

# Doubting Beautifully

*What If Your Uncertainty Is Actually Sacred?*

Unity on Maui | Rev. Blaine Tinsley

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## THE BIG IDEA

**Doubt is not the opposite of faith.** It is faith refusing to settle for a truth smaller than the truth itself. The great mystics, the neuroscientists, and the Gospel of John all agree uncertainty is not a spiritual problem to be solved — it is a sacred threshold to be crossed. The soul that is still asking is a soul that is still alive. The open hand is the one that gets filled.

## KEY QUOTES

*"Certainty is a closed fist. Uncertainty is an open hand."* —Terry Tempest Williams

*"In the beginner's mind, there are many possibilities. In the expert's mind, there are few."* —Shunryu Suzuki

*"Doubt was not the obstacle to the encounter. Doubt was the doorway to it."* —Terry Tempest Williams

*"I didn't lose my faith. I lost my need to be right about it."* —Brian McLaren (*Faith After Doubt: Why Your Beliefs Stopped Working and What to Do About It*)

*"Holy doubt is not the absence of faith. It is faith that has grown honest enough to keep asking."* —Brian McLaren

*"The minute I am completely certain about God, I have made God in my own image."* —Brian McLaren

*"What if the question is not a sign that you're lost? What if the question is the compass?"* —Brian McLaren

## WISDOM TRADITIONS

**Christian Mysticism:** The Via Negativa teaches that God always exceeds our concepts. Meister Eckhart: The moment we fully know God, we have made an idol. The Cloud of Unknowing counsels entering sacred darkness without a map — and finding the Holy in the not-knowing itself.

**Zen Buddhism:** Beginner's mind — shoshin — holds all possibilities open. The expert who thinks they know has quietly closed the door. Staying a beginner is one of the most advanced spiritual practices anyone can commit to.

**Sufism:** Rumi spent his creative life reaching toward a Beloved who cannot be contained in any theology. The reaching itself is the prayer. The longing is the gift.

**Unity:** Thomas represents the faculty of Understanding — one of the Twelve Powers — which must be earned through lived experience rather than inherited through information alone. Understanding requires the willingness to question.

**Thomas (John 20):** Jesus does not scold the doubter. He shows up for him, through the doubt. The wounds remain in the risen body — healing does not erase the questions. It transforms them into doorways.

## TWO KINDS OF DOUBT

**Destructive Doubt:** Curles inward into cynicism, despair, and disconnection. It says nothing is real, nothing matters, and why bother. This is a wound that needs tending — not a spiritual posture to cultivate.

**Holy Doubt:** Moves outward toward something larger and truer. Refuses to let faith stay smaller than the truth. Loves honesty more than comfort. This is not the absence of faith — it is faith at its most courageous and fully alive.

## WHAT NEUROSCIENCE TELLS US

**The brain is a prediction machine** that registers uncertainty as threat — firing the same neural circuits as physical danger. But research on **cognitive flexibility** shows that tolerance of ambiguity is one of the strongest markers of psychological maturity, resilience, and creativity. The most compassionate, creative, and resilient people are not the most certain — they are the most willing to sit with mystery.

**Contemplative practice** — meditation, centering prayer, silent sitting — directly trains this capacity. Each time you release a thought without following it, you teach your nervous system that not-knowing is survivable. *Curiosity and anxiety are the same uncertainty oriented in different directions.* Practice is how we learn — slowly, bodily — to choose curiosity over fear.

## THE SLOW ARRIVAL — A PERSONAL STORY

About twenty years ago, I was serving my first church when a board member relentlessly pressured me to be like my predecessor. I tried — genuinely — but couldn't be someone I wasn't. I pushed back. The board member grew frustrated, made up lies about my wife and me, and convinced the board to let me go. Some board members resigned rather than give in to the board members' lies.

*What followed was a long season of uncertainty: Who am I as a minister? What is my voice? What do I actually believe — not as inherited doctrine, but as something I have lived?* A nearby church hired me and loved me for five years. And then — this is not a small thing — I ended up on Maui, where I have served for fourteen years.

The voice, the depth, the style I experience today — **none of it was possible before the uncertainty.** The doubt was the doorway. The not-knowing was the teacher. The long, uncomfortable season of questions was not the detour from the calling — **it was how the calling got built.**

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*Take your time. The right question will have a little heat in it.*

1. **Is** there a question you have been avoiding because you are afraid of where it might lead? What would it mean to simply sit with it — without rushing to resolve it?
2. Can you name a season of uncertainty you later recognized as a threshold — a place where something in you was being stretched open rather than broken apart?
3. **Where** are you currently performing certainty rather than honoring what you actually feel or believe?
4. **What** would it mean for your faith to be large enough to hold your doubt? What would need to change in how you relate to God, prayer, or community?
5. **Thomas** touched the wounds and found presence rather than proof. Where in your life might presence be available — if you stopped demanding proof first?
6. **Think** of a time when not-knowing led you somewhere richer than any answer you had planned. What did that season teach you about trust?

## PRACTICAL TOOLS

1. **The Sacred Pause:** When doubt arises, resist the reflex to resolve it immediately. Give the question 24 hours. Let it speak before you reach for an answer.
2. **Reframe the Question:** Replace Why don't I know? What is this uncertainty inviting me toward? This single shift moves the question from threat to teacher.
3. **Say It Out Loud:** Find one trusted person this week and tell them something you genuinely don't know. Shame that lives in secret doubt dissolves quickly in honest community.
4. **Contemplative Sitting:** Even five minutes of silent sitting each morning — releasing thoughts without following them — teaches your nervous system that not-knowing is sacred, not dangerous.
5. **Journal Prompt:** What question am I most afraid to sit with — and what might it be trying to show me?
6. **Read and Reflect:** Read John 20:24–29 slowly, three times. Each time notice which word or phrase catches your attention. Let that word be your companion for the day.

## THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE

Choose one question you have been carrying and instead of trying to answer it, **let it walk with you for seven days**. Notice what arises. Write down anything that surfaces — not as a final answer, but as a continuing conversation. At the end of the week, sit quietly and ask yourself: *What did the question teach me that an answer never could?*

## GOING DEEPER

*Books worth exploring:*

*The Cloud of Unknowing* — Anonymous (14th c.)  
*Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* — Shunryu Suzuki  
*Learning to Walk in the Dark* — Barbara Brown Taylor  
*The Gift of Imperfection* — Brene Brown  
*When the Heart Waits* — Sue Monk Kidd  
*Everything Belongs* — Richard Rohr  
*Dark Night of the Soul* — St. John of the Cross

## A CLOSING THOUGHT

*"Thomas put his hand into the wound and found — not proof — but presence. Maybe that is all any of us are really looking for. Not the closed answer, but the open encounter. Not the map, but the living company of the One who says: Here. Come. See."*

**You are not lost because you are still asking.**

*You are exactly where the journey gets real.*

## UNITY FIVE PRINCIPLES

1. God is the source and creator of all. There is no other enduring power.
2. We are each an expression of God; the Christ spirit dwells within each of us.
3. We co-create our reality through our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs.
4. Through prayer and meditation, we align our hearts with God.
5. Knowledge of these principles is not enough — we must live them.

## A PRAYER FOR THE QUESTIONING HEART

*Spirit of all wisdom — meet me in my not-knowing. Let my questions become doorways, my uncertainty become humility, and my honest seeking become the prayer you most love to answer. Amen.*

## THIS WEEK'S AFFIRMATION

*I release the need for certainty and open to the wisdom that lives in my questions.*