

Shane Idleman: The Cure for Doubt and Fear

"When Jesus finished instructing His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities. Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said to Him, 'Are You He who should come, or should we look for another?'" (Matt. 11:1-3, MEV).

Imagine the scene: John the Baptist, this mighty man of God, was now in prison. He may be thinking, "Why am I here? I'm doing God's will, but my life is not going like I planned!"

Like John, it's OK to ask God about our doubts and fears if we are sincere and genuine. God says, "Come, let us reason together ..." (Isaiah 1:8), and "He who asks for wisdom" will receive it (James 1:5). But if doubt turns us away from God, serious readjustments need to be made.

The devil used doubt to mislead Eve, "Did God really say?" (see Genesis 3). Any time we question God's truth with a sarcastic and arrogant attitude, there will be ramifications. But if we approach Him with a sincere heart ... a heart that is humble and teachable, He will lead us in the right direction.

Granted, some questions will not be answered on this side of heaven. For example, although I don't question God's perfect justice, I don't fully comprehend hell and eternal separation, or some of the events in the Old Testament. My finite mind cannot grasp the full picture. But I'm not going to hell over a mystery.

In regard to salvation, I cannot fully comprehend how God is sovereign and His sovereign plans will prevail, yet, on the other hand, man is clearly responsible for his choices. Both are true.

Matthew 11 continues at verse 4, *"Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. Blessed is he who does not fall away because of Me'"* (Matt. 11:4-6, MEV).

Fruit reveals what seeds were planted, and wise decisions can be seen in what is produced: "wisdom is justified by her children" (see Matt. 11:19). The fruit of genuine Christianity is amazing—from individual to large scale social change, from changed lives to bondages being broken—from building hospitals and schools and missions—from helping the poor and the dying, to giving of oneself for the truth of God's Word, Christianity has influenced large-scale changes because it first transformed the hearts of men and women. This, no one can deny. Remembering what God has done is one of the primary cures for doubt and fear.

Think about your own life and those defining moments. God would remind you ...

- You were blind and lame and I opened your spiritual eyes and you walked with Me.
- I cleansed you from your sin, redeemed you, and paid the price for you.
- I led you through the darkest days of your life, and I will continue to lead you.
- I kept you together when the weight of the world came falling down.

John the Baptist was not where he expected to end up. We, too, should not expect life to be carefree. Doubt is a normal human emotion, but it should drive us closer to Christ, not away. Perseverance in the midst of a storm is essential: "You may suffer, you may bleed, you may break, but you shall go on" (Catherine Booth).

Having realistic expectations is another cure for doubt. Those who succeed in marriage, for example, are those who prepare for the ups and the downs.

In essence, they're ready for the obstacles; they have a plan, yet remain flexible; they have expectations, but they also brace themselves for the unforeseen challenges ahead.

In short, they are committed to the success of the marriage. Marriage never works out; you have to work it out. In the same way, we must press through the difficult seasons; fully committed to our relationship with Christ.

Personal experience, as well as counseling many people, has shown me that pride and doubt often go hand-in-hand. James 4:6 says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." This is why many begin to doubt their marriage, their calling, and even their faith. They are resisting God either through stubbornness, disobedience, or doubt.

Those who are proud find excuses for their actions, but humility leans on God to see us through. Humility is to doubt what water is to fire. Humility also repositions the heart and the mind toward God: "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3).

What is the fruit being produced from your lifestyle? Are you glued to the television watching the news throughout the day and allowing terrorism to terrify you? Or are you spending time in God's Word in minimizing the media's influence?

What about humility ... is it growing in your life? If not, uproot pride and plant seeds of humility. The seeds of humility produce an instantaneous and bountiful harvest. Humble yourself, and turn to God today ... don't delay. It's simple, but not easy. He will bring stability in the midst of doubt and peace in the midst of fear.

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