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The Season of Self-Doubt

Even the Apostle Paul, who was no stranger to natural self-confidence (in *Philippians 2*, he referred to himself as the "Hebrew of Hebrews and the Pharisee of Pharisees"), confessed in *1 Cor 2:3* as he was planting a church in Corinth: "*I came to you in weakness, with great fear and trembling*".

It seems to be a leadership trait, as Paul reminds a timid Timothy in *2 Tim 1:7*, "*For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*"

Where does self-doubt originate?

1. Nature

Some of us are naturally more prone to this than others. When God knit you together in your mother's womb, he gave you unique strengths- but if you're high on self-awareness (a good thing!)- you're likely to be high on self-criticism.

2. Nurture

Negative past experiences knock confidence. Lack of affirmation and encouragement at critical moments can cause hurt. Perhaps negative words have been spoken over you in the past. Undue parental pressure to perform knocks confidence. Failure to live up to our parents' unrealistic dreams of what we would become can cause us to doubt ourselves. One of the joys of being a Christian is we receive healing from a Heavenly Father who loves us and delights in us. He can turn the worst upbringing around.

3. Failure

When we hit trouble that we can't solve (relationships that go wrong, a job loss, a parenting-fail, a temptation that we give into, etc.), we feel lousy and we interrogate ourselves and wonder if we'll ever succeed.

4. Success

Successful people also seem to struggle with self-doubt. Meryl Streep, nominated for 20 Academy Awards and 30 Golden Globes, confessed to this: *"You think 'why would anyone want to see me again in a movie? And I don't know how to act anyway, so why am I doing this?'"*

Chris Martin of Coldplay: *"When on stage I know that Coldplay is the best band in the world, for 90 minutes! Other times I face paranoia and insecurity."*

American writer and civil rights activist Maya Angelou said, *"I have written eleven books, but each time I think, 'Uh-oh, they're going to find out now. I've run a game on everybody, and they're going to find me out.'"*

Those higher up the ladder are not necessarily more self-assured. Success is not the answer to self-doubt.

5. Comparison

When we look at our peers we perceive they're doing better/achieving more/coping in life, and we compare ourselves unfavourably. This leads us to look inwards and find self doubt.

We are often our own worst critic. We compare ourselves to an idealised version of ourself from the past (or perhaps if we've had time out of careers for illness or parenting, we compare ourselves with a single minded, more energised self).

We have a choice how we react to self-doubt:

1. Be dictated to by our doubts. Allow them to define us.
2. Ignore our doubts (unfortunately, they grow bigger over time, not smaller!).
3. Lie to our doubts and pretend we can do anything.
4. Speak the truth to our doubts and act on it.

Here's the truths that will help you in this season:

1. You have an identity in God

Exodus 3:4-14. Moses was raised in royalty but then became a failed revolutionary. He had been in exile for 40 years when he encountered God at the burning bush. God came with fresh identity and calling for him, but he struggled to receive it (*"Who am I?"*). Compare that with the beautiful, self-confident, assured God who says to Moses, *"I am who I am"*.

When we spend time with *"I am who I am"* it makes us more confident people. We're designed to be God's image bearers. There's nothing godly about unproductive self-doubt that simply wallows in the question, *"Who am I?"*

Moses came to understand he was God's choice, named by God, God's prophet. As Christian's we're to be assured in our adoption as God's children, chosen by him, known by him.

2. You are influential

Paul encouraged people to follow him as he followed Christ. 1 Tim 4:12: *"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity."*

There's always a "because" as to why we may self-deprecate and doubt: too young, too old, too inexperienced, too pretty, too plain, too uneducated, too educated.

Gideon asked, *"How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family"* (Judges 6:15).

Jeremiah exclaimed, *"Alas, sovereign Lord... I do not know how to speak, I am too young."* (Jeremiah 1:6).

In Genesis 18:12, Sarah *"laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and Abraham is old, will I now have this pleasure?'"*

Instead of saying, "I'm too weak, too young or too old", we should make it our ambition to get on with life and show people what it looks like for weak people to follow God and find their strength in Him.

3. You are inadequate

This may sound discouraging! But there's no point in building false confidence. The truth is that you cannot meet all of life's needs and challenges on your own. You need to rely on God.

2 Cor 3:5: *"Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God."*

When we face challenges, we can rely on God (it's what he designed you for!). In our weakness he is made strong.

4. You are invested

...with gifts from a good God. Remember the parable of the talents? One servant didn't think his talent mattered enough to invest it.

2 Tim 1:6, *"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands."*

2 Tim 4:14, *"Do not neglect your gift."* (i.e. keep using it!)

When self-doubting we can end up imitating others rather than fanning our own gifts into flame. When self-doubting we can easily withdraw from the game.

1 Peter 4:10, *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."*

When you use your gifts, the result is blessing for others. When you don't, other people miss out.

5. You are incomplete

None of us are yet finished works. However, *"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 1:6)

2 Tim 4:15, *"Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress."*

If we're going to bless other people, we will need to grow used to the idea that we will sometimes fail in front of people (that they may see our progress!).

Self-doubt is never a disqualifier, as long as we persevere, trusting in God.

Eph 3:20, *"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."*

Elderly Sarah had a baby; timid Tim became a great leader; stuttering Moses became the mouthpiece for God; self-doubting Jeremiah became a mighty prophet (who wasn't even listened to!).

His power is at work in you and me too.

Questions:

- **The Disposition to Self-Doubt.** Some people are more like this than others. do you agree? Where would you be on the spectrum? Which of the 5 causes (Nature, Nurture, Failure, Success, Comparison) would you most identify with?
- *A degree of self-doubt is helpful, but too much is harmful.* Do you agree? What harm does lack of personal confidence bring?
- How can we grow in the affirmation of our identity in God?
- God calls us to push through self-doubt barriers to be an example for others. What barriers are you facing right now? What does it look like to be an example where you are?
- How does the counter intuitive idea of using our gifts help propel us through a season of self-doubt? How can we stand against the temptation to withdraw?
- *We are works in progress.* Who can you encourage this week to help them see they're doing better than they were?



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