



Progressive Christianity Study Series

Study Number 002

“Faith & Doubt”



If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord (James 1:5-8)

“You frustrate me with your doubts!”
Look...just have faith! Faith is all you need!”



“I’m not so sure.
Maybe doubt is actually part of faith.”



Synonyms for faith:

Adhesion, allegiance, attachment, commitment, constancy, dedication, devotedness, devotion, faithfulness, fastness, fealty, fidelity, loyalty, piety, steadfastness.

Synonyms for doubt:

Distrust, distrustfulness, incertitude, misgiving, mistrust, mistrustfulness, query, reservation, scepticism, suspicion, uncertainty.

The analogy of COURAGE and FEAR...

We sometimes hear someone who is courageous being described as “fearless.” But is this actually the case? Is not courage the willingness to persist, even in spite of fear?

So too, I wonder whether true faith is really “doubtless”? Perhaps true faith is the willingness to persist, even in spite of one’s doubts?



“No! You have to hold tight to the articles of faith! I believe in Jesus, the Son of God, co-eternal with the Father, who was raised from the dead for our salvation!”



“I’m sure you’re right that holding on is a part of faith, but maybe so too is letting go.”

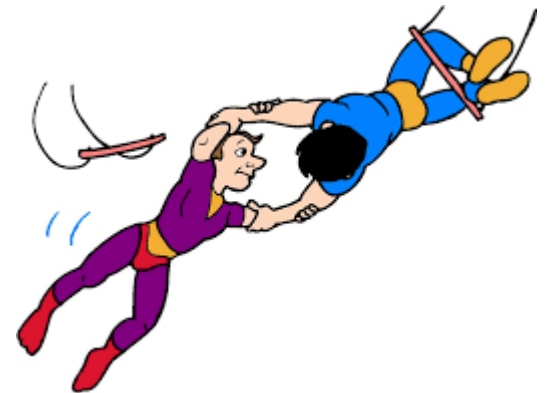


HOLDING ON...and LETTING GO

Is faith all about maintaining certainty, or might certainty and uncertainty co-exist within a “faithful” person?

When we hold on to certainty, is there an element of fear in the tenacity of our grip? What if we were prepared to let go of the illusion of certainty, of the illusion of control? What if we were willing to honestly admit to doubt? What if we were comfortable in asking questions, and without the need to always get answers?

Are we willing, like the trapeze artist, to acquire the ability both to hold on and to let go, knowing that there are times for each?





Some artificial plants can be very lifelike. They're also extremely low maintenance, very handy for the person with little free time on their hands! They last forever, and look as good as the day you first took possession of them! They are changeless.

But, as pretty and as practical as they are...they're not real.

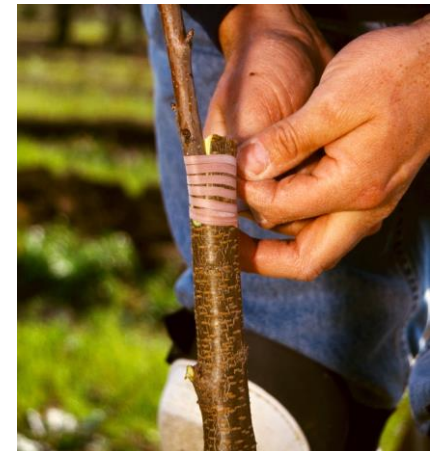
Real plants are alive, and living things have a certain fragility. They need to be fed in order to survive. If they don't receive sustenance, they will wither away. But if they are fed and tended to, they grow and mature. In short, they change.

A REAL faith...is a LIVING faith

What if we believed the same things, and had the same understanding of God, at the end of our life as we had when we were young? Surely part of the reality of faith is that, like real plants, it is changeable. Our living faith can bloom and our living faith can go through dry patches. Our living faith can grow and, at other times, it can feel as though it has withered.

Perhaps a necessary part of a real, living faith is the willingness to periodically examine our beliefs with a critical eye and heart, and to be willing to prune aspects of them? In an earlier stage of our life, they may have been life-giving, but now they may be impeding our further growth and maturity. Are we willing to consider letting these branches go?

To run the risk of overly milking the metaphor, might there be occasions when new insights require us to consider grafting in a new belief?



Invitation to reflection

1. As you reflect on your journey of faith, are there certain things you once believed, but don't any longer? Why did these beliefs change?
2. Are there some beliefs you hold which have taken time to fully form? Can you identify the influences that shaped them?
3. Are there some beliefs you hold on to more tightly than others? Consider some of your core beliefs and reflect on why you retain them.
4. Are there certain beliefs at the moment that you have begun to question? Do you feel comfortable in mentally examining these beliefs, or in speaking with others about your doubts? How comfortable are you to sit with uncertainty?

