

Dealing With Doubt

A Need-To-Know Basis of Belief

April 2, 2023

Today we're looking at our lives to see if the answers we've accepted are up to our own standards. Cuz whether we've *had* the thought or not, we've all *agreed* everything has to be *reasonable* and *reliable* for us to call it *believable*. And that's *good* – because if our *beliefs* are meant to make *sense* of life's *chaos* and *confusion* – they had *better* be believable! So, take a second, think it through, and honestly ask yourself: **Is what you believe believable?** Well, *how* believable?



Because beliefs can be *better*; better *supported* by better *reasons* to give you better *confidence* that *your* beliefs are *better* than the *alternatives*! And at that point, **what you believe isn't just believable, it's become convincing!** Like the way Paul talks about *his* battle-tested beliefs:



I know *whom* I have believed, and am convinced...- 2 Timothy 1:11-12 NIV

I am convinced that [nothing] ... will be able to separate us from the love of God... – Romans 8:38-39 NIV



I *know* and am convinced by the Lord *Jesus* ... – Romans 14:14 NKJ

Since, then, we *know* what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade [literally convince] *others*. – 2 Corinthians 5:11 NIV



Because **this is the brand of belief that brings relief in times of trouble!** This is the belief that lets us see through our momentary affliction to the purpose *behind* and empowers us to persevere when we can't quite *see* any good reasons for today's toughness. **This is the belief that has been tested and proven beyond a reasonable doubt.** And if we want *our* beliefs to become *convincing* convictions, we *too*, have to deal with those doubts; by calling them out. Just like this popular game show! Now, if you've never seen *Deal or No Deal*, here's how it works: There are 26 cases with 26 different amounts of money ranging from \$0.01 to \$1,000,000 and the player picks one of the *closed* briefcases at the start of the game, that they *hope* has the million. They then choose the other cases, one at a time, to be immediately opened and eliminated from play. And periodically, the player is offered an amount of money to quit, and asked, "*Deal or no deal?*" If they reject every deal and open all the *other* cases, the player wins the amount in their original case. And **that's pretty much life; it's a game of exploring options to get what we want before the game's over!**



Cuz in life, we've *all* got a goal to *hope* for; and *that's* our case. So, **what prize are you playing for?**



Well, **what's the one thing we all want more than anything?** Are you sure you *know*? Cuz it's easy to ignore... so let's double check with a couple questions: If you were given \$1 million right now, how would you feel? Could anything get you down for the rest of the day? Well, how about \$1 billion? *And you're a gorgeous movie star – so adored by the world that they elect you the first ever 'Emperor of Earth'?* Great, right? Okay, but what if you were offered all you ever wanted, **with one catch; you won't wake up tomorrow?** Today's your last day. *You taking it? Of course not!* But *why?* And what's *that* say about us?

It means **that there's something we value in tomorrow more than the promise of power, possessions, or prominence.** There's something *else* about *living* that we would trade everything on earth to have. So *what is it?* Well *that* answer is what we want in our case more than anything! **We want the meaning of life and a life to live that meaning!**

We want the truth! And the world is *full* of cases that offer it in varying amounts and various forms, but only *one* can have the truth, the *whole* truth, and nothing *but* the truth! So **what's the basis for building our belief on the case of Christ?** Why should we call *His* number? And what reasons do we have to hold onto it when other offers come rolling in? Well first, **He knew what we were looking for before we did!** While many worldly answers *still* promise power, possessions, or prominence, God makes His case by offering our *deepest* desire prior to us ever asking for what we want; what we really, really want! I mean, some of us just found out *today* – *loooong* after *He* said:

"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. [There's our *meaning and life!*] – Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

[And] God wanted to make the unchanging nature of His purpose very clear to [His followers]. ... so that [we] ... may be greatly encouraged. – Hebrews 6:17-19 NIV

And it's not just a *generic* promise of a prize that *satisfies*, because to make His case, Jesus *clarifies*:

I have come that they [His followers] may have life, and have it to the full. – John 10:10 NIV

As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning *remains* in you [Remember the case He's making, cuz] ... this is what He promised us—eternal life. [And why repeat?] I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you *astray*. – 1 John 2:24-26 NIV

Because until the game actually ends and you open your case, **it will take considerable confidence to stay strong** and not let all the other cases build the doubt that convinces you to cash out!

[But here's the *really good news*:] We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true. [He gave us a guaranteed game plan proven to win the prize! And the key is:] Dear children, keep yourselves from idols [Y'know – steer clear of all the other offers just like Jesus, no matter how enticing!] – 1 John 5:20 NIV

And that's the game-changer! **Jesus came, picked the case, played the game, and opened it up for all to see!** Which means we have a *proven* beat-by-beat cheat sheet that's whole purpose is to help us win the prize we want more than anything in this world! So what's the holdup?! *Trust.*



Because having the cheat sheet is like having a treasure map; **the only thing between you and your goal is following the path on the paper!** And before we'll quit our job to go on the quest, we gotta decide if the author is the real deal. So how do we build the trust that turns believable into convincing? **Ask for help!** That *is* what God's book *suggests and illustrates* with stories like the father *trying* to trust Jesus to save his son:

"If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us." "'If You can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes." Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; [But *also* said:] help me overcome my unbelief!" [Wait, you can believe *and* have unbelief?] – Mark 9:22-24 NIV

Yes! And don't worry – you're still a Christian! Because **honest humans know that they can't know everything!** And even *after* we've watched the way Jesus *won*, when it's *our* turn to play the *same* game, those closed cases feel frightening and we indulge our doubt: **"What if things have changed since Jesus?! Or what if I missed something in His instructions?! I'm just worried I'll do something wrong!"** Well that's okay. Just ask for help to overcome your unbelief and God'll give you *good* reasons to trust what you can't *currently* see. And even the apostles asked for *that* help:

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase *our* faith!" [And]– Luke 17:5 NIV

Faith is the *substance* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen. - Hebrews 11:1 NKJ

And apostle or not, of course we all want a sneak peak at the unseen in each closed case before we play! Cuz **seeing for yourself eliminates the discomfort of doubt!** But we *already* got our look at what Jesus has to offer on Easter morning 2000 years ago. So now, we either look past every other option by our weak willpower *or*, we can build our belief by opening all the other cases to destroy the doubt and prove the prize in a process of elimination! Because remember, the key to the game was keeping ourselves from those idols – and I don't think there's a better way of avoiding them than destroying them! And here's a hint to how we do just that:

Test all things; hold fast what is good. – 1 Thessalonians 5:21 NKJ

And read between the lines! **Holding onto the good also means letting go of the bad!** And we overcome our unbelief *both* ways – keeping Christ's case by the good we've seen in it, but also dropping the rest when they don't pass the test! Paul reiterates the idea in Romans:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but [reject those offers and] be transformed by the renewing of your mind. [Having actually seen *their* empty offers] Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will. – Romans 12:2 NIV



Every other option that competes with Christ's promise can cause doubt – but if you aren't afraid to look inside – seeing how they stack up against the Christian case can convince us to have *confidence* in *our* choice. Because **defeating doubt fosters faith!**



Now am I saying we need to indulge and engage every idea that *opposes* Christian belief? **NO!** I'm saying that if the footing of your faith ever feels faulty because of a compelling argument for a competing case – **don't count doubt out!** It's not a sign of weakness that you should ignore, it's a sign of honesty that you should explore! Because if God has the real-deal truth we want, we shouldn't be afraid, we should be eager to open any other case and *expose* it as inferior!



The problem is, **we want some things so bad that they make us doubt that a life of meaning is what it's all about.** Houses, cars, clothes, and cash are all appealing; being good looking, admired, and in control would feel fulfilling; and a life of accomplishments, awards, and appreciation is hard to turn down. But – we when we look into each offer, remember, **none of them give life, they require life.**



Eventually, we're all going to see the true value in the contents of our case! But while we're waiting, **wouldn't you like to remove the doubt before we find out?!**

Whether you're Joseph in jail wondering what God's gonna do from your dungeon, or you're a dishwasher at a diner having doubts about God's promise of perfection – **If you ask God to increase your faith, He's gonna ask you to deal with your doubt** by trusting Him enough to follow His gameplan; especially when it's uncomfortable. And that's totally reasonable, because:

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. – John 16:33 NIV
[That's the reasonable and reliable behavior of a truly trustworthy Savior!]

And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. – 1 John 5:4 NKJ
[That's the reasonable and reliable behavior of a truly convinced believer.]

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with My Father on His throne. - Revelation 3:21 NIV
[That's the reasonable and reliable behavior of a truly loving God who wants His kids to find their way home to enjoy the meaning and life we were created to want!]

Listen, this is about as simple as the Gospel gets: **Jesus overcame the game so you can do the same!** And that's not being flippant – that's reminding you to dial down the despair when the worries of this *world* start to drowning *you* in doubt. Cuz **God's got you.** And once you realize you want what He's offering, He Himself is willing to walk you through the steps to grow the trust that builds your belief into a convincing case. And that's a lot more comfortable than the perpetual pain of nagging doubt. All you gotta do is be bold enough to take them on and He'll turn them from distractions of doubt into foundations of faith. So... **deal, or no deal?**