



Help My Unbelief | Shawn Johnson | 08.18.2024

Weekly Study

## SHARE

As group members get settled, take a few minutes to check in with everyone and see how life is going. Share an exciting story from this week, your highs and lows, an answered prayer, or something you're struggling with. If someone is really struggling, rally the group around them and take a few moments to pray over them.

**Share a high and a low from last week.**

**How do you define doubt?**

## GROW

Welcome to Week Three of Bad Theology. By now, we hope that we all understand that theology isn't just an academic study but a framework that shapes our relationship with God and the world, which is formed by our beliefs, experiences, practices, and understanding of God. As A.W. Tozer says, "What we believe about God is the most important thing about us."

So, what does your theology say about you? How have your beliefs, experiences, and understanding of God been challenged in this series? How have they been strengthened? And how have you grown closer to the heart of God?

Last week, Pastor James mentioned that "incomplete theology, when presented as complete, can become bad theology." In this week's message, *Help My Unbelief*, Pastor Shawn builds on this idea to challenge the incomplete theology preached by some—that those with doubts shouldn't expect to receive anything from God (James 1:5-8). With more context and by comparing it to Jesus' ministry, it's clear that this incomplete theology actually distances us from our loving Father and contradicts how Jesus showed love to the broken and hurting people He encountered throughout His ministry.

While this may help some with their struggles, it's important to remember that our theology is shaped by more than just what we're taught. Our beliefs and experiences also play a crucial role in our faith, and doubt shapes our beliefs and experiences. Many of us are doing our best to believe in the healing, renewal, and breakthroughs we've been praying for, but over time, doubt can creep in. It's easy to start questioning whether we're doing it right, if our faith is strong enough to keep going, or if our faith is even worthy of Jesus' attention. This week, Shawn reminds us that Jesus doesn't shy away from or ignore those who struggle with doubt. Instead, we should bring our fears, doubts, and struggles to Him because He cares deeply about helping us with our unbelief.

- **What incomplete or inaccurate theological belief used to hold you back from the love of Jesus and His plan for your life? How has your faith/life been reshaped in that area, and what was the process like?**
- **Have you ever come across a Bible verse that made you doubt the strength of your faith? Explain.**

The Bible is the living, breathing Word of God, uniquely speaking to each of us in different ways. It meets us where we are, offering wisdom, comfort, and guidance in ways that are deeply personal and relevant to our individual faith. Because of this, there isn't a single "right" way to read the Bible. However, there is a wrong way to read the Bible, and that's often where bad/incomplete theology comes from.

Pastor and theologian, Dan Kimball, author of *How Not To Read The Bible*, provided four key principles to keep in mind when reading the Bible to help us develop sound theology to the best of our ability. The four principles are:

## **1. The Bible is a Library, Not a Single Book**

- The Bible consists of 66 books, written in nine different genres/styles, over 1,500 years.
- Genres include: Law, History, Poetry, Major Prophets, Minor Prophets, Gospels, Paul's Letters, General Letters, and Revelation.
- Just as you wouldn't take fiction as non-fiction, don't confuse biblical law with poetry or poetry with gospel.

## **2. The Bible Was Written for Us, But Not to Us**

- Paul's letters offer biblical insight and instruction, but we are not the original audience.
- Each book was written to specific people at a specific time, considering their cultural context.
- Reading these letters without understanding their historical and cultural context can lead to misunderstandings of God's Word and Jesus's heart.

## **3. Never Read One Verse by itself**

- Just as you wouldn't sign a contract after reading one line, don't assume you understand a chapter or book by reading one verse.
- Taking a single verse out of context can lead to misunderstandings and disappointment.
- When a verse speaks to you, read at least 2-3 verses before and after it. Research, read commentaries, and discuss with other believers for deeper understanding.

## **4. The Entire Bible Points to Jesus**

- When reading scripture, ask yourself, "Can I see, hear, and feel Jesus' presence, love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, patience, etc.?"
- If Jesus isn't evident in a verse, dig deeper to better understand its meaning.

**Read James 1:5-8, James 4:4-8**

Read the above verses and use Dan Kimball's Four Principles to break it down. You may need to look up some historical/cultural context or think back to some of Shawn's references in the message to gain the full picture.

- **What Genre is James?**
- **Who was James written by? Who was it written to?**
- **When/where was James written?**
- **What was going on at the time with those people in that place?**
- **If the Bible was written on x date, to y people, with z cultural context, what insight/instruction does God want me to get from this based on my current circumstances?**
- **What is the message I receive when I read James 1:6-8?**
- **What is the message I receive when I read James 1:5-8 and James 4:4-8?**
- **How does this point to Jesus? What other verses come to mind that support this?**
- **How has this activity changed your perspective when it comes to engaging with scripture?**

MOVE

**Read Matthew 14:28-31, Mark 5:36, Mark 9:21-26, Matthew 21:21-22, John 20:24-29**

Throughout the gospels, the disciples witnessed countless people struggling with doubt and frequently wrestled with their own self-doubt. In Mark 5, Jesus tells Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." in Mark 9, Jesus helps a desperate father through his doubt. In John 20, Jesus runs to Thomas to show him he has nothing to doubt.

In countless situations, Jesus showed up despite people's doubts. Some were afraid, some were running out of hope that things would ever change, some thought it was too late for their prayers to be answered, and some questioned if their entire life of faith was a lie. But Jesus always showed up. If you're struggling with doubt, you're in good company. Jesus hears your prayers and sees your struggles regardless of where you're at in your faith. Peter experienced this firsthand in Matthew 14:28-31.

During one of Peter's many low points of doubt, Jesus answered him and called him out on the water. Despite standing on one of Jesus' greatest miracles (walking on water), Peter began to doubt again, crying out, "Lord, save me!" Unphased, Jesus grabbed him by the hand, saying, "You of little faith, why did you doubt." But what happens next often goes unnoticed by most. Peter walks on water a second time, hand in hand with Jesus back to the boat.

Jesus doesn't shame us in moments of doubt; instead, He shows us that we have nothing to fear and walks with us hand in hand through life's storms, helping us with our unbelief. Jesus never promised we wouldn't sink, but He promises that He'll never let us drown. Even God's mightiest saints have struggled with doubt in both their lowest lows and highest highs. Jesus' consistency teaches us that we have no reason to doubt, and His character reminds us that even when we do, He will be right by our side, extending His loving hand.

- **What are your biggest takeaways from the verses and passages above?**
- **What fears and doubts are you wrestling with in this season of life?**
- **If Jesus helped Jairus with his doubt after all hope was lost, and He helped Peter with his doubt in the middle of one of Jesus' most extraordinary miracles, how can you hold on to hope that He will help you in your doubts?**
- **What unbelief have you been holding onto that you need to let go of? What promise of God do you need to cling to?**

## P R A Y

This week, spend some time praising God for the faith and beliefs you cling to and ask Him to help you with the areas of unbelief you may need to surrender. Pray for an "even if" heart posture, and remember that you can give praise and thanks for prayers not yet answered during seasons of waiting.