

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH
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The Doubters Club: The Uncertainty Principle
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In 1932, a theoretical physicist named Werner Heisenberg won the Nobel Prize for a groundbreaking discovery in the field of quantum mechanics for hundreds of years, physicists believed in a clockwork universe that was predictable and measurable and quantifiable. And then along comes Heisenberg and his uncertainty principle. And it turns the world upside down and inside out. Here it is, in a nutshell, the imprecise measurement of initial conditions precludes the precise prediction of future outcomes. We cannot know the precise position and momentum of a quantum particle at the same time and here's why. Sometimes matter behaves like a particle it seems to be in one place at one time. And sometimes it appears to behave like a wave it's in several places at the same time, it is the duality of nature. Simply put, there will always be an element of uncertainty. Or as my Gramma Johnson used to say, "You can't never always sometimes tell." Think about that. Here's the bottom line life is infinitely uncertain. Am I in the right room?

Now let me flip the coin and I want you to juxtapose that with this. Benoit Mandelbrot is the father of fractal geometry the study of complex shapes. Some shapes, like clouds in the sky, or coastlines are infinitely complex. Any detail can be magnified to reveal even more detail ad infinitum. I think theology is a little like fractal geometry. Any study of God can be magnified to reveal more detail more dimensionality of who God is. Now it's true of God's Word according to rabbinic tradition, every word of Scripture has 70 faces and 600,000 meanings, and it's true of God's character. And there are fancy theological phrases for this. It is the transcendence of God, the infinitude of God, the immensity of God, the irreducibility of God, the incomprehensibility of God, take your pick. Simply put, God doesn't fit within the four space-time dimensions that he created, let alone the logical constraints of our left brain. God cannot be reduced to a mathematical formula, or the 26 letters of the English alphabet,

A Greek Orthodox theologian whose name I have forgotten, said it this way' "It is not the task of Christianity to provide easy answers for every question but to make us progressively aware of mystery. God is not so much the object of knowledge as he is the cause of our wonder." Long story short, life is infinitely uncertain God is infinitely complex. Good luck, God bless. We'll see you next week. I'm kidding. We'll keep going.

Whether you are in the house, or you're at our online campus, YouTube channel, NCC app. Welcome to National Community Church, we are in a series called 'The Doubters Club. If you have a Bible, I want you to meet me in John's Gospel chapter 20 and we'll get there in a minute.

Okay, Faith is not the absence of doubt any more than courage is the absence of fear. In fact, doubt is a key catalyst, a key component of faith. Why? Because it forces us to ask the hard questions. It forces us to micro pile the foundation of our faith and reinforce the footers. It forces us to deconstruct and reconstruct our faith. Doubt is the irritant in the oyster that eventually produces the pearl of great price. When you go to the gym, or hop on your peloton, or do your Cross Fit workout, you are building muscles by breaking them down. Faith is a muscle and like every other muscle, you had to break it down to build it up doubt is what does that. Now if you deal with doubt the right way, it actually stretches your faith. In a sense, faith is doubting our doubt. And that'll make even more sense in about 20 minutes. And one or two things is going to happen over time. Either your theology will conform to your reality because you doubt your faith. Or your reality will conform to your theology because you doubt your doubt.

If you're taking notes, jot this down. Doubt is putting your circumstances between you and God. Faith is putting God between you and your circumstances. At some point in your spiritual journey, you run into something called reality usually at about 70 miles an hour. Everybody has a bout with doubt. Something happens it doesn't make sense, doesn't add up and it causes this internal angst Now the psychological term is cognitive dissonance. It's psychological conflict resulting from incongruous beliefs.

Let me give you an example and it's a hard one to share. But I don't think you sweep things like this under the carpet, as much as you wish they weren't true. When you dance with doubt, you will step on a few toes so here it goes. A few months ago, I felt tremendous cognitive dissonance when I heard some shocking news about Ravi Zacharias. Ravi ranks as one of the great apologists of our time. Now, I didn't know him personally, we did share one meal and it didn't take until desert to realize that he was brilliant. I have no idea how many people put their faith in Christ because of Ravi, but it's a lot. Now, after his death, an investigation into his life revealed a pattern of sexual misconduct that is saddening and sickening and sinful. When someone you respect does something that is not in keeping with the character of Christ it's disappointing, it's disillusioning, and it casts a shadow of doubt. I will say this, I respect the board of that ministry for letting that private investigation go public, it was the right thing to do. And part of why I share that is to share this we don't put our faith in people. I love Dick Foth. I would love him no matter what. Dick Foth is a spiritual father to me. But guess what? I've never once surrendered my life to Dick Foth. I've never put my faith in Dick Foth. I have put my faith; I've fixed my eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of my faith. And our faith is built on nothing less than Jesus blood, and righteousness.

Now with that as the backdrop we jump into John's Gospel, John 20:24. We're a few days removed from the resurrection. Jesus has already appeared to the disciples but one of them, Thomas is MIA, now, no idea where he was but that's where we pick up the story. *"One of the disciples, Thomas, was nicknamed the Twin, was not with the others when Jesus came. The other*

disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand in His side, I will not believe." Thomas is a card carrying member of the doubters club. And it's hard to blame him there's no precedent for what just happened. There's no category for what just happened. I mean, we have a tendency to reject anything that doesn't resonate with prior experience. It's called the confirmation bias. And all of us are guilty to one degree or another.

Verse 26; *"Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said to them."* Then he says to Thomas, verse 27, "How could you doubt?" No, that's not what it says. He could have said that, right? I mean, Thomas had heard all the sermons, had seen all the miracles, but Jesus doesn't shame him or blame him.

"Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop doubting and believe." Doesn't send them to the principal's office. Does a little show and tell. God is not intimidated by your doubt. He's not surprised. He's not disappointed. He's not patronizing. You know, I think right here Jesus gives us a glimpse of the heavenly Father's heart. He's so caring, so accommodating, so loving, so patient, so gracious. Can I remind us that we have a God who suffers with us. We have a God who shows us his wounds.

Verse 28, *"Thomas said to him, "My Lord, and my God."*

We call him Doubting Thomas. But this may be the most definitive profession of faith anywhere in the Gospels. Yes, he doubted but that doubt was a catalyst for this incredible confession of faith. I don't set a lot of commentaries in my messages but sometimes you can't say it any better than it's already been said. So here goes. It was reserved for the most depressed and skeptical mind of them all, the HONEST DOUBTER, the man who needed immediate and irresistible evidence, infallible proofs, invincible demonstrations-it was reserved for Thomas to say to him, "My Lord, and My God!" These words are the climax of the entire gospel. Every narrative points to this unchallenged utterance. From the wedding at Cana to the raising of Lazarus, every prayer, every discourse, every miracle, points to this superlative conclusion, wrung from the broken heart of the man who said, "Unless I see the print of the nails, I will not believe." This was the hour of the great confession; this was the birth-cry of Christendom; this was the epic-making scene, which guided the pen of John from the prologue to the close of the Gospel. Thus, Thomas doubted that the Church might believe. --The Pulpit Commentary, John's Gospel.

Verse 29, listening to what Jesus says, *"Because you have seen me, you believed: blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Now sometimes seeing is believing that's certainly the case with Thomas. He had to touch the nail prints but let me flip the coin. You're taking notes jot this down, sometimes believing is seeing. We don't see the world as it is. We see

the world as we are. So much of what we see is a projection of our personality, our pain, our past, even our prejudice. This is why hurt people hurt people. This is why forgiven people forgive people. What we see is a projection of who we are. Now, Abraham Maslow called it the law of the hammer. If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail, right?

Many years ago, read a fascinating book with a fun title, Mozart's brain and the fighter pilot. The author Richard Restak says, "What the eye sees is determined by what the brain has learned." Then he shares this maxim that has become a mantra for me, "Learn more, see more." Learn more, see more, learn more, see more, learn more, see more. When astronomers look into the night sky, they connect these dots called constellations. They see more because they know more. When a musician listens to a song they hear the harmonies, they hear more, because they see more, they know more. Endless examples but here's the bottom line, the more you know, the more you see. Let me push that envelope, the more you know, the more you worship. We tend to think that knowledge and worship is mutually exclusive, but there are two sides of the same coin. You can't worship what you don't know. And I would flip that and say, you can't really know what you don't worship. Stick with me.

In John's Gospel, Jesus has this encounter with a woman at the well. He says, "*You Samaritans worship, what you do not know.*" It's lip service at best. It's false worship at worst. They are worshipping out of ignorance, which makes it meaningless. Now, when Lora and I get into an argument, hypothetically speaking, I've been known to say sorry, without knowing what I'm sorry about. Because I just want the hypothetical argument to end. Now, let's be honest, that's a little lazy and it's a lot disingenuous. Why? If you don't know what you're sorry about, it's an empty apology, and in my experience, empty apology, start more hypothetical arguments. If you don't know what you're sorry about it's an empty apology. If you don't know who you're worshipping or why it's empty worship. Jesus says the Father is seeking worshipers who worship Him in spirit and in truth. In spirit is worshipping who you know. In truth is knowing who you worship. One way or the other the only feeling on our worship of God is our knowledge of God. And so the more you know, the more you see, the more you know, the more you worship. Let me add another one to the mix. The more you know, the more you know how much you don't know.

Now, Oliver Wendell Holmes, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, said, "There are two kinds of simplicity, there's simplicity on the near side of complexity, simplicity on the far side of complexity. I would not give a fig for simplicity on this side of complexity", said Holmes, "but I would give my life for simplicity on the other side." There are a lot of Christians who settle for simplicity on the near side of complexity. And I might add faith on the near side of doubt, joy on the near side of sorrow and peace on the near side of problems. They live by platitudes, and they clutch their clichés and we've got to do better than that. Listen, if you are growing spiritually, you will outgrow some old wine skins the same way you outgrew the clothes you wore as a kid.

At some point some of the things you believe shouldn't fit anymore. Why 'cause you know more, and you worship more and the more, you know, the more you know how much you don't know.

Now the Apostle Paul said it this way, *"When I was a child I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me."* That word childish means simple minded, its simplicity on the near side of complexity. Here's what I'm getting at, as you grow spiritually, you outgrow the faith you had a year or two or 10 years ago.

In the philosophy of science, there's a concept called critical realism, it's the recognition that we don't know everything there is to know. We can never expect at any stage to be absolutely certain that our scientific theories are correct, and will never need further amendment. Now this week, on Wednesday, New York Times ran a story about a groundbreaking discovery at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory. Did you see this? Evidence is mounting that a tiny subatomic particle seems to be disobeying the law of physics. I don't know why, I just kind of love it. In other words, there is a form of matter, a form of energy that is not currently known to science. And if it's true, it will fundamentally change every theory that we have. That's what critical realism allows for. Can I suggest that we need to know what we know, what we know. We also need a degree of critical realism when it comes to our theology. Listen, our faith is always being deconstructed and reconstructed. We're always learning and unlearning and relearning.

And I found that almost every spiritual truth has a fascinating corollary in the physical realm and so it's not unlike your body. You are not who you were 10 days, 10 months or 10 years ago. I mean, you look like the same person, but you're a totally different person. The 10 trillion cells in your body are in a constant state of regeneration. And you know this, but you don't see it when you stand in the mirror. It's like, oh, wow, look at that, you know, you don't, it doesn't happen like in real time, right? So the average adult has 10,000 taste buds, those taste buds are replaced about every two weeks. The surface of our skin covers about 20 square feet and those skin cells are replaced every 27 days. The cells that line your stomach regenerate every two days because of digestive acid. But the internal intestinal cells take 16 years to renew. And no matter how old you are, chronologically, your bones are about 10 years old. Long story short, oh, would you hear this right here. Your body is going through a process of death and resurrection all day, every day. In much the same way our faith is being constantly renewed. This is what the Apostle Paul said. II Corinthians 4:16, *"Though outwardly we are wasting away yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."* Faith is a lot like the apps on your phone, right? If you don't update them, eventually they aren't going to work. Why? Because they don't think with the operating system. And so faith and doubt are this dance that we continue to grow and evolve and learn and worship. And then the more we know, the more we know how much we don't know.

Well, one final thought and then a few applications. The more you know, the bigger God gets. I love the moment in Prince Caspian's second book in The Chronicles of Narnia, where Lucy and

Aslan are reunited. Lucy says, "Aslan your bigger." Aslan says, "That's because you're older, little one." Lucy is a little confused. She says, "Not because you are?" Aslan says, "I am not but every year you grow, you will find me bigger." And so it is in our relationship with God, the more you know the bigger God gets. "How much happier you would be" said G. K. Chesterton, "How much more of you there would be if the hammer of a higher God would smash your small cosmos."

A. W. Tozer said, "A low view of God is the cause of 100 lesser evils. A high view of God is the solution to 10,000 temporal problems". Do you know, everybody ought to have a few quotes that they quote all the time. You can just close your eyes and throw them out. "Let God be as original with others as he was with you." - Oswald Chambers. "Never lose a holy curiosity." - Albert Einstein. "Sometimes the greatest opposition of what God wants to do next comes from those who were on the cutting edge of what God did last." - RT Kendall. I go back to these quotes all the time but let me let me just throw a question at you. How big is your God? Is he bigger than your biggest problem? Is he bigger than the biggest mistake you've made? Is he bigger than the biggest challenge you face?

Let me close with a couple applications. You guys are doing so good. A lot of science this weekend, right? There's not gonna be a quiz at the end of this message but five application when in doubt, five things you can do. We're going to go fast.

1. Seek wise counsel, Proverbs 24:6 there is wisdom in the multitude of counselors. You need people in your life who have been there and done that, who can empathize with your weakness, who can call out your potential who can challenge your thinking, who can speak into your blind spots. Sometimes it's a mentor. Sometimes it's a spiritual father. Sometimes it's a literal counselor. Okay, I've been to two counselors in the last two years. And I make no apologies because I need all the help I can get. When in doubt, seek wise counsel. Don't isolate, don't isolate, invite people you trust into that process
2. Keep asking questions. I Corinthians 8:2 - listen, just as you ought to have a few quotes that you quote all the time, there ought to be a few verses that you quote all the time. I Corinthians 8:2 is one of mine. "He who thinks he knows, does not yet know, as he ought to know." Now, the more you know, the more you know how much you don't know. The world doesn't need any more know at all. We need to say, I don't know a lot more. We need to quit acting like we have all the answers and start asking better questions. Jesus asked 383 questions in the gospels. He often answered a question with a question. And so if we follow the Jesus way, we're gonna ask a lot of questions. Now, according to the research of Ralph Smith, kids ask on average, 125 probing questions per day. And I have some parents and young kids, you're laughing right now you're saying, "That actually sounds a little low". Right? Adults ask six. So somewhere between childhood and adulthood, we lose 119 questions per day. We got to get those back. Jesus said, "Ask and

you will receive, seek and you will find, knock in the door will be open” Those are present imperative verbs in the Greek language. In other words, keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. When in doubt, keep asking questions. By the way, Alpha course coming up here in a couple of weeks. A great place to ask honest hard questions ncc.re/alpha.

3. Create a Deuteronomy 29:29 file. Deuteronomy 29:29 says that the revealed things belong to us but the secret things belong to God. Life infinitely uncertain, God infinitely complex. What that means is there isn't an answer to every question. There's not a solution to every problem. There is not a resolution to every injustice on this side of eternity. Now, I know that sounds a little depressing but we don't believe in happily ever after. I said it last week, we believe in happily for ever after. And so there are some secrets that are only going to be revealed on the far side of the space-time continuum. When my father in law passed at 55 years of age, prime of life prime of ministry, it's the moment that I created this Deuteronomy 29:29 file. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to do with the questions. I didn't know what to do with the anger, what to do with the doubt so I just I created this file. And listen, it's gotten thicker over the years. And this is not a platitude when you can't see God's hand somehow you have to learn to trust his heart and you got to put them in that file. And so when in doubt, create a Deuteronomy 29:29 file.
4. Take a two foot field trip. Now you've heard me say this 1000 times - a little formula. Change of pace plus change of place equals change of perspective. Now I love this moment in Genesis 15, God takes Abraham on a two foot field trip. What are you talking about? Well, Abraham is inside his tent and God says come on outside. Okay. And he is there. Now, why would God do that? Well, as long as he was in the tent, Abraham was staring at an eight foot ceiling. The second he goes outside the sky is the limit. Doubt is an eight foot ceiling. Sometimes you have to get outside and I mean that literally and figuratively. Go take a hike. Get out in nature, or just go stargaze one night. Do you know that there are 9096 stars visible to the naked eye in the Milky Way galaxy? But that's a fraction of the stars, you know this. The latest estimate I've heard is about 300 billion stars in the Milky Way and so let me try to put that into perspective. 31,560,000 seconds in a year so 100 years, 3.1 5 billion seconds. So if Abraham tried to count every star just in the Milky Way galaxy, one star per second, it would take 10,000 years. And that's one galaxy. I mean, astrophysicist now suggest maybe 2 trillion galaxy, like just look up. And all God is saying, “Would you trust me for one?” Would you trust me for one? When in doubt, take a two foot field trip and remind yourself of God's promises.
5. When all else fails, eat a watermelon. You were wondering, weren't you? What is this delicious looking watermelon doing up here? I'm about to tell you. I'm not gonna drop it. I wouldn't drop it. In 1925, William Jennings Bryan played the role of prosecutor, do you remember this, in the infamous Scopes Monkey Trial. He was a former congressman, Secretary of State, ran for president three times. But later in life, he taught a Bible study

and he wrote religious books and one of those books he wrote about a watermelon. And this is what he said, "I have observed the power of the watermelon seed. It has the power of drawing from the ground and through itself 200,000 times its weight. When you can tell me how it takes this material and out of it colors the outside surface beyond the imitation of art, and then forms inside of it a white rind and within that again a red heart, thickly inlaid with black seeds, each one of which in turn is capable of drawing through itself 200,000 times its weight ~~ when you can explain to me the mystery of the watermelon, you can ask me to explain the mystery of God." Anyone can count the number of seeds in a watermelon. Only God can count the number of watermelons in a seed.

I think one measure of spiritual maturity is feeling more comfortable with mystery than certainty. Am I making you nervous? Just a little bit. I feel like I should... All too often we resort to therapy instead of mystery. Kathleen Norris said, "Modern believers tend to trust more in therapy than mystery." Do you remember what that Greek Orthodox theologian said? "God isn't the object of knowledge he is the cause of wonder." Carl Jung said it this way, "A religion becomes impoverished when it cuts down on its paradoxes." Why? "Only the paradox comes anywhere near to comprehending the fullness of life non ambiguity and non contradiction are one sided, and thus unsuited to explain the in comprehensible."

At the epicenter, we're almost done, I promise you. At the epicenter of our theology is the Trinity. Okay, we believe in one God, three persons. Well, which is it? One or three? It's not either or. It's both/and/and - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The concept of the Trinity is passed our pay grade, and I would expect nothing less. If we could comprehend the Trinity, it could be a human construct. Once again, his thoughts are higher than our thoughts, his ways than our ways. And so I say when in doubt, eat a watermelon.

Let me invite our worship team to come. Let me double back to Doubting Thomas. Here's the rest of the story; founding member of the doubters, club patron saint of doubters but that didn't keep God from using him in a profound way. Now he walks off the pages of Scripture, but fortunately we have a wonderful church historian. His name is Eusebius, a wonderful book to read, his record of these early church, fathers and mothers. And so, Thomas it is believed traveled beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. He was martyred on July 3, 72 AD, but not before sailing to India, where he established seven churches. Thomas is widely regarded as the patron saint of India. Simply put his life impacted in entire subcontinent. Why? And how? Well I think it traces back to this loving gesture that Jesus makes. Jesus wasn't afraid of letting Thomas touch his wounds. This is such an intimate, such a beautiful moment. He's not afraid of that. And Thomas touches those wounds and then he says, "My Lord, and my God."

Romans 10:9 and 10, *“If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you shall be saved.”* Have you ever made a profession of faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ? You can do that right here, right now. If you're at our online campus there's a place to raise a hand. If you're maybe at our YouTube channel, somewhere else or right here in person was at [ncc/re/followJesus](https://www.nccre.com/followJesus). We want to help you take those next steps in your spiritual journey. And so let me just say this “Welcome to the family.”