



The Benefit of the Doubt: Claiming Faith in an Uncertain World

Frank Clark Spencer

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Doubt can rob you of spiritual fulfillment. It can drive you away from a faith community. Doubt can leave you feeling inadequate or hollow. Rather than running from doubt or struggling to defeat it, this book explores how we embrace and use doubt to claim faith in an uncertain world. This easily accessible text is uniquely written from the perspective of a lay person. It is ideally suited for small group study, officer training or personal reflection. Doubt concerning spiritual and religious matters comes in many forms. Intellectual doubt is a question of synthesizing what we know. It plagues those who struggle with squaring religious doctrine with an understanding of the universe built on scientific discoveries and proofs. Existential doubt finds its home in anxiety and often takes hold when bad things happen and life spins out of control. Ethical doubt questions how a loving God can allow the evil and suffering we see in the world. Spiritual doubt questions life after death and leads us to wonder about our place in eternity. Doubt does not recognize denomination, faith tradition, time or geography. It is a part of the human condition, but as this study explores, so is faith. In December of 2010, six pastors came together to examine questions of faith and doubt. They ranged in age from 37 to 70. There were four men and two women. They have led large churches and small churches and new churches. They have traveled the world on mission work and have run countless session meetings in countless church parlors. They have managed budgets, staff and outreach. They have studied, taught and preached. They have celebrated Holy Communion. They have baptized new members, confirmed young adults and laid saints to rest. Over two days, these six ministers explored intimate views of faith and doubt using sermons by John Rogers as a starting point. Three of those sermons are published here for the first time. This study is written from the point of view of these pastors' common parishioner. The result, as you will see, not only addresses fundamental questions of doubt in its many forms, but has broader implications for how we live and worship together in faithful congregations. The discussion did not focus on an argument for the existence of God, but rather examined what the Reformed tradition has to say about how we study, worship and live, embracing a community of faith in the face of doubt. These ministers explored the concepts of constant journey, the sovereignty of God, the faith of the community, death and resurrection, and the Reformed perspective on the good news of the Gospel.

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