

D O U B T

TRUSTING
GOD'S
PROMISES

31-DAY DEVOTIONALS FOR LIFE

ELYSE FITZPATRICK

D O U B T

31-DAY DEVOTIONALS FOR LIFE

A Series

DEEPAK REJU

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Tips for Reading This Devotional

EARLY IN OUR MARRIAGE, my wife and I lived on the top floor of a town house, in a small one-bedroom apartment. Whenever it rained, leaks in the roof would drip through the ceiling and onto our floors. I remember placing buckets in different parts of the apartment and watching the water slowly drip, one drop at a time. I put large buckets out and thought, *It'll take a while to fill them.* The water built up over time, and often I was surprised at how quickly those buckets filled up, overflowing if I didn't pay close enough attention.

This devotional is just like rain filling up a bucket. It's slow, and it builds over time. Just a few verses every day. Drip. Drip. Drip. Just a few drops of Scripture daily to satiate your parched soul.

We start with Scripture. God's Word is powerful. In fact, it's the most powerful force in the entire universe.¹ It turns the hearts of kings, brings comfort to the lowly, and gives spiritual sight to the blind. It transforms lives and turns them upside down. We know that the Bible is God's very own words, so we read and study it to know God himself.

Our study of Scripture is practical. Theology should change how we live. It's crucial to connect the Word with your struggles. Often, as you read this devotional, you'll see the word *you* because Elyse speaks directly to you, the reader. You'll get much more from this experience if you answer her questions and follow her practical suggestions. Don't skip them. Do them for the sake of your own soul.

Our study of Scripture is worshipful. Fundamentally, any struggle with doubt is a worship problem. We've lost our orientation

toward the One who should rule our lives, and we need to turn back to him. The Word points us to Christ, who rescues us from our doubt and reorients our life. The goal of your time in God's Word should always be worship. As you grow in your affections for Christ, the King, you learn to do battle with your doubts. As Elyse teaches, doubt is normal for Christians. But just because you struggle with doubt doesn't mean that your life is hopeless. Christ can lead you through your doubts—and to faith in him. Adore Christ. Love him. Cherish him. Praise him. Honor him. Give your whole life to him. Don't hold anything back.

If you find this devotional helpful (and I trust that you will!), reread it in different seasons of your life. Work through it this coming month, and then come back to it a year from now, to remind yourself how to do battle with your doubts.

This devotional is *not* meant to be a comprehensive guide to fighting doubt. Good volumes are already written for that purpose. Buy them and make good use of them. You'll see several resources listed at the end of the book.

That's enough for now. Let's begin.

Deepak Reju

Introduction

IF THERE'S ONE thing that I've learned throughout my decades of interacting with Christians, it's this: everyone has doubts about their faith . . . *even me*. My guess is that you're reading this devotional right now because you're struggling with doubt yourself, and perhaps it feels overwhelming. Perhaps you're new to this walk of faith and you still have nagging questions—or you're wondering whether you were maybe a bit hasty in buying into this new life.

Or maybe, like me, you've been a Christian for decades, but you still wonder things such as: Is all this Christianity stuff really—I mean *really*—true? Is God who he says he is in the Bible? For that matter, is the Bible really God's Word? Or, even assuming that the Bible is God's Word, maybe I've been reading it wrong or making assumptions that I shouldn't have made—like assuming that God will save me when that's not the case. Am I really forgiven, or am I just kidding myself?

And then there's the whole problem of the way my life has played out. If God is really the all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving God he declares himself to be, then why isn't my life (my marriage, family, job, ministry, health, or bank account) what I hoped it would be? Have I misjudged or misunderstood God? Why do I continue to struggle with my own sin and failures?

At the bottom of all these “whys” is one more, really big one: *Why am I still struggling to believe?* Aren't I supposed to have the rock-solid conviction of faith that the people in the Bible (and my leaders) seem to have? Does my struggle to believe prove that my faith isn't genuine and that I shouldn't count on any kind of blessing from God? *Am I just fooling myself?*

I know the kinds of questions that doubters ask because I've

asked, *and many times continue to ask*, every one of them myself. Sure, I've been a Christian for nearly half a century (wow—that seems like a long time!), but I still question. *Really? Is it really true?* I still wake up in the middle of the night and wonder if God really loves me and will take care of _____ the way I hope he will. In addition, I've known many people of faith who looked pretty good on the surface but who really struggled in private, too. From those interactions, I've learned that I'm not alone in my doubting. Neither are you. In fact, though it may seem counterintuitive, the Bible is chock-full of men and women who were known as people of faith but who also doubted, just like we do. In fact, some of them even doubted while they were conversing with God himself.

Why is doubt so ubiquitous? Why do we all have so much trouble with certainty? Not surprisingly, the Bible gives us the reason. We all struggle against doubt because “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).

We are physical creatures on a physical earth. Much of what we know, we know through our physical bodies. We are used to gaining certainty through our physical senses. For instance, at this moment, I am sensing a computer on my lap. I feel the aluminum casing with my wrists. I am touching the plastic keys and hearing the click-click as I structure my thoughts into sentences. I see the screen—its many colors and the way it signals me when I've made an error or stopped typing. I feel the warmth of the fan in the casing as it rests on my lap. I am certain my laptop is here. How do I know? I can touch it—there's no faith involved. Right now, as far as my writing process is concerned, I'm walking *by sight* and *not by faith*. When you think about it, that's the primary way that we know anything. I experience the world around me, and I know that it's there.¹

But that's not the only way that I know what I know. I know many things because I've been taught them. For instance, I've studied the Civil War—and, though I didn't witness it firsthand,

I know without doubt that it was an actual event. Sure, I've seen some pictures and visited many battlefields, but that wouldn't prove that it happened without the reliable testimony of those who were there. I've seen artifacts such as letters, newspapers, and the texts of political speeches that assure me that what I'm learning is true. This is how we discover so much of what we know. By the same token, I know that *Voyager* has traveled to the outer limits of our solar system because I've been to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena and seen evidence. I've seen a life-sized model, pictures of the men and women who built it, and the transcription of the messages it has sent back. When it comes to history, science, mathematics, geography, and ancient and modern world cultures, I know what I know mostly because I believe credible witnesses who either were there or have gained extensive knowledge through study. In each of these areas, I put aside doubt (mostly) because I have no reason not to.

Superficial belief in others' testimony about things that we haven't personally witnessed is normal and commonplace. But religious faith is in a different category, isn't it? Perhaps such faith feels like an untethering of our reason. We wonder if our Christianity is just a mindless *leap of faith*. Or is there enough eyewitness evidence to push us beyond unbelief?

We all struggle with inward doubts that arise even when we have strong evidence to convince us. In such cases, doubt occurs for two reasons: First of all, the truth about who I am, and who God is, is *way* more important than whether *Voyager* is actually a grand hoax. Everything in this life and the life to come (if there is one) is riding on it. Second, because we are prone to unbelief by nature, doubt is just part of our DNA. Face it: we are, all of us, Doubting Thomases.

In the readings that follow, you'll meet famous Bible characters who doubted, find evidences to bolster your faith, and enjoy the promises that God has made to those who feel like they have only microscopic faith (smaller than a mustard seed). In addition,

every devotional has two takeaway truths for you to memorize or write out in order to help you when you feel condemned because of your doubt. These truths are also found on pages 87–92.

Above all else, though, we want you to know that you're not alone. Doubter, you are welcome here.

DOUBTERS
IN THE BIBLE

DAY 1

A Doubter in Paradise

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say . . . ?” (Gen. 3:1)

INTO THEIR SPLENDID garden home, a place where “Are you really telling me the truth?” had never once been thought, let alone asked, the beguiling serpent hissed his foul question: “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Gen. 3:1)

In that moment, at the beginning of the history of our race, Satan introduced doubt into the heart of the woman. That phrase, “Did God actually say?” has echoed down through millennia. Through centuries of permutations, it has whispered, “Is there a God? Does he speak? Does the God of the Bible really exist? Is the Bible actually God’s Word? Is his way *really* the right way?” And, more personally, “Is God actually speaking to me? Does he know and care about me? Am I his? Am I loved? Can I trust him?”

If Eve and Adam had resisted Satan, you and I wouldn’t struggle with doubt the way we do. But they didn’t, so we question and wonder and struggle. To make things worse, we think that we’re alone in this battle. We look around at other Christians who seem confident and filled with faith, and we think we are somehow different. Maybe our faith is intrinsically flawed . . . or maybe we don’t really belong in God’s family.

We’re revisiting the story of the first temptation today because I want to remind you that you’re not alone in your doubts. Doubt has been with us since the very beginning—since our first parents fell and were exiled from paradise. At some point they probably began to doubt whether they used to walk with the Lord in the

“cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8). From their exile onward, we have all had to walk by faith, not by sight. We have had to try to *see* “him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27), as Moses did—and, though there were occasions when Moses did that well, there were also other times when he failed miserably and was engulfed with doubt. None of us have had the certitude that Adam and Eve knew. All of us struggle.

Remembering that doubt has been a part of the human experience since the beginning is meant to bring you comfort; it is meant to silence the inner accuser who tells you that you’re different from everyone else. Today I want you to know that you are not alone. Every daughter and son of faith has also been a child of doubt, as you will soon see. But, for today, let me encourage you to think about these truths and to ask God to help you remember. Walking by faith, striving to see what our natural eyes cannot see, is impossible on our own. *But we’re not alone.* He is with us.

If you can, take time now to list the four or five most troubling thoughts that you have. Next, in prayer, ask the Lord to help you find answers to them as we study together. Remember—we’re not striving for complete certainty here. One of Satan’s big lies is to tell you that, if you don’t have complete certainty, you’re doubting—and that God hates doubters. That’s a lie. God promised salvation to the first two doubters (see Gen. 3:15) . . . and he has salvation for you, too.

Truth 1: Doubt has been around since the beginning.

Truth 2: God loves and saves doubters.

DAY 2

The Doubting Father of Our Faith

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old?" (Gen. 17:17)

WE'VE ALL HEARD how Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness (see Rom. 4:3, 9). He's referred to as the father of those of faith (see Rom. 4:12; Gal. 3:9), and he had great faith when he trekked up Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac. Hebrews 11 describes him this way: "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son. . . . He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead" (vv. 17, 19).

When asked to sacrifice the one on whom all the promises of God were fixed, Abraham thought, *God gave me this son; if he dies, God will raise him up*. Abraham seems like a man who never struggled with doubt, doesn't he?

Thankfully, the Bible never paints false portraits of God's children. Sure, there were times when Abraham's faith shone, but . . .

- Abraham doubted God's protection, so he told his wife to lie . . . twice (see Gen. 12:11–13; 20:2).
- Abraham doubted that God would give him a son, so he suggested that God use his servant instead (see Gen. 15:2–3).
- after believing the promise of a land as an inheritance, Abraham doubted and demanded a sign (see Gen. 15:8).
- Abraham gave in to Sarah's unbelief and fathered a son, Ishmael, by her servant (see Gen. 16). Again he tried to substitute Ishmael for the promised one (see Gen. 17:18).

- both Abraham and Sarah doubted God’s word and laughed at his promise (see Gen. 17:17; 18:12).

While Abraham did have shining moments of certainty, most of the time he was trying to fight off doubt and unbelief. In fact, it wasn’t until after the birth of Isaac that his faith grew strong. Both Abraham and Sarah seem to have had a much easier time walking by sight than by faith. Did they believe? Yes. Did they doubt? Yes. They were just like us. Doubt didn’t disqualify them, and it won’t disqualify you, either.

Think back over the story of Abraham and Sarah’s life. If you’re not familiar with it, take time to skim Genesis 12–20. Perhaps you’ve heard sermons about Abraham’s great faith and you’ve surmised that there’s something innately wrong with you because you can’t picture yourself sacrificing to God like that. Don’t worry. You’re not alone. Even if God is asking a difficult obedience from you, he has also promised to be with you. Perhaps part of your doubting has to do with what you fear God *might* ask of you. Don’t test the strength of your faith in imagined scenarios. If God calls you to a difficult time of sacrifice, he will strengthen you for it.

Make a list of the steps of faith that God is *actually* calling you to take today, and then pray for grace to begin to obey. What he wants from you today is simply a heart that says, *I’d like to believe and obey. Please help me.*

Truth 3: Every child of faith, even the “great” ones, had times of significant doubt.

Truth 4: It’s foolish for us to compare the strength of our faith to the strength of others’.

DAY 3

The meekest Doubter on the Earth

*Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people
who were on the face of the earth. (Num. 12:3)*

I'M PART OF THE generation that first learned about Moses by watching Charlton Heston stand before the Red Sea with his staff in his outstretched arm, commanding the waters in great faith to part so that the Israelites could pass through. Who hasn't seen the epic 1956 movie *The Ten Commandments*?

That's generally how we think of Moses: bold, fiery, filled with faith, making demands before Pharaoh (the most powerful man on earth), commanding bread from heaven, leading the rebels through the wilderness. In addition to being a strong leader, he was also called the most humble, or meekest, man on the earth. That's quite a combination, isn't it? His faith was strong enough to enable him to lead millions of people through extremely difficult times, yet his strength didn't come from pride or narcissism. It came from humility and trust. Have we found someone with perfect faith? Let's take a closer look.

You remember the story: Pharaoh's daughter saved baby Moses out of the water and raised him in her household. Once he grew to manhood, he identified with the suffering Hebrew slaves and killed an Egyptian. He soon fled to the land of Midian, where he spent forty years tending flocks. Then, when he was eighty, he came face-to-face with God in a burning bush. After the Lord informed Moses of his identity, he said, "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people . . . out of Egypt" (Ex. 3:10).

You would think that Moses, this great man of faith, would say, "Yes, sir, Lord! Sign me up!" But you know that that's not what

happened. No fewer than five times, Moses doubted God's ability to use him to deliver his people. Five times he argued with a talking bush that burned but wasn't consumed. Sometimes doubt makes us silly. And even after Moses had gone back to Egypt, he asked questions like "Why did you ever send me?" multiple times (Ex. 5:22; see also 6:12, 30).

Let's fast-forward to the end of Moses's life. He'd led the Israelites through the wilderness for years. He'd put up with their complaining and unbelief. He'd given them God's law and built a portable church for them in the desert. Was Moses finally free from doubt now? No. Even after years of seeing God's miraculous provision, Moses still didn't fully believe. In a fit of unbelief and anger, he struck the water-giving rock instead of speaking to it. God diagnosed Moses's problem: he did not believe in him (see Num. 20:12). Even though he saw miracles, spoke with God face-to-face, and was called the friend of God (see Ex. 33:11), Moses still doubted.

Take a few moments now to review the passages above. What are you learning about the interplay between faith and doubt? Was Moses used by God even though his faith wasn't perfect? Yes, of course he was. What does that tell you about God's ability to use you even though you struggle? Have you noticed times in your life when your doubt bred anger or self-indulgence? Can you name them?

Truth 5: Sometimes doubt can make us respond foolishly.

Truth 6: Having more physical proof, like bread falling from heaven, won't erase our doubt.