

Navigating Our Beliefs

Series: The Deconstruction Zone: Navigating Doubts and Difficulties

Brad Bailey - June 25, 2023

Intro

In the **late '90s**, **Joshua Harris** burst on to the Christian scene with a book titled ***Kissed Dating Goodbye***, a treatise on dating and courtship. The book sold millions and made him, in one observer's terms, an "evangelical boy wonder." He was **just 21** when he wrote the book. [1]

At 29 years old he became the **lead pastor of a Maryland megachurch** as well as a principal player in Sovereign Grace Ministries.

But when that movement was torn apart by, among many other things, accusations of a systemic cover-up of child abuse, **he found himself – in his words - “deconstructing.”**

He left the ministry in 2015, and in **2019 he announced that he no longer identified as a Christian** and that **he and his wife were divorcing.**

He told *Newsweek* that it was problems in his church and mistakes he made as a church leader, among other experiences, that led to his falling away from Christianity. **As Harris** put it, **“That was all part of my deconstruction process — questioning the things I built my life around.” - Joshua Harris**

It is this type of experience that has led to the terms **“deconstruct,” “deconstructing,”** and **“deconstruction”** having entered into our **cultural vocabulary** in ways that have **nothing to do with bricks and mortar.**

Applied to Christian beliefs, **“deconstructing”** can refer to the process of anyone raising questions and exploring challenges to the beliefs they have long held. It is often related to beliefs one was raised with...which they are seeking to reconcile with their own thinking, or experience, or desires.

“Deconstruction” can speak of those who may conclude that they **no longer believe...** to those who **sift through** what they believe and identify what they deem to be some “cultural baggage” (misguided beliefs or practices) that they then leave behind...and to those who **discover a more meaningful and mature faith.** [2]

Broadly speaking...most of us go through some process by which we face a need to more deeply engage what we believe.

In the most basic sense... it's not new. And as I hope to help us see today... it is a **natural part of life.**

It's not uncommon to wonder...

What do we do when what we believe is true and good... doesn't seem so clear?

But this process **has been accentuated in the recent years**. The last few years has brought **something of a cultural shaking on multiple fronts** that has **led people to want to rethink all kinds of things**. [3]

We're deconstructing our politics, our memberships, our news sources, our mindsets, our views, our beliefs, our affiliations. Everything that seemed simple and settled has become messy and confusing.

It seems like **more spiritual leaders** than ever before **have fallen**, more churches have engaged in the **coverup of things like the abuse of children** than ever before - **or at least those things** are more widely disseminated than ever before.

So today...we're launching into a new series entitled **The Deconstruction Zone: Navigating Doubts and Difficulties**. We are going to engage the process of navigating the difficulties and doubts that can effect people's faith.

Why?

Because **some of us may find ourselves in such a process... now or in the future**.

*Because **some of you are parents... or one day will be parents... and nothing will be more vital to the faith of those children than understanding how to navigate these issues.***

*And because **some of us are friends** with someone who **may have walked away from what they believed.***

*I believe that God wants us to create a **space wide enough to navigate ...but with guideposts that keep us from simply finding ourselves stranded on the side of the road.***

And one of the most important things to understand...is that

The process of "deconstructing"...of navigating difficulties and doubts... need not end in a cul-de-sac of unbelief. In fact, deconstructing can be the road toward reconstructing—building up a more mature, robust faith that grapples honestly with the deepest questions of life.

If we stand back... we can see that **deconstructing is only part of a larger process**. Or should be.

There is construction... deconstruction...and then reconstruction.
(Or we could refer to this as orientation – disorientation – and reorientation.)

Deconstruction doesn't have to mean destruction. It can be reconstructing something that's really healthy. It can mean walking away with a faith that is more vibrant, more real, more alive than ever before. Often it is about deconstructing the outward and shallow religious dynamics to engage that which is more committed to a way of life that flows from the heart of God. More dialed-in with the heart of the Christian faith than ever before.

Over the next few weeks...we will engage some of the issues in our current culture that can be barriers to belief.

- **Aren't We Better Off Without Religion?**
- **What About Hypocrisy and Abuse?**
- **Is Christian Belief Rational?**
- **Isn't Christianity Homophobic?**

Today...I want to help us understand...

What We Are Navigating Through Life

As we go through life... we form an understanding of what is true and good... but there are **various elements that we are navigating in that process.**

Navigating Development: From childhood simplicity to adult complexity (and mystery)

One of the most basic things we navigate in what we believe...is simply the fact that **any beliefs we learn as a child...are simplified... and will go through transitions as we develop more cognitive capabilities** over time.

The Bible recognizes that we naturally mature in our spiritual understanding.

In one of the only references to Jesus at the earlier stage of life... around age 12... the Gospel of Luke... states that...

Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. - Luke 2:52

Jesus grew in wisdom... understanding... **as he grew in stature...**which refers to **his basic age and physical development.** [4]

And the apostle Paul would state...

When I was a child I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child does. But when I became a man my thoughts grew far beyond those of my childhood, and now I have put away the childish things. - 1 Corinthians 13:11 (TLB)

The Bible teaches us that **we are to have a child-like faith...** in terms of humility of **our position** and **subsequent trust...** (Matthew 18:3, "Except you become as little

children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”)... but **we ideally grow beyond our childish understanding**. To whatever degree we have developed into human adult cognitive capabilities...we will engage reality as such.
[5]

In our earliest stage of life, as an infant we are merely forming a basic experience of trust. Our world is simply that of figures we develop trust for. As we move through childhood years... we are learning about what is true...but everything is a bit magical.

The stage associated with our development as children between the age of 7 and 12...is more **logical and literal**. We tend to understand that the world operates with good receiving rewards and bad receiving punishment. If we learn that God is good...and has the whole world in his hands...and then we go through a tragically painful experience or loss... we will need help with understanding our beliefs in more expanded ways. When we learn about **good and evil**... we conceive of those who do good get what is good and those who do bad get what is bad. There is little capacity to see any of this worked out in the nuances of time. So as one grows **into the ensuing years... they see that this doesn't seem so clear**... those who do good often are not rewarded and those who do bad often seem to gain from it.

We can begin to appreciate that **what we were taught was not simply false**...but it was **reduced to our capacity**. It was true but simplified. It wasn't the whole of truth...simply because of our capacity.

Only later in adult life do we tend to understand the “paradoxes and the mysteries attendant on transcendent values.” [6a]

If we hear as children that in the beginning God created the world in six days... we can only understand this in an absolutely literal way. If we hear that the problem came when **Adam and Eve ate an apple**... we can only understand that it was a literal apple. There is **no capacity to consider** the nature of **Hebrew language and poetic truth literature**. The first three chapters of Genesis have become far more powerful and profound to me...but I no longer believe that it is as important whether it is referring to six 24 hour days or six stages... or whether the apple is literal. But make no mistake... when one emerges into their youth... it may be confusing if they feel that they must understand this in the way it was taught to them as a child. They may come to a point in which they feel that their faith is ripe with something akin to fairy tales... and that moving on from such beliefs is simply something they should do to grow up.

In this sense... of natural development...we all deconstruct and reconstruct the nature of our beliefs. And it is not simply a matter of discovering that the Bible is not true...but of developing our capacity of understanding.

The point is that

We will need help with understanding our beliefs in more expanded ways as we grow older. ... if we are to align them with the more complex reality we now are engaged with.

We need to welcome that process. [6b]

(My talk with our children)

And this connects to...

Navigating Individuation: From the beliefs we received to a faith we own

*One of the dynamics of life that fascinates me... is that of individuation...that is...the process by which we find a healthy sense of ourselves as individuals. It's such a **natural and needed part** of our maturity... but **often a hard and messy one.***

(Every teen and parent of teen... I know there is a deep "amen" in you.)

*We **begin life** with a **natural separation anxiety**... we find our security in the bond with our parents and similar figures. But we are individual beings who naturally **begin to express our will**...and then **develop our own thinking...and beliefs.***

It may be natural... but the process can be complicated.

*Sharing **common beliefs** is a part of the core of what **connects us**... so changes in beliefs can be that which a **parent feels threatened by**... and a **child feels empowered by.***

*The point is that there is an element of **deconstructing beliefs** which is a natural part of individuating. **Ideally...it would simply be** a process of **re-examining our beliefs** and learning how to bring our own maturing thinking into play.*

*But **sometimes in the process of individuating**... one becomes **very adversarial**...and is driven to **contend against everything** their parents and other authorities seem to represent. It may partly be due to their **personality**...or to a **more controlled environment**...but it leads to a stronger desire to reject those beliefs as part of excising our individuation... our independence.*

The point is that

We need freedom to form our own beliefs... but to realize that such beliefs need time to become more than just a rejection of our parents or past.

*It took me some time to realize **I could remain a Bailey even as I differentiated from my parents. I forged a wider sphere of that family. I didn't have to reject the family...I just brought a wider scope of what we represented. In a similar way... we***

may identify some differences with some of the “Christian family”... while still being united in Christ and his call to be family in him.

Often we are driven to become independent from parental control...but are not as aware of how much **our current culture is simply shaping our new ideas and beliefs.**

One is wise to see how even “deconstructionism” can become a movement which offers a new identity... a new form of belonging...with groups that provide a script for “who we are”...that can become as self-affirming as any religious community one has denounced because people just “conform” to the beliefs. It may be difficult for those in their teens or twenties to hear this... but often the independence is not as independent as we think.

This is especially important...when the defining and driving narrative of our current popular culture...is that of a radical individualism... the idea that we are not rooted in anything... but rather our identity is simply found in our own self-expression.

Navigating Questions: Embracing doubt as a means (not an end)

We will all have questions that arise in relationship to our beliefs.

They can be as simple as a child asking: “**Why can’t I see God... like I see people?**”... to “**Why does God allow so much suffering?**”

And they **may be far more personal.**

And with these questions... we are **trying to reconcile our understanding.** We have reasons to believe something...and reasons that can also raise questions and doubts.

In many regards... those reasons are **inherent to being finite creatures engaging the infinite.**

And one of the problems we have is this....

The modern western church has lost the place of mystery in exchange for a sense of certainty ... a certainty that cannot ponder questions.

We are this shaped by the pride of the enlightenment era...in which mankind began to be so enamored with what we were discovering...that we believed we could come to understand everything and resolve every problem. The degree of optimism may have begun to fade...but it left it’s mark in American Christian culture by shaping our relationship with God to be so logical and certain that there is no need for questions.

And we may presume that doubt is bad...as we may recall that Jesus challenged those who were stuck in doubt. **But look again** and we see that **what Jesus called out...was the position of parking ourselves in doubt... of an unwillingness to step out.**

Some may recall that **Jesus had great sympathy for John the Baptist...** who had been destined to be the one who prepared the way for Jesus.... **was imprisoned...** and couldn't understand why Jesus was not defeating the wicked King Herod. To this we see **Jesus send reassurance.**

There are **13 references to the encounters** with Jesus after he had risen but not yet ascended. Listen to how this is described by Matthew...

Matthew 28:16-17 (NLT)

Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!

Notes when we see something bad in others...we are encouraged...so we might with their doubt.

We might wonder...how could they doubt when right there in his presence? Well...the word used actually speaks of being of being unresponsive. It doesn't mean they doubted he had risen from the dead...but they didn't understand it. [7]

Or we may think of the disciple who has historically been **nicknamed “doubting Thomas.”** At one point after Christ had risen...Thomas says he needs to see him himself. He had been away when Jesus had initially come to the others. And **Jesus doesn't chastise him...he says come and see for yourself. (John 20:24-25)**

The point is that

God will come meet us in our doubts...if we sincerely seek him. God is never seen simply punishing those who think...and question...and are honest with their doubts.

- **Your doubts don't disqualify your faith.**

Oswald Chambers:

“Doubt is not always a sign that a man is wrong: it may be a sign that he is thinking.” – Oswald Chambers

He knows there can be a sincere desire to understand...and he can meet us there...and help us.

As Os Guinness describes [8]...

"The person who has the courage to go back when necessary is the one who goes on in the end." - Os Guinness

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the philosophically and theologically insightful Russian author, went through great suffering during the Russian oppression... he was nearly executed by a firing squad... and served four years in a labor camp. But fortunately

he lived on to write some of the most famous works in Western Literature. His deeply thoughtful and best-known novels Crime and Punishment and The Brothers Karamazov remain pillars of literary genius.

Throughout his life, Dostoyevsky struggled to maintain his faith...but in the end... he remained a devoted follower of Jesus Christ... not despite his questions and doubts...but through them. The result of Dostoyevsky pondering eternal truth resulted in deeply profound Christian Faith. He explained...

“It is not as a child that I believe and confess Jesus Christ. My hosanna is born of a furnace of doubt.” - Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Jesus had no problem interacting with doubt if that doubt was part of an authentic journey toward coming to a decision about belief.

Jesus came to Thomas...because

- **God is not distant in your doubts.**

It can be scary to ask questions...and what is needed is encouragement without fear.

- **The church community and the home should be the safest places to share our questions.**
- **Find the wisdom to doubt your doubts as much as your beliefs.**

*If we find ourselves going through a process of doubting our beliefs... we **should not stop short of the whole process** which **includes doubting our doubts**... that is... allowing ourselves to bring as critical of a mind to the alternative beliefs embodied in the positions our doubts lead to.*

“Make no mistake, there are things within Christian culture that need to be challenged and re-evaluated, but a Christ-honoring deconstruction revels in truth and beauty, not cynicism and arrogance.”

Navigating Disappointment: From initial trust to reacting to hypocrisy and harm ... in some institutions and authorities

*Into all the other elements that our beliefs are navigating through...comes the potential for disappointment. I am referring specifically about how those related with our beliefs may disappoint us in both small ways...as well as **dramatic and deep ways.***

*It can as personal as having a **parent or parent figure**... who may identify with Christ... but who has acted in ways that are **deeply abusive**... to that of more broad ways in which **a communal leader**... such as a priest or pastor... carried on in **fraudulent and abusive ways.***

And perhaps **what is so commonly felt is the potential for hypocrisy.**
*It is so common to **extend some respect and influence** to someone that calls us to believe... to then...at some point... **see elements in them that contradict** what they have claimed to believe.*

We will engage these in one of the weeks ahead... *but this is another vital element which everyone must navigate.*

It is in the process of disappointment that we will have to identify Jesus as our foundation...and accept that we are always a part of human communities...of which we all can abuse our trust.

The point is that...

We need to create space for discernment in the communal integrity we align ourselves with...rather than simply choose separation unto our own self-centric lives.

Navigating Cultural Influence: Discerning truth amidst the current social beliefs, values, and pressures that surround us

In referring to culture... I believe we **need to be conscious** that we are **always navigating the influence of both** the unique Christian culture that surround us...as well as the **wider culture at large that surrounds us.**

Most of us **tend to be more conscious of one or the other.**

It is helpful to realize that **each of these cultures** bring certain **ideas about what is true and good...** but they are never the absolute bearer of such truth and goodness.

Jesus knew that the religious culture which formed around God... had it's human flaws...and his disciples had their misguided nature. So the local church is always formed by the culture of it's time and leaders.

“Christianity” is always a cultural form... of representing Christ.

There has been a tragic degree of ways in which various “Christian cultures’ have cultivated postures and practices which were contrary to Christ.

Often there are healthy principles which are then **infused with what is toxic...**and it **makes it hard to distinguish anything good.**

There is a long history of how abusing power...and authority....and of alignment with political parties. In many times and in many places, believers have struggled with the disappointing fact that **not everything calling itself “Christian” resembles the**

character of Christ and the testimony of the historic church. And we'll **always be rightly frustrated by this disconnect**...sometimes to the point of wanting to disassociate from the mess altogether.

It's led many to believe that they needed to deconstruct their faith...when what was needed was more that of **"disenculturating" their faith**... that is...with shedding some cultural baggage in order to become more connected to Christ at the center.

But it is vital that we realize that the wider culture is in need of our critical discernment as well.

My own story is that of rebelling against what I deemed conventional... until I realized that Jesus was the only real rebel...and my ideas of rebelliousness were really petty and pretensions.

The point is that we shouldn't **presume that denouncing one cultural form is itself countercultural.**

As Brett McCracken describes [9]...

"Far from renegade, edgy, and brave, the announcement of a person's conscious uncoupling from institutional religion is simply going with the flow of a culture that mainstreamed such behavior decades ago. Rather than going against the grain of Western culture, abandoning received doctrine and institutional faith—in favor of a self-styled, follow-your-heart spirituality—is quite smoothly "with the grain." Far from a countercultural protest, to choose this sort of build-your-own religion is simply to fall in line with the "have it your way" Burger King brand of faith."

This is why it has become so critical to stay very centered on Jesus himself.

All of this leads to concluding with a final point which I believe God has...and which can serve each of us.

CLOSING

In all that we navigate... we do well to **keep ourselves fixed on Jesus.**

In the Biblical Book of Hebrews, the writer is addressing those who have the pull of cultural pressures. And they write these vital words...

Hebrews 12:1-2 (MSB)

Let us run with endurance the race set out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

There is no more important guide than that of focusing on Jesus.

Culture is quite relative to ultimate reality... of what is true and good...so fix your eyes on Jesus.

Whatever your struggle, it **gets better with more—not less—of Christ....**and that which is rooted in the most orthodox of beliefs.

He is the **author of your faith...** not some just an editor.

He is the **perfector** of your faith...the one in whom we find what is true and good. It is he who guided lives beyond cultural traditions.

And perhaps no words have captured this truth for me personally more than those of Philip Yancy

"Why am I a Christian?" I sometimes ask myself, and to be perfectly honest, the reasons reduce to two: (1) the lack of good alternatives and (2) Jesus.

Martin Luther encouraged his students to flee the hidden God and run to Christ, and I now know why. If I use a magnifying glass to examine a fine painting, the object in the center of the glass stays crisp and clear, while around the edges the view grows increasingly distorted. For me, Jesus has become the focal point. I learned... to keep the magnifying glass of my faith focused on Jesus.

I tend to spend a lot of time pondering unanswerable questions such as the problem of pain or providence versus free will. When I do so, everything becomes fuzzy. But if I look at Jesus, clarity is restored.

Jesus gave no philosophical answer to the problem of pain, but he did give an existential answer. I cannot learn from him why bad things occur, but I can learn how God feels about it. I look at how Jesus responds to the sisters of his good friend Lazarus, or to a leprosy patient banned from the town gates. Jesus gives God a face, and that face is streaked with tears.

Jesus corrects my fuzzy conceptions of God. Left on my own, I would come up with a very different notion of God. Jesus reveals a God who comes in search of us, a God who makes room for our freedom even when it costs the Son's life, a God who is vulnerable. Above all, Jesus reveals a God who is love.

Those raised in a Christian tradition may miss the shock of Jesus' message, but in truth, love has never been a normal way of describing what happens between human beings and their God. Not once does the Qur'an apply the word love to God. Aristotle stated bluntly, "It would be eccentric for anyone to claim that he loved Zeus"--or that Zeus loved a human being, for that matter.

In dazzling contrast, the Christian Bible affirms, "God is love" and cites love as the main reason Jesus came to earth: "This is how God showed his love

among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."

[In a moment of bearing the weight of what many faced, a friend asked...]
"Philip, do you ever just let God love you?" she said. "It's pretty important, I think."

I realized with a start that she had brought to light a gaping hole in my spiritual life. For all my absorption in the Christian faith, I had missed the most important message of all. The story of Jesus is the story of a celebration, a story of love. It involves pain and disappointment, yes, for God as well as for us. But Jesus embodies the promise of a God who will go to any length to get his family back.

Let's pray.

Resources: While the frame of this series was distinct from others, I am indebted and drew from various resources, most generally: *Before You Lose Your Faith: Deconstructing Doubt in the Church*; by Trevin Wax (Author), Ian Harber (Author), & 14 more (2021); Amazon - [here](#) / Provided as FREE eBook at TGC - [here](#); *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion*, by Rebecca McLaughlin (2019, Crossway) - [here](#); James Emery White Meck series: Deconstruction Zone

Notes:

1. One of the things which America is known for ...is creating celebrities... and the American Christian culture has tended to create it's own popular sources of inspiration. And in recent years that has led to creating a façade larger than the substance... some not holding up well...and some saying they couldn't navigate their beliefs and no longer believed as they had.

2. Brian Zahnd refers to deconstructing with the preferred renovating your "theological house," what is needed is not a demolition but instead a renovation of faith.

From: *When Everything's on Fire: Faith Forged from the Ashes* Hardcover by Brian Zahnd (2021) - [Here at Amazon](#)

From another article...

"Deconstruction" is a critical dismantling *not* of historical orthodox Christian beliefs, or rejecting the oversight of New Testament-endorsed faithful, godly, spiritual leaders ([Hebrews 13:7](#)), but of cultural influences that distort and redefine the faith in unbiblical, harmful ways.

What Does 'Deconstruction' Even Mean? Article by Jon Bloom - Staff writer, [desiringGod.org](#)
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-does-deconstruction-even-mean>

3. Current research suggests that 70% of teenagers who were once in church regularly will leave the local church and even walk away from Christianity altogether. See: *8 Reasons Children Grow Up to Doubt Their Parents' Faith* by Victoria Riollano, Jun 24, 2021 - [here](#)

4. The word wisdom (σοφία in Greek) refers to mental and moral insights, prudence and understanding. Stature (ηλικία in Greek) is a word that takes into account a combination of age and size to reflect that physically, Jesus grew in size like any human being would. - [Here](#)

5. Some may recall the [stages of psychosocial developmental by Erik Erikson](#) and [Jean Piaget's Four Stages of Cognitive Development](#). James Fowler would later define what he calls the [stages of faith](#) ... recognizing that our faith naturally develops through stages based on our stages of mental and social development.

We begin our development with the most fundamental development of trust... and then basic encounters with stories, images, the influence of others...forming a very basic intuitive sense of what is right and wrong.

6. There is also an interesting a longitudinal account of how children develop perspective in interpreting the biblical creation narrative. - [here](#)

In general, then around the age of 12 we begin to understand ourselves as individuals of a set of communal beliefs which may be a part of our identity. Only later in adult life to we tend to understand the “paradoxes and the mysteries attendant on transcendent values.”

6b. Along with recognizing that spiritual beliefs need room to expand with our developmental capacity, we should also appreciate that those with a spiritual faith...and especially those who engages regularly in that faith...are found to be healthier and happier. See [here](#)

7. Drawn from Craig Groeshel [Dealing With Your Doubt PART 1](#)

For good understanding of this passage, see: “But Some Doubted”: Studying an Intriguing Response to the Resurrection of Jesus, Posted February 16, 2013 by Tim Chaffey - [here](#)
The *doubt* exhibited here is not unbelief, but more like hesitation, which is what the Greek word *distazo* implies (see BDAG, p. 252). This is not the typical word for doubt used in the New Testament (*diakrino*). In fact, it is only used in one other time ([Matthew 14:31](#), see below for explanation). Instead of refusing to believe what they were seeing, like some have said, the disciples were amazed. The concept here is somewhat comparable to our modern statements like “It’s too good to be true,” or “Pinch me, I’m dreaming.”

Craig Blomberg stated it well in his commentary on Matthew:

Distazo refers more to hesitation than to unbelief. Perhaps, as elsewhere, something about Jesus' appearance makes him hard to recognize at first. Perhaps they fear how he may respond to them. Perhaps their Jewish scruples are still questioning the propriety of full-fledged worship of anyone but Yahweh. Or (most likely?) they may simply continue to exhibit an understandable confusion about how to behave in the presence of a supernaturally manifested, exalted, and holy being. There is no clear evidence that more than the Eleven were present, but the particular grammatical construction hoi de (“but some”) does seem to imply a change of subject from the previous clause (“they worshiped him”). So “they” probably means some of the Eleven, while “some” means the rest of the eleven. Some of the disciples worshiped Jesus at once; some were less sure how to react. (Blomberg, p. 430)

Regarding how Jesus engaged those with doubt, see also: Have Mercy on Those Who Doubt - Article by Jon Bloom, OCTOBER 19, 2019 - [here](#)

The brief book of Jude is mostly a sober warning against false teachers. Like John’s epistles, Peter’s second epistle, and Hebrews, Jude wants us to feel the seriousness of their perversion of and departure from the gospel so that we will persevere in faithfulness.

But in his closing remarks, he says, “Have mercy on those who doubt.” Jude uses the Greek word (*diakrinō*) that also means a wavering uncertainty, and [as one dictionary puts it](#), “being at odds with oneself.” In other words, be merciful to those who are struggling over the competing truth claims. Don’t crush them or condemn them; help them.

I can't help but think that Jude recalled how Jesus once showed mercy to him. Because there was a time when he doubted his divine brother's claims, and Jesus at some point helped him ([John 7:5](#)). And there are numerous other examples of Jesus's mercy to doubters.

Jesus's Diverse Mercy

The New Testament uses a number of different Greek words for doubt, because not all doubt is the same and not all doubters are the same. Therefore, mercy toward doubters doesn't always look the same. Some cases call for patient, compassionate understanding and encouragement. Some cases call for an exhortation or even a rebuke. That's why we see a range of responses from Jesus toward those who doubted.

John the Baptist

In [Matthew 11:2–6](#), we see a touching example of Jesus's kindness to a surprising doubter: John the Baptist. God had revealed Jesus's identity to John in utero ([Luke 1:41](#)) and by special revelation ([John 1:29–34](#)). But confined in Herod's prison, likely knowing he wasn't getting out alive, and likely experiencing significant spiritual oppression, John was second-guessing whether he had been right about his calling as forerunner. So, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" ([Matthew 11:3](#)).

Jesus's response was merciful kindness, intended to fortify John's faith in his last, brutal days. Jesus does not break a bruised reed ([Matthew 12:20](#)). He knows when to deal gently with the doubts that assault us in the darkness of suffering and isolation.

8. From: *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of Doubt* [Paperback] Os Guinness - [here](#)

And as Frederick Buechner once noted, if you don't have any doubts, "you are either kidding yourself or asleep."

9. From: *Before You Loose Your Faith* YLYF, PDF pg26ff; chapter: *Deconversion Is Not As Countercultural As You Think* by Brett Mccracken

10. From: "Christianity Today" 6/17/96