

DOUBT

MIND GAMES

WEEK 5 GROUP GUIDE | MESSAGE BY SHAWN JOHNSON

START

To get things started, let's go around the circle and answer this question:

If you had one last “bucket list” place to go or thing to do, what would it be and why is it important to you?

SHARE

Welcome to our new series entitled, “Mind Games.”

Every day we experience an entire spectrum of God-given emotions. Think about your day so far. How many different emotions have you experienced? In a given day it is possible to feel happiness, frustration, sadness, joy, optimism, regret, anger, insecurity, fear, and anxiety. It's fascinating, the roller coaster of emotions we can experience in just one day. There are many factors at play with our emotions. For instance, if we are tired or worn out, we might be more susceptible to be easily frustrated or angered. If we are feeling joyful and well-rested, we might be more likely to be gracious and patient with others. Not always; but more likely.

Now if that wasn't complicated enough, let's add the powerful influence of our thought life. We all have a wide-range of thoughts that go through our brains and half the time we don't even understand where they are coming from. Some of us think the best in situations, while others tend to believe that the sky is falling and think the worst. Thoughts are powerful and what you believe about God, yourself, and other people is more important than you might think.

We are told throughout scripture that we are loved, valuable, and we are worth being pursued by a loving God. We can either think about the truth of what God says about us or we can believe lies. In 2 Corinthians Paul tells us to literally, “...take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” We shouldn't let our thoughts push us around. We can take control and make sure that those thoughts line up with the Word of God. If the thoughts you're having aren't true, send them packing and cling to what God says is true! Make them obedient to Christ.

This week Shawn brought up a battle that we all face: the battle with doubt. Phillip Yancey said it well, “God's invisibility guarantees I will experience times of doubt.” We all want to believe that God's got a plan right now, but sometimes we are not sure. We want to believe that

God loves us, but sometimes we don't feel that way. We want to believe God can save us, but sometimes we think we are the one person in the room who just cannot be saved – we have sinned too greatly. We all battle, we are in a continuous fight for belief at times. The great news is that our biggest doubts don't change God's mind or heart towards us. We are loved, doubts and all.

It is important to note that the word 'doubt' in Latin is defined as "to be in between two thoughts." To struggle with doubts doesn't mean you are an unbeliever; you are simply a human who is wrestling with your true belief in God and perhaps the circumstances, difficulties or unanswered questions you currently have. As Shawn mentioned, even the great Billy Graham admitted that one day he desires to hear God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," his comment was followed by, "I hope so." Even the great leaders and preachers of the faith cling to this hope that all God says is really true.

Read Mark 9:15-24

Does this man have some doubts? If so, what are they?

What are some of the doubts that you have wrestled with in your faith journey?

What have you learned through those periods of doubt?

GROW

This week Shawn talked about how there is this underlying fear that when we doubt, somehow God will not act or hear our prayers. For example James 1 and Matthew 21 both refer to praying without doubting and believing in faith and not doubting. As believers, knowing this can make us wrongly believe that if we doubt, God will not act or that if we just believe more resolutely or have positive thoughts, that God will be compelled to answer our prayers. Both of these are completely false. In reality, we are told to believe and have faith, because the object of our faith – God – is worthy of being trusted and is a good and completely sufficient God.

The Inter-Varsity Commentary notes:

A further distortion of the biblical teaching occurs when Christians treat James's warning against doubt (and the similar teaching by Jesus in Mt 21:21) superficially, taking it to require a willful suppression of mental doubts. This can become an unrecognized attempt to manipulate God by one's own power of positive thinking. The error has left many in bondage to fear, afraid of their own thoughts and afraid of the God who might hold their doubts against them and therefore not grant the wisdom needed. The result is a crippling of people's faith and a perversion of the very truth James is teaching: that God gives freely, without finding fault.

James certainly does place doubt in immediate contrast to believe (or, literally, in contrast to the noun faith) in 1:6. But James is writing about something much deeper than surface thoughts. The actual point of his warning about doubt is to expose a basic soul-condition of unbelief.

Let's read Mark 9:25-27

Even though the Father doubted, he still came to Jesus and what happened?

What does this story tell you about the heart of God?

Considering the truth of scripture in light of this story, do you think God can still care and hears you when you have doubts?

MOVE

According to scripture, God wants us to trust him, to believe in him, and to have full faith and not doubt. God desires us to have a child-like faith, but when we doubt, that doesn't change God's promises or his love for us. We don't have to pretend with God about our doubts. We don't have to play a belief-game and think that because of our thoughts, we somehow can control the outcomes in life. God knows what we need. God cannot be manipulated. God is big enough. God knows what we need before we even ask it. But like any good father, God loves for us to come to him and to ask and seek him. We don't need to pretend with God, in our life groups or serving teams at church. If you still doubt that the spiritual greats didn't doubt, then let's look no further than John the Baptist. Look at what Jesus said about him.

Read Matthew 11:1-11

Regardless of the circumstances, God is in control. When we don't understand, we can know that there is a God who does. If you are dealing with serious doubts right now, you are not a second class citizen among God's people, you are completely normal as a Christ follower.

Do you think you have been honest with God and others around you regarding your doubts?

How can thinking back on God's past provision and guidance help you today in your struggle with doubt?

This week, what is the next step you need to take after going through this study?

(Encourage someone going through a tough time, be honest with your accountability partner, get an accountability partner, open up to your life group about your struggle)

PRAY

As a group, spend some time praying for each other, especially for the struggles that people might be facing today. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men and women's groups to talk more freely.

TO GO.

John 20:27

Then he (Jesus) said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe"