

RUNAWAY

A grown-up story about childish ways

DAY 1

Would you describe yourself as a skeptic? Do you most often approach things with questions and doubt? Does this skeptical nature keep you from belief? Are you skeptical or suspicious of people who seem to believe more easily? Are there times you're jealous because you just wish you could believe?

The danger of being skeptical is the potential of refusing to believe anything we can't fully understand or prove. It's easy to let skepticism grow into cynicism, arrogance, and/or contempt. On the other hand, the positive side of being skeptical is using those questions and doubts to potentially lead us to new understandings, new insight, and faith. It's an opportunity to let go of the myth: **I CAN BE IN CONTROL IF I CAN UNDERSTAND.**

It's freedom to follow **without** all the answers.

If you aren't naturally a skeptical person, how do you respond to those who are? How do you deal with doubts? If skepticism and doubt aren't your natural inclinations, it can be devastating when you actually begin to doubt. There's a tendency to ignore the doubts for fear of shaking up your entire belief system. But this strategy doesn't make doubts disappear. It makes doubt quietly grow on the edge of our awareness.

All of us will be challenged by doubt at some time. It doesn't always come through intellectual questioning, but through pain, disappointment, the failure of a trusted spiritual leader/parent, or when our theology is challenged by new ideas. When we see our doubts as healthy and manage them well by using them to propel us toward God, our own faith will be deepened, more real and personal. Remember, God doesn't call us to understand Him but to know, love, and follow Him. *After all, do you really want a God you can understand?* That's a very small God.

READ Mark 9:20-24. *In this story, what does the boy's father ask of Jesus? Could you make that your prayer today?*

DAY 2 - READ Jonah 1:17 and 2:10.

DOUBT IS THE SOIL FROM WHICH FAITH GROWS.

What does it mean? Do you agree with that statement?

As you read the story of Jonah, how do you respond to these verses?

How do you feel about what you are reading? Do you believe this story?

Why or why not? Which of the following most closely captures your thoughts and feelings?

1. **This is an allegory, but still the Word of God.**
2. **This is a true, miraculous historical story.**

In order to believe and follow Jesus, must you claim one of these statements? Why or why not? Is it possible to have doubts, yet believe and follow Jesus?

"Faith is not the absence of doubt.

In fact, if there is nothing that can be doubted, there is no need for faith."

Do you agree with that statement?

DAY 3

"A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibodies. A person's faith can collapse almost overnight if she has failed over the years to listen to her own doubts, which should only be discarded after long reflection. Believers should acknowledge and wrestle with doubts - It is no longer sufficient to hold beliefs just because you inherited them."

The Reason for God by T. Keller

Which parts of the Bible do you doubt? Which aspect(s) of the Christian life do you doubt? **TAKE** time to consider the concepts, ideas, stories, or beliefs you doubt or question. **BE** honest, **BRING** these questions to light, and **ASK** God to help your unbelief. **ASK** Him to guide you into truth and a deeper more personal faith in Him.

JESUS STILL LOVES ME EVEN THOUGH I HAVE DOUBTS.

Do you agree with that statement?

Have you ever shared your doubts with a trusted Christian friend?

DAY 4

Can you have doubts and still have faith? Why or why not?

READ Romans 10:17. *According to this verse, from where does faith come?*

By reading the Scriptures [especially the Gospels] with an open heart and fresh eyes, we can begin to build and strengthen our faith in the midst of our doubt.

DESCRIBE a time when you faced doubts. *How did you deal with them? How did they affect your personal faith? Did they cause you to move away from God and your faith? Or did you discover that, by facing and pushing through your doubts, your faith became deeper and stronger? Why or why not? What doubts/questions are you dealing with right now? **BRING** them into the light and share them with a friend.*

DAY 5

READ 1 John 4:15-16, Ephesians 2:4, and John 14:5-7.

As we struggle with doubts and our own unbelief, it's important to cling to what we **do** believe. During times of struggle, questioning, confusion, or doubts, *what do you believe? To what/whom do you cling?*

WRITE a prayer to God which begins:

"Father, at times I have doubts and fear. Thank you for loving me before the world began and that you love me even though I don't have everything figured out. Help me cling to You and to the things I know. Help me place at Your feet the things I don't understand..."