

Growing Faith by Giving Room For Doubt

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NOTE: The entire video presentation is 43:47. It can easily be adapted for a two-part lesson for classes or small groups:

Part 1: Introduction and Point I (0:00-22:47).

Part 2: Points II-IV (22:47-43:47).

This fill-in-the-blank outline can be used as a handout. Teachers may request an outline with answers.

Introduction

A. Christian Conviction

1. Truth (Eph. 6:10–20; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:15–19).
2. Certainty, proof, confidence, and boldness (Acts 1:3; 2:36; 4:29; 17:31; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 3:11–12; Jude 3).
3. Reasonable.
 - a. A “*reasoned* defense” (1 Pet. 3:15 - *Apologia* > apologetics).
 - b. Paul *reasoned* repeatedly with his audience (Acts 17:2–3,17; 18:4,19; 19:8–9; 24:12).
4. Don’t doubt (Matt. 14:30–32; 21:21; James 1:6).

B. **Faith VS. Doubt:** The prominent perspective.

C. **Faith AND Doubt:** The paradoxical picture.

1. Father of possessed son: “I do believe; help my _____.”
(Mark 9:24).
2. John the Baptist (compare John 1:29 and Matthew 11).

D. We must provide an atmosphere that _____ questions and doubts in order to strengthen Christian faith.

I. Developing Doubts in the Culture and the Church

A. The **NONES**—the Religiously Detached.¹

1. Adults: 1990 8.1%; 2007 15.3%; 2012 19.3%; 2014 _____%.
2. 18-29 year olds: 2007 22%; 2012 32%.
 - a. 2014: Older Millennials (25-33): _____%.
 - b. 2014: Younger Millennials (18-24): _____%.
3. For every ONE person becoming religious, _____ become Nones.
4. _____ are religious “de-converts.”

“The most frequently mentioned role of Christians in de-conversion was in amplifying existing doubt.’ De-converts reported ‘**sharing their burgeoning doubts with a Christian friend or family member only to receive trite, unhelpful answers**” (Drew Dyck, “The Leavers: Young Doubters Exit the Church,”

¹ See Richard Knopp, “Understanding the Engaging the ‘Nones,’” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 21 (Fall 2018): 217-237.

Christianity Today [Nov. 19, 2010]; emphasis added; citing a report at a 2008 meeting of the American Sociological Association). <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/november/27.40.html?share=>

B. Atheists: 13-18 year olds (see the 2018 “Gen Z” report by Barna)

1. “Atheist”: 6% of all adults; 6% of Gen X; 7% of Millennials.
2. “Atheist”: _____ of Gen Z.

C. Churchd Youth (Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*).

1. Significantly doubted their faith? _____%.
2. Can’t ask their most pressing life questions at church? _____%.
3. At some point, felt like rejecting their parents’ faith? _____%.
4. No longer active in church in their 20s? _____%.

D. High Information Seekers

“We found that the presence of doubt much more strongly predicted leaving Christianity for high information seekers **[H]igh information seekers with doubts are about two to four times more likely to disconnect from Christianity than other doubters who are not high information seekers....** According to our research, high information seekers are not intrinsically more difficult to disciple, but only when they have unanswered questions or unresolved doubts about Christianity’s truth claims.” (Larry Barnett at www.projectnextgen.org).

E. Some key reasons for church rejection:

1. Overprotective.
2. Experience of Christianity is shallow.
3. Too exclusive.
4. Antagonistic to science.
5. Not relevant.
6. Unfriendly to those who doubt.

F. Some sample statements (excerpts from submissions on the www.roomfordoubt.com website)

G. How can we direct doubts toward greater Christian faith?

II. Create a better MOOD.

A. Highlight the greatest MOTIVE for Christian faith.

1. Not just **WHAT** to believe (“I believe **THAT** ...”) (e.g. Matt. 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:14–16; Col. 2:8; 2 Cor. 10:5; 2 Tim. 2:24–25; Titus 1:9; Jude 3).
2. The **WHY** of faith.

David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*. Youth with a Christian Background:

23% say that it is “completely or mostly true” that they have significant intellectual doubts.

Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*: “Why did they fall away from the faith in which they were raised?... **The most common answer [open-ended] for becoming nonreligious (32%) was some version of intellectual skepticism or disbelief....** Answers included ‘It didn’t make any sense anymore.’ ‘Some stuff is too far-fetched for me to believe.’ ‘I think scientifically and there is no real proof.’ ‘Too many questions that can’t be answered’” (p. 89; emphasis added).

B. Pursue a better OBJECTIVE.

1. Belief (Matt. 16:15-17; John 20:30-31; Rom. 10:9; 1 John 4:15; Heb. 11:6ab).
2. Trust (James 2:19; Matt. 4:1-3; Hebrews 11:1,6c).
3. Love (Mark 12:30; Deut. 6:4-5; Cf. Matt. 16:15–16 and John 21:1–17).

C. Show that you are **SENSITIVE**.

1. 1 Pet. 3:15 “with gentleness and reverence”
2. 2 Tim. 2:24-25 “not quarrelsome but kind ... with gentleness”
3. Jude 22 “Have mercy on some, who are doubting”

III. Employ Better Methods.

A. **Be APPRECIATIVE** of tough questions and doubts.

David Kinnaman: **Over 33%** of young adults say that “Christians are too confident they know all the answers” (*You Lost Me*, Kindle location 2119).

B. **Be INTERROGATIVE**.

1. The Gospels record _____ questions by Jesus.
2. E.g. Jewish leaders: “By what authority?” and Jesus: “Is the baptism of John from God or men? (e.g. Matt. 21:23-27; Mk. 11:27-33; Lk. 20:1-8).
3. Learn penetrating questions.

C. **Be COMPREHENSIVE** in applying the Christian faith.

1. Daunting data in church rejection by Millennials (see Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*).
 - a. Church is “anti-intellectual” (18%).
 - b. Church is “anti-science” (25%).
 - c. Yet, <1% of youth pastors addressed any science topic in previous year. (See Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*; Kindle loc. 2121.)
 - d. Church is not relevant to career (24%).
2. Cf. Song: “The B I B L E, yes that’s book for me.”
3. Use the tool of a “Christian _____.”

D. **Be COMPARATIVE**.

1. How do the *alternatives* to the Christian worldview stack up?
2. What is the “best explanation”?

IV. Open the Door for Doubts.

Dallas Willard, *The Allure of Gentleness*: “We need to emphasize that point strongly, because the great problem facing the gospel of Jesus Christ is not the doubt that is outside the church; it is the doubt that is inside the church. **We need to be able to deal with doubt lovingly, helpfully, and especially without ever scolding or shaming anyone for doubting.** We must allow people to be who they are and then be able to meet them where they are” (25; emphasis added).

- A. Develop an atmosphere of humility (Col. 3:12; Acts 20:19; Phil. 2:203; 1 Pet. 5:5).
- B. Diagnose the doubts (e.g. moral, self-doubt, spiritual, intellectual, volitional).
The most dangerous doubt is _____ doubt.
- C. Dialogue with the doubter.
 1. Don’t be so _____.
 2. Don’t be so _____.

62% of non-practicing Christians are open to talking about faith matters “with someone who listens without judgment.”

But **only 34%** see this trait in Christians. (See Barna, “What Non-Christians Want from Faith Conversations.” <https://www.barna.com/research/non-christians-faith-conversations/>.)

- D. A doorway to address doubts and strengthen faith: www.RoomForDoubt.com.