

THE Encourager

DAVE DRAVECKY'S OUTREACH OF HOPE

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Dealing with Doubt Holding Onto Faith in an Invisible God

by Jan Dravecky



Although
they were unsettling,
my doubts led me to
search,
to ask questions that
eventually strengthened
my faith. Pastor Frederick
Buechner has called our
doubts "the ants in the
pants of faith—they keep it
alive and moving."
I had lots of ants.

JAN DRAVECKY

When I first met Debbie two years ago, she was exuberant and overflowing with joy. Although she had lived with MS for more than 20 years and had recently been confined to a wheelchair, her faith was strong and vibrant. Speaking with her was a great encouragement to me. When I saw Debbie more recently, however, she hardly seemed like the same person. Her face was tight, drawn, and she seemed to be enveloped in an air of sadness.

As we talked, I learned that her disease had worsened, making every aspect of daily life much more difficult. Debbie was worn out—not just physically and emotionally, but spiritually as well. "I seem to have lost God in all of this," she shared. "I feel like I'm losing hope, and what's worse is that I can't see God. I need so much to feel His presence, but I can't see Him. I even feel silly for believing in God. I wonder if God is real. What is it that I believe? What have I put my faith in? Is it really true?"

Her words, although they may seem

shocking to some people, were no surprise to me. Many people who have endured a season of suffering echo the same doubts. And a number of years ago, Debbie's words could have been my own. After Dave's battle with cancer and in the midst of my own battle with depression, I reached a point where I felt stupid believing in a God I couldn't see. I didn't want to believe in something that wasn't true. I wanted to see God visually because I could no longer feel him. Like doubting Thomas, I said, "Show me first, then I'll believe."

My doubts eventually led me to the Bible. Everything I believed was based on the Bible, so I needed to know if it was really true, if it was really God's Word. As I studied the facts about the formation and history of the Bible, I became overwhelmingly convinced that the Bible itself was a true miracle. It really was God's Word. I could trust its message.

I read Josh McDowell's book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. There I discovered that Jesus' life, death, and

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Believing What We Cannot See

by Kim Jones

resurrection are substantiated by undeniable historical evidence. I realized that my faith was not based on a myth or a fairy tale, but on the true revelation of a God who gave us His words and who sent us His Son.

The Bible tells us that we are to live by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). No human can literally see God and live, but we can “see” God in His Word. We can “see” God through His Son, Jesus. We can “see” God in the love of others. We can “see” God through the beauty of His creation. As I learned that I could trust in the evidence of God that I could see, my faith in what I could not see began to grow once again.

As I shared with Debbie my personal experience in dealing with doubt, I also encouraged her to remember the times in her life when she was certain about her faith, the times when God seemed real to her. I shared one of my favorite quotes, “Never doubt in the dark what God has shown you in the light.” As we talked, I could see a change come over her. My very brief reminders of the truth had already begun to work on her heart, and I could see the beginning of a gentle smile on her face.

If you have been dealing with doubt, I want you to know that you are not alone. I hope that this issue of *The Encourager* will help open the eyes of your heart to “see” a glimpse of our invisible God. I hope you discover, as I did, that He’s not so invisible after all.



Blessed are those
who have not seen
and yet have
believed.

JOHN 20:29



God’s invisibility guarantees I will
experience times of doubt.

PHILIP YANCEY

REACHING FOR THE INVISIBLE GOD

Is it really necessary to see something with our eyes before we can believe it exists? Many of us would answer with a wholehearted “Yes!” Yet when we stop to think about it, much of what we do every day is in response to forces, influences, and realities that we cannot see. Consider this brief slice of life for example:

Even as I ponder the concept of believing in what we cannot see, gravity holds me fast to the seat of my chair. As the sunlight streams through my office window, I fight off the urge to nap—an urge that is prompted by the unseen, yet very effective, radiant warmth of the sun. In an effort to stay awake, I walk into the kitchen to warm my coffee by the invisible energy of my microwave. As I wait, I glance out the window. For a moment, the beautiful dance of the pine trees distracts me. Their dance is powered by the wind of a coming storm that is not yet visible on the horizon. As I consider the approaching storm, my heart becomes heavy with concern. Motivated by the invisible power of a mother’s love, I wonder when my children will return home, safe and sound.

My afternoon of pondering has not answered my question, but it has led me to the undeniable conclusion that we not only are capable of believing in what we cannot see, but that we *must* believe. We can’t see the ultraviolet radiation of the sun, but we believe in it enough to put on sunscreen. We can’t see gravity, but we believe in it enough that we don’t attempt to fly without mechanical assistance.

Yes, it can be difficult to believe in a God we cannot see. But if we can’t see the most powerful forces in our universe that influence our life every day, why are we surprised that we can’t see God, the powerful Creator of those forces? Perhaps we can take comfort in the knowledge that God’s invisibility is evidence of His power. We want and need a powerful God. As a friend of mine says, “If God were small enough for our minds, He wouldn’t be big enough for our needs!”

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Can I Trust the Bible?

The Bible has had a greater impact on human history than any other book. The desire for copies of the Bible inspired the invention of the printing press. The Bible, or parts of it, has been translated into 2,200 languages that are used by more than 90 percent of the world's population, and translators predict that the Bible will be available in all of the world's languages by 2007.

Furthermore, no one can dispute the Bible's long-lasting popularity. More than one-third of all Americans, for example, read the Bible every week. More than 90 percent of the homes in America have at least one Bible, and most have three. Worldwide, billions of Bibles have been sold, and the Bible continues to outsell every book ever published.

Yet the Bible is more than an influential bestseller; it is God's Word. The Bible is God's letter to the human race. It originated with God, not with men. Second Timothy 3:16 goes so far as to declare the Scriptures to be "God-breathed." As such, the Bible tells us who God is, who we are, and how we, as His children, are to live.

Given the vital importance of the Bible's claims, what do we really know about this most sacred book? How do we know we can trust its authenticity? How do we know it is accurate? How do we know it is actually from God? Consider the following facts:



Unity

The Bible was penned on three different continents, in three different languages, over a span of approximately 1,500 years. Century after century, 40 different authors from diverse backgrounds wrote their portions of this book. For the most part, they were unaware of one another's writings. Sometimes they were unaware of the meaning of their own words. Yet, upon careful study, the 66 separate books of the Bible are in complete harmony and unity.

Scientific and Historic Accuracy

Centuries before scientists took note of it, the water cycle was described in the books of Ecclesiastes (1:7), Isaiah (55:10), and Job (36:27-28). Isaiah 40:22 speaks of the "circle of the earth" even though for the next 1,500 years most people still believed that the earth was flat. Scientists now agree that a catastrophic, worldwide flood, such as that described in Genesis 6, actually did occur. Archeological evidence agrees with the lives and recorded deeds of Bible characters.

Relevance

The moral directives and standards for living put forth in the Bible are as relevant today as they were when they were written. Unlike other works of literature, the Bible—from Genesis to Revelation—addresses hundreds of controversial topics and does so with an amazing degree of harmony. Although the Bible is an ancient document, any person in any situation in any society can find timeless truth in its pages.

Preservation

Although many have tried, the Bible cannot be destroyed. Jesus affirmed this truth when He said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away" (Mark 13:31). Portions of the Bible were written first on perishable materials that were copied and recopied for hundreds, and even thousands, of years. Even so, the Scriptures have never diminished in style or correctness, nor have they faced extinction. When compared to other ancient writings, the Bible has more manuscript evidence to support it than any ten pieces of ancient, classic literature combined.

Fulfilled Prophecy

The Bible stands alone as the only piece of literature that accurately predicts the future. The Old Testament, for example, contains more than 300 references to the coming Messiah that were precisely fulfilled by Jesus Christ. In addition, the Bible has many other prophecies that have been fulfilled and verified through archeological evidence.

Influence

Part of the beauty of Scripture is that it is alive, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God (Hebrews 4:12). While some books can change a person's thinking, the Bible is the only one that can change a person's nature. Thus its life-changing power is one of the greatest proofs that the Bible is true.

When doubts about God begin to erode our faith, when we can't see or feel God's presence, we can open the pages of His mighty and miraculous Book and know that its words, and the God who inspired them, are absolutely trustworthy.

Dealing with Doubt

by Growing in Faith

*How do I seek
Your face
When my flesh needs
Your hand?
What must I do, O Lord,
There's a need
to understand.*

RITA SPRINGER
"I REMAIN IN YOU"



What is it that enables us to perceive an invisible God and be certain of our relationship with Him? It can't be our physical senses because our senses are subject to limitations and disabilities. It can't be our emotions because our feelings are often unreliable or damaged. It can't be our intellect because young children can believe in God long before they can read, write, or engage in intellectual debate. So what is it? It is faith.

The Bible defines faith as the ability to be "sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). And that is exactly what we need when we're plagued by doubt. Faith banishes doubt as it enables us to seek God, to believe in Him, and to have a meaningful relationship with Him. What is more, faith—the essential element of a relationship with God—is a gift from God Himself (Romans 12:3). Take a moment to consider a sampling of what the Bible tells us about this wonderful gift from God:

- * Faith in Jesus Christ makes us righteous or holy in God's eyes (Romans 3:22).
- * Faith allows us to approach God with freedom and confidence (Ephesians 3:12).
- * Faith makes it possible for us to please God (Hebrews 11:6).
- * Faith causes us to obey God's commands (Romans 1:5).
- * God gives His promises to those who have faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:22).
- * A lack of faith can rob us of God's blessings (Matthew 13:58).
- * Faith is a shield that protects us from the lies and attacks of the enemy (Ephesians 6:16).
- * Our faith can encourage others in their relationship with God (Romans 1:12; 1 Thessalonians 3:7).

We don't have to look very far in the Scriptures to realize that faith is powerful and effective. But we sometimes overlook the fact that faith is also a living thing. Faith is not static and unchangeable. Like a muscle, faith can grow and be strengthened. In fact, the Bible tells us we are supposed to grow and excel in our faith (2 Corinthians 8:7; 10:15).

We grow in faith when:

- * We put the gift of faith into action, such as when we believe in God's power and ability to do something rather than believing in our own power (Romans 4:19-21).
- * We spend time seeking to understand God's Word (Romans 10:17).
- * We are encouraged by others who share our faith (1 Thessalonians 3:2, 10).
- * We remember God's faithfulness to us in the past (Psalm 77:10-12).
- * We admit our faith is weak and ask God to give us faith (Mark 9:21-24).

It's important that we exercise and strengthen our faith because the Bible assures us that life on earth will test our faith (1 Peter 1:6). In the same way that the strength of a muscle is stretched and tested

by hard use, the strength of our faith is stretched and tested as we apply it to the trials of life. When our prayers seem to go unanswered, when our pain lingers for months or even years, when God appears to be silent despite our desperate cries for help, our faith is stretched and tested.

During times of testing, we are particularly vulnerable to doubt. For some of us, our faith may be stretched to near the breaking point. But even then we can find hope and comfort in God's precious gift of faith. First Peter 1:7 assures us that the testing of our faith refines it, making it genuine and more valuable. We also can pray that our faith won't fail, and this prayer is very dear to God's heart. As the time of His arrest and crucifixion neared, Jesus Himself prayed that Peter's faith would not fail (Luke 22:32).

So when we find our faith lacking, when doubt is lurking on the doorstep, we can look to Jesus for encouragement and strength to grow in our faith.

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus,
the author and perfecter of
our faith, who for the joy set
before him endured the
cross, scorning its shame,
and sat down at the right
hand of the throne of God.
Consider him who endured
such opposition from sinful
men, so that you will not
grow weary and lose heart.*

HEBREWS 12:2-3

"I Remain in You," words and music by Rita Springer
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Dealing with Doubt

The Fingerprints of God

When our faith is shaken to the core, when we question God's very existence, we hunger for tangible evidence of our invisible God. Although the dark passages of our lives may dim our view, we literally are surrounded by a world full of visible signs of God. Even a cursory look at creation reveals evidence of God's fingerprints in every glance. Feast your eyes on these "fingerprints"—visible reminders of what God has created by His own hand.

- * A universe that encompasses about a trillion galaxies, each one averaging a hundred billion stars.
- * Our own star, the sun, that has a mass or weight of 2 billion, billion, billion tons.
- * The planet earth that is perfectly designed for our existence. If the earth varied in distance from the sun by as little as 2%, life on earth would cease.
- * The moon that lights our night sky and, because of its gravitational force, creates tides that cleanse our oceans and stabilizes the earth's axis, preventing extreme and deadly climactic changes.
- * An amazingly unique animal kingdom that includes the 7-ton elephant and the 95-ton blue whale, the 35-foot-long python, the cheetah that can run at 65 mph and the sailfish that can swim at 69 mph, the sandpiper bird that migrates 11,800 miles, the 343-pound ostrich and the tiny hummingbird whose heart can beat at an astounding 1,260 beats per minute.
- * A plant kingdom of more than 300,000 different species—some that produce flowers 35 inches across, some that live only two weeks, and some that are nearly 5,000 years old.
- * The human body, comprising one hundred trillion cells most of which are too small for the human eye to see without magnification.
- * The 130,000,000 receptor cells of the human eye that instantly tell us about the world around us.
- * DNA, the chemical instruction book of all living cells. If the instructions in just

*The heavens declare
the glory of God;
the skies proclaim
the work of his hands.
Day after day they
pour forth speech;
night after night they
display knowledge.*

PSALM 19:2

one DNA molecule in one human cell were written out, they would fill a thousand, six-hundred-page books.

- * Human DNA that is so complex that if the DNA from just one human being were unwound and joined together end to end, it would stretch from the earth to the sun and back again more than four hundred times.

- * Human bone marrow, hidden in the long bones of the body, that turns out a trillion new cells each day.

- * Sixty thousand miles of blood vessels within the average-sized human that link every living cell. Within those vessels, blood cells travel at remarkable speeds. A round-trip journey from heart to toe and back again, including a brief stop in

the lungs to refuel, normally takes a red blood cell only twenty seconds.

- * Human nerves that are so fine that a hair-width bundle of them contains 100,000 separate wires.
- * The human brain, weighing in at only three pounds, is packed with ten billion nerve cells, each with up to ten thousand private lines of communication. The brain's total number of connections rivals the numbers of stars and galaxies in the universe. In addition, the chemistry of the brain works so marvelously that five trillion chemical operations occur within the brain in any given second.

Sources: *The Creator and the Cosmos* and *The Fingerprint of God*, by Hugh Ross, Ph.D.; *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* and *In His Image* by Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey; *Collier's Encyclopedia*; *The Top Ten of Everything*; *The Larousse Desk Reference*.

Wherever we look in the realm of nature, we see evidence for God's design and exquisite care for His creatures. Whether we examine the cosmos on its largest scale or its tiniest, His handiwork is evident... God's fingerprints are visible.

HUGH ROSS, PH.D.,
ASTROPHYSICIST

Horsehead Nebula photo by Randy Brewer
Used by permission.

Dealing with Doubt

Remember What God Has Done!

On his way to the airport to fly to Washington, D.C. to meet with yet another medical specialist, Outreach of Hope volunteer Wayne DeReu stopped by the office. His face told the story. During the three years he had battled an extremely rare form of cancer, Wayne had seen scores of medical professionals. He was not encouraged by the prospect of traveling halfway across the country to meet yet another specialist who offered little promise of relief. He was disappointed about the possibility of facing surgery and treatment so far away from his immediate family and friends. With little physical reason to hope for a good outcome, we prayed fervently for God to reveal Himself to Wayne and his wife Sally during their time away.

Talks with Wayne during those weeks were difficult. He was in tremendous pain. He and Sally had to deal with the emotional roller coaster of surgeries, the discovery of more tumors, and an uncertain future—all without the familiar comforts of home. As their planned two-week stay dragged on for more than two months, our calls often ended in prayer and tears. Although Wayne and Sally never voiced doubt in God's love or provision, their faith was stretched.

After he had returned home, Wayne shared about how God had revealed Himself throughout his long medical ordeal, particularly the time in Washington, D.C. "When my original doctor, one of very few who has experience in treating my kind of cancer, was deployed," he explained, "I thought the trip was a waste. But within the hour we were referred to a medical team that had worked extensively on my type of cancer. Never before had we found anyone with their credentials and skill. This turn of events amazed us. We also received help and blessings from friends and acquaintances who we never imagined would come alongside us. The way in which we were provided with places to stay, meals to eat, cars to borrow, and visits from dozens of

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live.

DEUTERONOMY 4:9



Remembering God's mighty works in the pages of the Bible—and in the pages of our lives—gives us hope in our distress and courage in our trials.

THE ENCOURAGEMENT BIBLE

sincere friends all served to show me that this was more than mere coincidence. Someone was directing all this toward us."

Those trying, difficult days in Washington, D.C. have had a lasting impact. "My experience has given me the ability to trust God far more than I could before," Wayne says. A retired U.S. Air Force Colonel, Wayne admits he has always been a "control person." "But I'm coming to realize that God is in control more than I ever imagined. Because I've seen how in control He really is, my faith and trust in

Him grows every day, even though it's hard not knowing what's going to happen next. I am more able to accept things, even difficult things, because I can see God's faithfulness throughout the whole ordeal. Because God has been faithful in the past, I trust that He will be faithful in the future."

Maintaining that perspective when we are blinded by pain, when we don't see God's provision, when we don't feel His presence is a challenge. Pain's unrelenting presence forces us to live in the moment. Like blinders on a

horse, pain's narrow, unpleasant perspective shields us from seeing God's faithfulness in the past or His promises for the future. Pain can even blind us to God's present expressions of love, leading us to think He is not only invisible, but uninvolved.

What Wayne has learned in hindsight offers real encouragement to anyone who struggles with pain and wrestles with doubt. As he looks back on the difficult days of the past, he remembers God's faithfulness and thereby gains hope for the future. Remembering God's faithfulness in order to deal with our present challenges is a time-tested technique. In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, as the Israelites stood ready to enter the Promised Land, Moses knew they would face difficult days ahead. He would not be there to lead them, so 16 times he told them to "remember" what God had done for them in the desert.

When the pain of our immediate trial blinds us to God's presence, when our faith is shaken, we, like the children of Israel, can remember and cling to God's faithfulness. Like Wayne, we can be assured that one day, perhaps even during our lifetime, we will look back and see clearly how God's hand carried us through our present trial.

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God Made Visible

Dealing with Doubt by "Borrowing" Faith

by Kim Jones

Most of my friends are well into their "presbyopia years" when our eyes need assistance to focus on small things like printed text, jewelry clasps, and price tags. We adjust by carrying reading glasses with us everywhere. Inevitably though (perhaps because our memory is also a bit out of focus), someone in the "presbyopia crowd" can't find his or her glasses and needs to borrow a pair in order to see clearly.

When we go through a period of suffering, doubt can loom bigger than life, causing us to lose our focus on God, causing our faith to waver. It is during those times that we may need to "borrow" the faith of others to help us see clearly. For example, when my best friend was battling brain cancer, I could always tell when her faith was being shaken. I could hear it in her voice or see it in her worried expression. She was too weak and weary to focus on God, to stand firm in her faith, without help.

During those times, I would let her "borrow" my faith. I shared my eyes, eyes that were not clouded by tears, eyes that could still see a larger perspective, so that she could see God more clearly. I shared my heart, a heart not so badly bruised and battered by unanswered questions and broken dreams, so that she could feel God's presence near her. I shared my memory, a memory not altered by powerful winds of change, so that she could recall God's faithfulness. By sharing my faith, I could help my friend refocus her perspective and find peace.

When we need God's comfort and encouragement, most of us want it in a big way. We secretly long for a "burning bush" experience to erase all doubts of God's existence and to prove His involvement in our lives. But most of the time, God conveys His love through far more approachable means—through the gentle touch of a human hand or the familiar sound of a friend's voice.

Fallible as we are, God often uses human couriers to make His presence known. During his battle with cancer, Dave Dravecky learned to recognize God's love and care being expressed to him in human form. In *When You Can't Come Back*, Dave writes:

At times in the wilderness, God seemed to be distant, if not absent altogether. But just when our mouths were parched and Jan and I felt we would die of thirst, God provided a well in the wilderness, Dr. McGowen. Just when we were completely disoriented, He provided a sign pointing the way, Dr. Townsend. Just when it looked as if every trace of Him had vanished, He provided a flower—Sealy Yates. Just when it felt as if I were going to die from sunstroke, He provided shade—Atlee Hammaker. Through them we learned that God was not absent in the wilderness. He was there. We saw Him. In the caring eyes of a family doctor. In the sympathetic voice of a psychologist. In the helping hands of a friend. In the comfortable presence of a fellow ballplayer. In the arms of a loving church.

So when we question where God is in the midst of our suffering, when we begin to doubt His love and concern, we need look no farther than the hands of those who have fed, encouraged, and comforted us to see that He has been there all along.

**When we stretch out our hand to help,
we stretch out the hand of Christ's Body.**

DR. PAUL BRAND
FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE



All I have seen
teaches me to trust
the Creator for all
I have not seen.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

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The Encourager is free, a gift from us to you. Now that you've read it, become an encourager yourself and share this gift with someone you know who needs uplifting. Don't throw the gift away . . . pass it along!

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The mission of Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope is to partner with Dave and Jan Dravecky as they minister to the spiritual and emotional needs of suffering people, especially those who suffer from cancer or amputation, by offering resources for encouragement, comfort, and hope through Jesus Christ.

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