

Q:

Does questioning reveal doubt in my faith?

In matters of belief, I have always struggled with the concept of “mystery”. As Christians we are asked to accept a level of uncertainty regarding difficult-to-explain concepts: the six days of creation, God’s will, the Trinity, the purpose of the universe, the rapture, transubstantiation, salvation.

In the Bible, the Psalms are chock full of questions. The prophets frequently question God’s plans and second guess His decisions. The apostles are quick to ask Jesus to explain His parables and clarify laws and traditions.

“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.”

- Proverbs 25:2

We humans are inquisitive beasts. We want answers.

Asking demonstrates an innate desire to better understand. We desire just enough understanding to know where we stand and what is being asked of us.

But when so many questions go unanswered, frustration can set in. Or worse, resignation.

What do we expect of our questions?

Do we understand exactly why we ask?

Do we use inquiry to understand our unease - or cloak our unbelief?

The Bible itself is an epic question-generating mystery machine.

Nearly one-third of the Psalms are classified as “laments” – passages directly addressing God about pain, fear, confusion, abandonment, and anger.

Major figures ask pointed and sometimes uncomfortable questions to God about His ultimate plan and purpose - life, redemption, resurrection, salvation, etc.

- In Genesis, Abraham interrogated God over the terms of His decision to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.
- Job repeatedly demands answers and pleads for an invitation to stand before God and present his case of innocence.
- Moses questions God about His choice to appoint him, a man with speaking difficulties and limited rhetorical skills, to represent God before Pharaoh. He would later question God’s plans for His people and be punished for lack of faith.

“Then Moses turned to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all.’”

- Exodus 5:22-23

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A WORD ON THE WORD

The Greek word *diakrino* means to distinguish, discern, judge, make a distinction, hesitate, dispute, waver, or doubt. The English word "doubt" as we know it today is more psychologically connected with lack of assurance sometimes bordering on disbelief. *Diakrino* leans toward the positive image of discernment - an intellectually curious person asking difficult questions rather than one wavering between binaries, lacking a settled allegiance, or careening headlong toward faithlessness.

If faith rests on trust, seeking to know more fully whom we are being asked to trust is not only fitting but essential.

The main question about our inquiring lies not in substance but in approach. A question can arise from many sources - devotion, fear, intellectual curiosity, anger, resistance, disbelief.

To acknowledge the true source, we should ask...

Are my questions purely inquisitive – seeking ways to fill gaps in the wall of faith? Or do they come from a point of skepticism – searching to validate a negative perspective?

Or are they formed in cynicism – having made a decision and seeking a means to confirm it?

"When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny."

- Psalm 73:16-17

It is just as important to know how the question is being asked.

Is it coming from "inside my faith"? Am I seeking to strengthen and extend my relationship with God, or am I seeking a means of release?

One thing is quite clear. God wants us to ask.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

- James 1:5

Questions reinforce faith more completely. We seek answers to learn how to live out our faith in sincerity, and in the process, perhaps make peace with the mystery.

Faith perpetually protected from inquiry is how real doubt creeps in.

"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind."

- James 1:6

