

driving away DOUBT

by Florence MacKenzie

Many of us are no strangers to doubt in some form or another. Problems can arise, however, when our doubts get out of control and we find ourselves in a faith crisis. I've discovered that three common sources of doubt are unexpected happenings, unanswered prayer, and unmet desires. Each of these has the potential to become a breeding ground for feelings of doubt as we question God's goodness, power, and care.

Unexpected happenings. Our faith is rarely challenged when life is going well, but when we're hit by sudden difficulties, we can find ourselves giving way to doubt regarding *God's goodness*. I once heard about a couple whose son was involved in a serious car accident. The husband said, "Perhaps God will be good and spare the life of our son", to which his wife replied, "It's not a question of whether or not God will be good; He is good, regardless of whether our boy lives or dies." When unexpected happenings come into our experience, we need to remind ourselves that God's goodness is not dependent on our circumstances. He is good – all the time.

Unanswered prayer. Many of us earnestly pray about something and do not receive the answer we seek. Sometimes, there is no answer at all and this is especially hard when we believe we are praying according to God's purposes. The apparent silence from heaven can cause us to doubt *God's power*. Is He really as great as we thought He was? Is this problem too difficult even for Him? When I found myself in this situation, I needed to remind myself to "live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). I had to consciously reaffirm my faith in the God whom the Bible repeatedly describes as being almighty. This dispelled any doubts I had had about His power.

Unmet desires. Do you know what it's like to wish for something that never becomes a reality? Maybe it's a job promotion that you were pursuing; or being married, but Mr Right has never materialized; or it could even be a ministry opportunity that didn't turn out as you would have liked. Unmet desires can sometimes promote doubt concerning *God's care* for us.

Here are some practical pointers to help you deal with feelings of doubt.



Distinguish between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is often the expression of a struggling faith whereas unbelief is an obstinate refusal to take God at His word. For example, doubt arises in our minds when we try to make sense of why God acts in one way or doesn't act in a different way. Instead, unbelief is a product of our will where we make a deliberate decision to reject God's truth.

Offer your doubts to God. The psalmist verbalizes his doubts by asking God, "Why have you forgotten me?" (Psalm 42:9) and then "Why have you rejected me?" (Psalm 43:2). Bringing your doubts to God demonstrates an element of trust in His ability to help you, and verbalizing them can separate real doubts from vague feelings of unease.

Understand you are not alone. One of the things I love about the Bible is that it doesn't sugar-coat reality. It tells the story of life as it is. This is why we're able to read about people like the imprisoned John the Baptist or the disciple Thomas who knew and loved Jesus Christ but weren't immune to doubt. Doubt is probably more prevalent among followers of Jesus than you imagine.

Believe God's word. One of the most frequent questions asked by a person with doubts is "Why?" Sometimes this question is answered and other times it isn't. I've found that when no answer comes, I have to remember that God's word is true and can be trusted. There are times when I might not feel it to be true but, because God has said it, I believe it to be true.

Take responsibility for your thinking. Remember that doubts arise in the mind, the same place as our thoughts come from. It makes sense, therefore, to guard against doubt by guarding our thoughts. No-one can make us think thoughts we don't want to think. Let's be careful regarding what we allow ourselves to think about.

When doubts come, don't let them spark a faith crisis – let them spur you on to a stronger faith!