

LESSON



DEALING WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF DOUBT

“DOUBTS ARE LIKE GRAPES—THEY COME IN DIFFERENT VARIETIES AND ARE NOT EQUALLY SOUR. SOME ARE TRUTH-SEEKING AND STRENGTHEN FAITH; SOME OTHERS DON’T HAVE TRUTH AS THE GOAL.”

DR. ZACH BREITENBACH

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ROOM FOR DOUBT

Room For Doubt

Room For Doubt encourages questions, addresses doubts, and strengthens faith. It offers a variety of resources, including a great website and a cool mobile app, video and animation productions, live presentations, and a growing number of curriculum options. It is a grant-funded project at Lincoln Christian University.

The program is led by **Dr. Richard Knopp** and **Dr. Zach Breitenbach**. **Rich** is the Program Director of Room For Doubt, Professor of Philosophy and Christian Apologetics at Lincoln Christian University, and Program Director of WorldView Eyes (www.worldvieweyes.org), a grant-funded project to help high school youth understand and embrace a Christian worldview. He has degrees from St. Louis Christian College (BA), Lincoln Christian Seminary (M.Div.), Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (M.A.), and the University of Illinois (PhD in philosophy).

Zach did his academic work at North Carolina State University (BS, MBA), Lincoln Christian Seminary (MA in Apologetics), and Liberty University (PhD in Theology and Apologetics). Prior to his work with Room For Doubt, Zach worked with American Airlines and taught at a large Christian high school in Florida. He now serves as the Associate Director of Room For Doubt and is an adjunct professor at Lincoln Christian University.

How To Use This Resource

This lesson plan includes detailed outlines with fill-in blanks, “hidden text” notes with explanations and answers for blanks, recommended online videos and other resources, suggested activities, and questions for group discussion or personal reflection. It can be used in **two different ways**:

(1) Teachers can use it to present a lesson to others (e.g. face-to-face or online). It offers a complete preparation and presentation manual. If you are using this material *as a teacher*, you can print the lesson *without the hidden text* and use it as a student handout.

(2) Students can use it for self-instruction. Just go through the lesson yourself (or maybe with a few friends or family), learn what you can, watch the recommended videos, jot down responses to questions, try some of the learning activities, and choose some of the items to answer in the Discussion & Reflection Guide.

“**Hidden text**” is a feature of Microsoft Word. Hidden text is given in a shaded background to provide explanations of the lesson content along with links to suggested videos and other resources. Hidden text is also given with **yellow shading to display answers** for the fill-in blanks. If you want to see (or print) the *hidden text*, you can specify this in Word’s Preferences. (For convenience, PDF files with, and without, this hidden text are also available.)

Please encourage everyone to install and frequently use the **Room For Doubt app** (for iOS or Android). It offers great searchable resources that you can easily share with others. It also allows you to submit questions. See <https://www.roomfordoubt.com/app/> or use the QR code.



Dealing with Different Types of Doubt

Room For Doubt: “Strengthen Your Faith” Curriculum¹

www.roomfordoubt.com

Lesson Objectives: “This lesson helps students...”

1. Discover different sources of doubt.
2. Consider how different sources of doubt call for different types of responses.
3. Understand different “targets” of doubt—that doubts about some things are much more significant than doubts about other things.
4. Distinguish between doubts that are essential to Christianity and those that are not.

Introduction

- A. What kinds of things have you read about or heard about that you doubted were really true? What examples can you think of? (Think of claims made by friends or family, something you accessed online, etc.)
- B. Have you ever doubted that you were able to do a particular task or accomplish some goal? What examples can you think of?
- C. In this lesson, we will see that doubts are not all the same. Doubts come from different *sources* and they also differ in their *significance*. This is important to understand, because different kinds of doubts require different kinds of responses.

I. Different Sources of Doubt

- A. **Psychological** doubts.
 1. These come from _____ and are about ourselves.
 2. Examples?
 3. **Strategies for response.** (How can we respond to psychological doubts?)
- B. **Intellectual** doubts.
 1. Come from our _____ and pertain to the *truth* of Christianity.

Christian Smith, in his book *Soul Searching*, reports that students often leave faith behind due to intellectual doubt and skepticism (page 89). “Why did they fall away from the faith in which they were raised?” Students were asked this open-ended question (there were no multiple-choice answers). The results: 32% said they left faith behind because of intellectual skepticism or doubt. (That is, 32% said things like: “It didn’t make any sense anymore.” “Some stuff is too far-fetched for me to believe.” “I think scientifically, and there is no real proof.” “There are too many questions that can’t be answered.”)

2. **Question:** What do you think are the most common *intellectual* doubts that people have about Christianity?

¹ Room For Doubt (R4D) seeks to encourage questions, address doubts, and strengthen faith. It offers a variety of resources, including a great website and mobile app, video and animation productions, live presentations, and different curriculum options for churches, small groups, college ministries, high school camps, and high school youth groups. Be sure to install and use the Room For Doubt mobile app (for iOS or Android)! R4D is a grant-funded project at Lincoln Christian University.

3. **Strategies for response.** (How can we respond to intellectual doubts?)
- B. **Emotional** doubts.
1. Come from how we _____ about something.
 2. Two key signs that one is experiencing emotional doubt.
 3. Typical emotional (and spiritual) worries for believers. (What are some worries and emotional doubts that Christian believers face?)
 4. **Strategies for response.** (How can we respond to emotional doubts?)
- C. **Volitional** doubts.
1. **Volitional** doubts originate in our _____ or from what we truly want.

Thomas Nagel (atheist philosopher): "It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! *I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.*" (*The Last Word*, 130; emphasis added)

2. **Strategies for response.** (How can we respond to volitional doubts?)

II. Different Targets of Doubt

- A. Doubts about _____ matters.
1. Some beliefs are not essential for Christianity itself to be true.
 2. Examples?
- B. Doubts about _____ matters (what is essential).
1. Some beliefs *must be true* if Christianity itself is true.
 2. *Question:* What are some Christian beliefs that, if false, would mean that Christianity itself is false? That is, what are some things that would have to be true in order for Christianity to be true?
 3. Be really concerned only about what is _____ for Christianity.

III. Reflections

Note: Before giving or looking up the "answers," just share or reflect on some big things you've learned from this lesson.

- A. There are different _____ of doubts.
- C. Doubts are not always about _____.
- B. Christians can have a _____ assurance that *goes beyond* the intellect and evidence (Romans 8:16-17; Heb. 11:1).

Relevant Resources

- Room For Doubt keeps an updated list of recommended resources for addressing questions and doubts at <https://www.roomfordoubt.com/recommended-resources/>.
- Room For Doubt has a variety of articles in its web and mobile app that discuss doubt: <https://app.roomfordoubt.com/category/34/Doubt>.
- Here is an example of a question submitted to Room For Doubt that seems to involve emotional doubt: <https://www.roomfordoubt.com/post/wondering-about-gods-existence-prompts-panic-attacks/>.
- Two free online resources for learning more about the types of doubt are: Gary Habermas's *Dealing with Doubt* (http://www.garyhabermas.com/books/dealing_with_doubt/dealing_with_doubt.htm) and *The Thomas Factor* (http://www.garyhabermas.com/books/thomas_factor/thomas_factor.htm). In these, Habermas discusses types of doubt (with a special focus on emotional doubt, which is the most common). He also discusses how to deal with the various types of doubt.
- The Christian apologist Gary Habermas talks about emotional doubt (watch from 4:45-7:05; the rest of the video is useful too if you have time to show it): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3q0JHiLTck>. In this one-minute apologist video, J. Warner Wallace talks about the key factors that lead so many young adults who were raised in a Christian home to walk away from the church in college. He emphasizes the importance of preparing young people to know what they believe and why they believe it is true before they go off to face the intellectual and moral challenges of college. Watch here (3 min): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xPHVW_Z4w.
- The Christian apologist Sean McDowell discusses the importance of expressing your doubts and seeking answers to them. Do not hide from your doubts and do not discourage others from honestly expressing their doubts. Watch here (3 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQdlRbsyzAU>
- Richard Knopp, "[Where Will We Go Without God?](http://christianstandard.com/2014/06/where-will-we-go-without-god/)" *Christian Standard* 149 (June 2014): 38-40. <https://christianstandard.com/2014/06/where-will-we-go-without-god/>.
- David Kinnaman talks about how young adults today are different from young adults of past generations. He talks about how a big part of the problem is that young people don't feel like they can ask their most pressing questions in church. They need "real dialogue" and "real answers" about the big questions in life if they are going to be committed Christians. Otherwise the church will lose them. Intellectual doubts must be addressed. Watch here (3 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jitHsBPGtUY>.

Discussion & Reflection Guide: Dealing with Different Types of Doubt

A Resource Provided by Room For Doubt

www.roomfordoubt.com

1. What are *intellectual* doubts about Christianity? What are some intellectual doubts that you would like to have answered?
2. What are *emotional* doubts? What are some common characteristics of emotional doubt? Have you struggled with any emotional doubts concerning God, the Christian faith, or your salvation?
3. What is *volitional* doubt? Do you think this is the most serious kind of doubt? Why or why not? How might you help someone overcome volitional doubt?
4. Why is it important to consider whether a doubt that you are having has to do with something that is essential to Christianity or something that is non-essential? What sort of beliefs do you think are essential to Christianity?
5. The lesson covered four sources of doubt: psychological, intellectual, emotional, and volitional. Which one do you believe is experienced the most by your peers? Can you share some examples of doubts that you know others (or you) have had or are having? As you think about or discuss these examples, try to classify them: are they primarily psychological, intellectual, emotional, or volitional?
6. What did you learn in this lesson that you didn't know before, and how is it helpful to you?