**Doubt.**

It’s like a spiritual drought, a starless night of the soul, a low tide when faith seems to have retreated forever. Nearly all of us experience these dry, dark, difficult times when God doesn’t seem real and it’s hard to keep going, much less growing. Sometimes these low tides of faith relate to events ... the death of a loved one, a broken relationship, the loss of a job, a prolonged illness, questions raised by a book or professor. But sometimes they seem to come out of nowhere; it’s sunny and bright outside, but inside you feel dark, cloudy, gray, empty.

As a pastor, I must deal with matters of faith and doubt daily. But it’s not just other people’s faith struggles I must face; I experience my own high and low tides of faith even during an active ministry. Through it all, I have learned that doubt can be a doorway to spiritual growth.

Doubt is the same way. Out of control, it becomes unbelief, a hard heart, an arrogant or defeatist cynicism. But in balance, it is our Geiger counter for error. Without it, we’d be gullible, naïve, stupid ... not great spiritual qualities!

Ultimately, faith isn’t just about answers or concepts–it’s about admitting that many of life’s greatest truths are going to be mysteries to us, due to the limitations of our tiny intelligence. It’s about reaching out to God to guide us and asking for God’s help so we can be honest, good-hearted seekers.

But here’s where faith comes in–a faith that leans on God himself, and not on our own understanding, including our own theological understanding. We have the challenge of believing that good answers are out there if we only have the courage to press through the intellectual pain of questioning, seeking, learning, and stretching. I believe Jesus when he said he’ll never leave us or forsake us–and that includes even when we question. Or as Paul said, even when we are faithless, God remains faithful. It’s ironic: the freer I am to doubt my specific beliefs, the freer I become to hold on to that personal faith in God. At the point where the tide of faith seems the lowest, if we hang on and don’t give up, we’ll see it come in again. **Excerpts from Brian MacLaren, "*Doubt: The Tides of Faith" Written for Christian Single Magazine.***

**Frederick Buechner** expresses this ambivalence about doubt beautifully:

*“Whether your faith is that there is a God or that there is not a God, if you don’t have any doubts, you are either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.” (An excerpt from Wishful Thinking)*