful to those who doubt. Jude 22 (TLB)

Why? Maybe because one day that doubter will be me. Maybe because one day that human struggling with their certainty will be you. Faith is not the presence of 100% certainty. Faith is a lifestyle of commitment in spite of how ever much uncertainty we may be dealing with in our lives on any given day and in any given season. If I told you I live my life at the 100% certainty line 100% of the time I'd be lying. In fact, I've noticed over the last year that my certainty has wavered more than I'd care to confess with the death of Riverside's worship pastor of over 10 years (and my brother-in-law, next-door-neighbor and friend), Pastor Jeff. I've spent more than a few nights asking troubling questions but I've tried to continue to live out my commitment in spite of my wavering certainty. I can't even clearly identify what my questions were/are but I can identify a whole lot more today with the disciples on that mountainside with Jesus than I used to could. Maybe you can too. That's ok. Jesus looks both of us in the eye and says, "take your doubts and go into all the world and share the good news with every human you meet."

I'm included. So are you. Welcome to Jesus' community. A community that moves forward in worship, service and love even as we wrestle with our doubts.

Thursday Reflection: So far this week we've learned that faith is more than just what I think to be true- it's also about a commitment that doesn't necessarily always equate to 100% certainty. So next we need to address a very human problem that goes along with faith/belief/certainty/doubt/commitment which is, even if I've committed my life to following Jesus in spite of my doubts my certainty level will ebb and flow (that's right- ebb and flow. This is the only lesson I believe I've ever used that phrase in but it fits so there you go). In other words, my certainty level will fluctuate. I always thought faith was a steadily and continually rising line that never wavered from its increase. But it turns out it's not true.

We talked about Peter walking on the water a few weeks ago as a picture of what "faith" looks like but I want to revisit that story because it is a great analogy of what ebbing and flowing faith looks like. One day Jesus sent His followers across the Sea Of Galilee and told them He'd join them later:

Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people home. After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone. Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. Matthew 14:22-24 (NLT)

Do you see where it says that Jesus "insisted"? Do you know why He had to insist? Because they didn't want any part of crossing the Sea Of Galilee- especially at night? Why not? One

because it was common for violent storms to arise without notice and so they knew better than to be sailing out in the middle of the lake. Yes they were fisherman which meant they stuck close to shore so when the wind started to pick up they could easily get back to safety before they got into trouble. And two- they were afraid of ghosts. Yes. Ghosts. The people who lived around the Sea of Galilee called it the Abyss and they believed the souls of the dead went into the sea. That's why it's so funny in the story of Jesus and the man named Legion who was possessed by an army of demons that when they begged not to be sent into the Abyss (I'm guessing a very bad place that has nothing to do with the Sea of Galilee) Jesus agreed and let them go into the pigs and then the pigs ran into the Sea Of Galilee (The Abyss). I sometimes wonder if Jesus didn't chuckle to Himself after that happened?

All that to say this- the disciples DID NOT want to cross the Sea of Galilee under any circumstances but especially they didn't want to cross it without Jesus in the boat with them (they had already witnessed Him calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee in Matthew chapter 8 but now they were being sent into the Abyss alone- a wholly different can of worms for them I'm guessing). So they're freaking out at the storm and then Jesus shows up and their terror level gets cranked up a notch or two (or three or four or five or...):

About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!" But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here! Matthew 14:25-27 (NLT)

I always wondered why they assumed Jesus was a ghost. Now we know why. They are beyond scared- they're terrified. But when Jesus calls out to them they find some measure of courage just from His presence (Jesus was the ultimate encourager in the most literal sense of the word- I always thought of encouragement as being less about courage and more about lifting someone's spirits when they were down but I'm not sure why. I mean the word says it all, doesn't it? En-courager. I swear sometimes I can be so dense). Peter especially is infused with courage and here I'm going to switch to the Message paraphrase because I like the way it translates this section:

Peter, suddenly bold, said, "Master, if it's really you, call me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come ahead." Jumping out of the boat, Peter walked on the water to Jesus. Matthew 14:22-30 (MSG)

Talk about certainty levels ebbing and flowing- Peter goes from terrified that he's going to die and be welcomed to the watery depths by ghosts to believing with all of his heart that he can walk on the raging seas with no trouble and no worries. At this point where do you think Peter's certainty level is? Pretty high, right? Heck, it's probably at 100% at this point. And before anyone can lift a finger to stop him Peter has leapt out of the boat and onto the Sea of Galilee. And if you've ever seen a typical fishing boat from first century Israel then you know, this isn't stepping out of a row boat onto the water (a strange way to put that but accurate in this one case in human history I suppose)- it would have been like jumping off a four foot wall. But Peter doesn't hesitate which I think is why for at least a few steps he walked on water.

Now let's just stop there for a minute and be blown away by that statement, ok? For a few steps Peter. Walked. On. The. Water. That's crazy, right? Peter gets a bad rap sometimes because of what happens next but for a couple of seconds Peter does something no other person who has ever walked this earth has done other than Jesus Himself. That's rarified air (or water in this case). But Peter's certainty level having "flowed" to 100% doesn't stay there- instead something happens that causes Peter's certainty level to ebb:

But when he looked down at the waves churning beneath his feet, he lost his nerve and started to sink. He cried, "Master, save me!" Jesus didn't hesitate. He reached down and grabbed his hand. Matthew 14:30-31 (MSG)

When Peter was on the level his certainty level was high, right? So what happens? He takes his eyes off Jesus and starts to think about the fact that this is another fine mess he's gotten himself into and that's when it happens- his certainty level ebbs and leaves him sinking into the water rather than walking on top of it. That happened fast, didn't it? And the same thing can and will and does happen to us. Our certainty level ebbs and flows. I don't know about you but I'm not sure my certainty level has ever been as high as Peter's was as he walked on water but as it turns out I don't need much certainty to do miraculous things in this life. At the conclusion of a story that we're going to focus on tomorrow Jesus says this to His disciples (and to me and to you):

Afterward the disciples asked Jesus privately, "Why couldn't we cast out that demon?" "You don't have enough faith," Jesus told them. "I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible. Matthew 17:19-20 (NLT)

I used to have this idea that if God was going to do anything for me or through me I had to have a faith that would move mountains. And it's true but not in the sense I always thought. Because it turns out it doesn't take much faith to move mountains. A mustard seed is tiny. Jesus isn't claiming we need ginormous amounts of faith to move mountains- just a tiny bit. I guess I haven't even approached mustard seed levels of faith yet but even with the small amount I've been able to muster (I guess you could say I can't muster a mustard-seed's amount?) I've seen God do crazy and miraculous things in my life and through my life. Even as my certainty levels ebb and flow.

So knowing all of that I want to leave you with this verse to chew on for today:

The righteous will live by faith. Romans 1:17 (NIV)

What does that mean to you? And before you say, "I could never be 'righteous'" let me just define that word for the sake of clarity- the-righteous aren't the-perfect. The-righteous are those who are attempting to live by faith and because of that are credited with Jesus' righteousness rather than their own. You are righteous not because of what you've done but because of what Jesus has done. God doesn't save us because of who we are but because of Who He Is. So with that in mind- what does it mean that a follower of Jesus will live-by-faith? Not 100% certainty- but faith.

Friday Reflection: So let's reset a bit- this week we've looked at how faith is more than just what you think is a fact- it's more of a commitment that has to exist within a wavering, fluctuating sense of certainty. Today I want to look at how God works with doubters. That's right- He works with doubters. We kind of saw that yesterday with Peter and the other doubting disciples but today I want to look at a story that illustrates this point better than any other I know.

When Jesus was up on the mount of transfiguration with three of His closest disciples having a sort of pep rally just before He headed off to Jerusalem for the last time in His life there was a drama unfolding down below. The disciples that were left had been presented with a challenge they were having a difficult time with:

When they returned to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd surrounding them, and some teachers of religious law were arguing with them. When the crowd saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with awe, and they ran to greet him. "What is all this arguing about?" Jesus asked. One of the men in the crowd spoke up and said, "Teacher, I brought my son so you could heal him. He is possessed by an evil spirit that won't let him talk. And whenever this spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground. Then he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it." Jesus said to them, "You faithless people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." Mark 9:14-19 (NLT)

What's going on here? A man has brought his boy that has been dealing with demon possession. This is not a theological discussion for the man- this is his boy. But this young boy who is possessed by a demon has become a theological debate between Jesus' disciples (the "B" team) and the religious leaders. When Jesus shows up and asks what's going on the man tells Him the whole story. How this demon has taken away his son's life. How destructive and disruptive it has become. And he tells Jesus of the disciples inability to cast out this demon. This was confusing for the disciples because they had been given authority over demonic possession so they weren't sure why it wasn't working this time. The story continues:

So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth. "How long has this been happening?" Jesus asked the boy's father. He replied, "Since he was a little boy. The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us, if you can." "What do you mean, 'if I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes." Mark 9:20-23 (NLT)

Can you hear the hope in the father's voice? Can you hear the doubt? Jesus could. He brings it up. What's the word that sticks out in the father's plea?

If...

Jesus points it out for some reason. "What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes." Can you hear the implicit question? Anything is possible if a person believes is the explicit statement but behind that statement is the question, "do you believe?" Well, do you, dad?

What would you do if you were this guy? I know what I'd do. I'd summon up some enthusiastic faith and I mean right now. "Believe? Of course I believe! Would I be here if I didn't believe? I mean, I don't have much faith in your junior varsity team of disciples over here but You? You I believe in! 100% certainty level, Lord." That's what I would have done. But listen to what this father says in response to Jesus question, "do you believe?"

The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"
Mark 9:24 (NLT)

What do you hear in that reply? I do believe but not 100%? I believe and I doubt? I'm in and I'm out at the very same time? So much in that little statement. In the church I grew up in the impression I got was that if someone approached God with that kind of a statement of faith they would be cast out. That God's voice would boom with, "BE GONE THOU UNBELIEVER!!!!"

But that doesn't happen here. For Jesus this is a good enough response. The guy says, "I believe and I don't so help me with the part of me that doubts" and you can almost see Jesus nod His head and turn toward the boy. And then this happens:

When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. "Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable to hear and speak," he said. "I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!" Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd as people said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up. Mark 9:25-27 (NLT)

Isn't that one of the coolest stories you've ever read about Jesus. If you struggle with doubts in your faith then it should be. I have to tell you this- I am SO glad this story is in the New Testament. I'm SO glad Mark decided this was a story you and I needed to hear. It shows me how much Jesus can do in the life of someone who is struggling with faith and doubt. It shows me once again how important commitment in spite of a lack of 100% certainty is when it comes to faith and belief. It shows me that Jesus doesn't hold it against us when our certainty is wavering if our commitment level is strong. With a questionable amount of certainty but a high level of commitment this dad brought his boy to Jesus and Jesus changed both of their worlds forever.

And He'll do the same for you and me if we'll let Him. All it takes is commitment. Not having 100% certainty. But a commitment in spite of our lack of 100% certainty. Imagine what the boy's life would have been like had his dad not risked so much by bringing the boy to Jesus. It was not a popular thing to do. Jesus was a controversial figure at this point in His ministry. The religious leaders are plotting ways to kill Him. People who follow Jesus are harassed and that's not a small thing in first century Israel. This was a HUGE risk. But the dad took it. Why? Well, not because he was 100% certain it would pan out. He wasn't. But he had nowhere else to turn. So he risked everything. Certainty level low but commitment level pretty high. And Jesus changed everything in this guy's life.

I've noticed that's the way Jesus still works. My certainty level wasn't high when I finally came to Him. But my commitment level was adequate I guess. I've told the story in these

pages many times. How I approached Jesus because nothing else had worked to save my life. I prayed to Him, "if You're really there and if You really want my life then I'll give it to You. And I'll start trying to figure out what You want from me and I'll do my best to follow You. But if we're going to get to a relationship where I say things like, 'I love You, Lord!', then You're going to have to get me to that point because right now I can't feel it."

Now as I type those words out again I see it pretty clearly. I believe, help me overcome my unbelief. And Jesus took me with those anemic words and changed my life. I'd like to say my certainty level has risen and never ebbed over the last 33 years since I prayed that prayer but I'd be lying if I did. I wish I could say my commitment level has remained at a high point during the last 33 years but I'd be lying again. And yet Jesus continues to walk with me and work in my life and through my life in spite of my doubts and fears.

And He'll do the same for you. How much faith does it take for Jesus to change a life. Not much. So bring whatever amount of faith you have and offer it to Him and then watch as He works miraculously in your life and the lives of those you love.