

Questions & Doubts: When Your Child's Faith Is Uncertain

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SUMMARY

In this episode of the Connected Families podcast, host Stacy Belward discusses how parents can respond to their children's doubts about faith. Joined by guests Bonnie Williams and Chad H, they explore the emotional challenges parents face when their children question their beliefs and emphasize the importance of maintaining open communication and unconditional love.

- *Parents often feel anxious when children express doubts about faith, prompting a need for self-reflection on their own feelings.*
- *Establishing a safe and connected relationship with children is crucial for open discussions about faith and doubts.*
- *Encouraging curiosity and asking open-ended questions can help children articulate their feelings and doubts.*
- *Parents should model authentic faith and demonstrate that it's normal to question beliefs without fear of judgment.*
- *Prayer and scripture can provide comfort and a sense of control for parents feeling helpless about their children's faith journey.*
- *It's important to recognize that each child's faith journey is unique, and parents should avoid imposing their expectations.*
- *Grieving the loss of expected faith outcomes is a natural part of parenting, and parents should seek support from others.*
- *The podcast emphasizes trusting in God's plan and the Holy Spirit's role in guiding children's hearts back to faith.*

[Music] hey everybody welcome back I'm Stacy belward the host of the connected families podcast Welcome to our community we are people committed to pursuing God's grace and truth for ourselves and then daily working to pass that Grace and Truth onto our children I'm so glad that you are here today well you know as people of faith our hearts great desire is that our children would follow Jesus so it can really shake us up when we hear questions from our kids

such as why should we pray for Grandma she didn't get better last time well it's true our children each have to decide for themselves whether they will trust Christ many of us have asked the question then how should I respond if my child is already struggling with their faith today I invited two guests onto the show One Bonnie Williams she is a connected family's certified parent coach and a mom also with us is Chad H Chad is the

connected fames Director of Education and equipping he is over our coaching certification program and the

newly launched partnership program we're excited about that you can actually tap through to our show notes and send a link with the partnership information to maybe your pastor or your preschool director or Christian School so that they might explore how all of our resources could support the families they work with well without further ado

let's get on with the show so Chad welcome to the podcast again thanks Stacey glad to be here glad to have you on again and we have one of your connected families parent coaches with us Bonnie Williams welcome oh thank you so much it's great to be here we're glad to have you you know a topic that brings a lot of emotion in parents and we're talking about the question of how to respond respond when our children are

doubting in their faith and Bonnie we're just grateful for you to be here and so I just want to start off the podcast today with you giving us a summary of the story of your family and then we're going to jump into a conversation between the three of us where we're really walking through how do we as parents respond when our kids ask us questions that we take a Big Gulp when we hear them so Bonnie go ahead why

don't you share your story thanks Stacy well you know I'm GNA back up a little bit and just share a little bit of my story first you know I grew up as a missionary kid and a pastor's kid overseas for many years and I was able to watch many kids of missionaries and pastors really struggle in their faith and many of them walk away from their faith or really question so many things

about the Lord and that was hard that was really hard to watch that and so when I became a parent I was so intentional about really doing all that I could and my husband as well just doing all that we could to be intentional in our parenting with our children to family devotions and you know take them to church and take them to church and be faithful in that but not only that but to live authentically in our faith to be open

with the hard questions and to do those things that we hoped and prayed would set them on a path to help them Embrace their faith but we knew we were not naive we knew that those things would not be a guarantee to them embracing their faith we knew that one day they would have to own their faith for themselves and so you know as they grew up we encouraged and they all trusted the Lord as their savior we were

thrilled for that but you know as kids get older and they become more independent they you know begin to separate from their parents which is what they should do you know that is a natural thing they begin to question you know one of our kids they they did Embrace their faith but another one they just began to question didn't really want to go to church as much and uh we we try to stay really safe emotionally

and love them unconditionally but you you know that was that became a little bit difficult as they really started to question those things and so we began to Grapple with that and you know what is that going to look like for our home because we'd always gone to church and we'd always taken them to church and what does that look like in a Christian home and and so you know I have to say connected families was just so helpful

to me during those times and I thought what am I going to do with this now I mean not go to church what do what is that I mean what are we going to do with that right everybody goes to church in a Christian home and so they're going to see people are going to notice they're not with us it's going to be embarrassing what are we GNA say right all those things and so you know I

thought thought of the course arguing more wisdom the power of questions that oh what a lifesaver and so one day I just thought you know what I'm going to ask this child a curious question and so the question was I'm curious about what your thoughts are about God right now and I am telling you that question was just so powerful and they just sat there quietly and thought about that question because you know they had not really

opened up to me even though I could see in their heart that they were beginning to become more distant to the Lord they did not feel free to share with me about that in that moment I I wasn't sure I'm not sure about God right now I'm not sure about his existence I need to see evidence and they really had some questions about God and their faith and boy was that a shock to me I had not

heard them verbalize those things before and it was because of these curious questions that I was able to ask them and they really opened up and we had this powerful conversation and I really believe it was because I was able to stay safe emotionally and love unconditionally and they knew that I wasn't going to judge them or shame them for their responses and I have to say just so grateful for connected families and the tools that had been invested in

me as a parent for that moment and for that day really what I felt in that moment also as that child just really crawled up in my lap and we wept together was what they were saying was Mom can you help me feel safe today can you help me feel safe in a very uncertain world and a very uncertain time in my faith and that was the message and so we're sticking together we're on a journey and the story isn't

done being written and I believe God will continue to pursue my children and continue to write their story We believe that with you for sure it could feel very un safe for kids when they're young and they're starting to question what they know to be the faith fabric of the family yes yeah and they feel bad you know my children are people Pleasers and they feel bad that they have not

embraced the faith of the family and Christian parents have to be aware of that if you have compliant children they will feel guilt from that they will and I guess in some way that guilt might be a little healthy like maybe the Holy Spirit could use that to say things aren't the way they should be maybe I don't know but we do trust the Holy Spirit he's working in that isn't he yeah he can work through that to let

them know that my child you're not where you should be come back to the fold but that's his job yeah that's his job Well Chad I'd like to invite you into the conversation I'd like to spend the rest of our time together just having a conversation around this and how parents can respond and It just strikes me that possibly the number one place to start is our own anxiety you know Bonnie as you told the story you

were it felt really peaceful like like you were in a very peaceful place but I can't imagine that you were always there so Shoring up that Foundation of what's going on in me you know how did you show up safe is I think let's start there in unpacking this story Chad do you have anything to add right there and then we can unpack it more I think that the thing that stands out to me is Bonnie being aware and then asking the

question and there had to be some level of connectedness and relationship in order for a child to respond in that sort of way sometimes I think we believe as parents that if we open the door and we ask the question that that might somehow allow or cause a child to say I'm really doubting or I'm really struggling actually I think it's a relief to the child to to be like oh somebody sees me they're recognizing these kinds of things and there are some

people who come to Faith and they don't doubt they just they just believe and they have this faith that that they just don't really doubt very much but there are people who doubt and I think if if we're afraid of doubts we create a culture that says don't ask questions a lot of our kids are not wired that way they ask questions and if we're afraid to hear the questions they're asking they'll go somewhere else and find

answers and so I think the thing that strikes me just about what you're talking about Bonnie is just the the connected relationship in order to be able to to jump into that have the conversation and feel comfortable enough for your child to to express the real stuff right and you can't deal with you can't deal with things until you get to the real stuff like what's the true and hard thing to say but it needs to be

said so that just jumps out to me is is creating that connected place to have that kind of conversation yeah and you know just I want to encourage parents you know if if you want to have a connected relationship with your teenagers it has to start when they're babies and then when they're one and then when they're two and when we're three it's never too late to start if you say if you're hearing this and saying oh

it's too late you know they're five and six just start start with whatever age they are because then they will want to listen to you and hopefully have a relationship with you when they're 16 and 17 if you want the right to be heard when they're older it really needs to start building that Foundation when they're younger and it's hard it's hard teenagers you know sometimes they don't think that parents have any good advice at all um but really invest in that

relationship when they're younger if possible yeah I can remember when my girls were little and I remember one of the questions that they asked when they were young I mean I feel like it was six or seven and it was the question that gives a gulp for a parent right it was you know let's pray for grandma because she's sick and I remember the question was well we prayed last time and she didn't get better so why should we do it

now right the this is just six-year-old doubting six-year-old seven-year-old doubting and so that's kind of what you just saying bu right like am I am I staying curious am I staying safe even when they're having this very natural question and they're young so how do I respond in that moment and I think you know it's it's doing what you've already modeled Bonnie but it's staying present staying empathetic yeah it does sound like that I can remember it was during

the same time she said I took a vitamin mom why aren't I better there you go do you know what I mean it's like we did it it should happen so even understanding the development of the stage um as far as faith I think is important but it got older too it was you know can I trust God when I pray because I want to get on to this theater production you know I have an audition or onto this sports

team or you know how do we respond to those things when kids are asking you know is God trustworthy because I didn't see him trustworthy to heal Grandma before yeah and those are heavy things that parents need to I think really think about how you want to answer that and I think our go-to many times as Christian parents is to get real preachy sometimes you know judgmental and a little legalistic sometimes and says oh you shouldn't doubt and and make them

feel all guilty for asking these questions and right and what that does it just shut them down Y and makes them not want to ask questions the next time you know how how dare you ask that about God of course you should trust and we and we just really shut down those whole curious question types of things and that's the opposite really of what we should be doing we should welcome those hard questions because those are the

things that are going to strengthen their faith yeah know why you believe what you believe you know that's what's building the foundations of their faith and empathy to me was just so important during those times and those conversations like that yeah it is hard and I can understand how didn't seem like Grandma got better but over time she got better she doesn't have that anymore it's harder when they have something that they are still sick from

maybe a chronic disease or something like that but you're right then we go to the character of God what we believe about the character of God and other places of his character where he is faithful and these are hard conversations aren't they yeah a couple thoughts too that that whether our kids are six and seven and eight and asking questions that we're unsure of or or that maybe we just want to shut down or there's evidence that maybe they're

they're questioning some things or whether they're you know teenagers or young adults and they've said I'm done I I am over this stuff that's your thing I'm not doing it uh forget it whatever it might be and it won't be a surprise to anybody who's been around connected families for any length of time but the question that we're asking before we get into what are we going to do here is really that that foundational question of like what's going on inside of me

what is happening here and often times our kids are asking the questions that maybe we've actually had or we don't know the answer and I think we've kind of been conditioned in a lot of ways to to be the answer people we know the answer and here it is and when I don't know the answer I get uncomfortable and I can easily want to shut the conversation down because I don't know what to say and so I think there's a a

level of managing our own anxiety like hold on here a second what is going on with me that causes me to want to shut this down or get preachy give the right answers whatever it might be and I think that's the discovery

piece here that I think Bonnie even as you're talking and the story that you're relaying is like okay that's safe with me peace this does not define me I am not defined by my child's doubts or by their unbelievable

faith I am defined by God it's a settled issue right so my my identity is secure here and I think that's a really important piece for any parent who's hearing this and you're fearful about your kids future and we start to catastrophize that it's like oh man if they don't believe now then they're going to be and we start borrowing trouble from tomorrow and the next year and the next year rather than just staying where we're at hold on a second

what's going on God right uh and taking a breath and being prayerful and not reactive I think is so important here so what's going on inside of me is great for parents of two year olds and great for parents of 22 year olds and and Beyond but I think that's an important piece that we that we want to start with here in this conversation you just took the words right out of my mouth because I think the the greatest anxiety for

parents is first of all are they ever going to come back to their faith yep you know if you told me you know B don't worry in six months everything's going to be fine okay I'm good you know but no parent knows and so it's that it's that worry of what is going to happen and so it's really an opportunity for parents to grow their faith and trust in the Lord and realize this is not for me

to control this is not for me to control and they are not my report card we have done all that we can do and have we been perfect no but we have done all that we can do to show our children children that our faith is authentic and it's the most important thing being happy is not the most important thing a job is not the most important thing an authentic walk with Christ is the most important

thing in our lives and we wish with all of our hearts that you would want that too but at the end of the day it's up to you and we're going to pray for you and that's all that we can do and they're responsible for their choices just like the me the four messages the fourth one they're responsible for that choice and uh we're going to trust God that he's going to chase after them and pursue

them with his love and his grace and his Mercy but it's between he and them I love that Bonnie because to me that's even the what's going on inside of me work is remembering God's role in this that the holy spirit is the one who draws Hearts to him yes so that's God's job like my role what I'm responsible for yeah is to grow my relationship with him to receive God's grace and to pass

on God's grace and truth to live the authentic faith that I want to have in front of my kids model it essentially yeah yeah I like that and ultimately they will be responsible for deciding what they want to do but I can't control that yeah I I appreciate sha McDow he relays a story of having some doubt when he was 19 years old and his father Josh mcdal who's one of the you know the most influential apologists

for the Christian faith in the in the 20th century he told his dad Josh mcdal that he wasn't sure he believed in

this Christian stuff anymore his dad simply encouraged me to seek truth and wanted to be sure I knew his love for me was unconditional he didn't freak out he wasn't threatened he simply gave me space to work through my doubts and I think that he loved me unconditional right his love for me was unconditional

he didn't freak out he wasn't threatened if there's anybody I would expect to be threatened because of an identity like wait a second the son of you know my son better believe and if not but it it just shows again a foundation a recognition that God is the one who is in charge here that it is not me that this might be a little uncomfortable and it might be a little rocky my faith doesn't need to be shaken by this

pronouncement or this declaration that a child might give me I think he must have gone through the connected families coaching Chad there you go yeah certainly rooted right in an identity that wasn't shaken by his son I think he did yeah you're safe with me I think that message and then the second message you're love no matter what comes shining through too it does I love you no matter what unconditionally that story when I heard

that I'm like what in the world that is so powerful amazing yes so good and and then to borrow something out of the power of questions online course all of this means that as parents we can play the long game you mentioned not catastrophizing Chad right because that's what anxiety makes us want to do yes and then get strong or respond the way Bonnie you had alluded to you explained once right like no we can't doubt we can't you know it's you can't

think that way about God God is good don't you know God is good you know we can hold all that back and push it down because we're playing the long game we know the holy spirit is the one who draws we know we're secure and then we can come in with curious questions and we can be safe in the moment when our kids are questioning no matter no matter what age we can empathize with them in

the stage that they're in and really be listening to the Holy Spirit and how to respond and you know when to ask questions I can remember the day one of my said to me well Mom if I really am all in on this do I have to study the Bible as much as you do was almost as if that was holding her back like that's what she thought like if I'm all in with God I have to be you

know this way that my mom's modeling and I just remember like pausing and saying to her you know what your journey with God is going to look totally different than with me and that took a minute right because I because I love the Bible and I wanted to say oh yes you'll love the word of God As a Christian you're going to love reading the Bible or it has to happen no I didn't do that and I

really felt like that was the moment where I could tap into all this work that we've done and then ask the Holy Spirit how to respond and that's um she swallowed and listened you know you can hear that pause that your kids do this is a great conversation I wonder if either of you just have any closing thought I have a verse that you know during this time you know as a parent you kind of feel helpless because you

obviously you can't control the situation you can't make your child own their faith the Lord just really led me to start praying scriptures over my kids and then I felt like I was in control the only control I have is to pray more and that helped me feel more grounded and like I I could do something just pray scripture and so the scripture that I love is from Ephesians 3:18 to 19 it says and just pray this for our kids

may they have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ for them and to know this love that surpasses knowledge that they might be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God and it's really isn't it the love of God that's going to draw them it's not the rules or the regulations or us badgering them or controlling them that's going to draw them it's it's the

love and the grace and the mercy of God that's going to bring them back to him and you know I just pray that whatever they're chasing after would pale in comparison to this deep love of God they would desire to live near to him and desire to live in relationship with him that's really my prayer for my children I love that Bunny and I pray that too and I also pray real spiritual warfare prayers over my kids and see that as really part of

my role yes to just cutting off the work of the enemy who does want to kill steal and destroy them yes and so I try to put more in or as much energy as I can into that I would say that's right and protection from that and The Temptations are every aren't there that's good Stacy and I would add to that the practice of fasting was uh something important for my wife and I as as uh in certain situations in family

life it's like all right again these aren't formulas but there are things that we see in Scripture that Jesus did that he would expect that his disciples and followers would do as well so fasting I think was a important part of even spiritual warfare uh I appreciate the the statement that is made in the book sticky Faith from caral and chap Clark that show that young people don't often abandon their faith solely because of Doubt but it is usually because of

unexpressed Doubt okay that is kind of that corrosive to Faith and so so inviting your kids to have conversations where might they doubt open the door to conversations rather than try to keep those things sealed up or somehow we need to defend God uh like well here's the answer for that like if we have all the answers all the time which we don't we can can we be okay with a little bit of messy we don't know you know all of

the things or why God does why what he does so right I think just a couple other maybe practical pieces here uh find people if you're in this space just find people who are supportive of you who will walk with you and I'm not talking about hundreds or you or dozens or whatever but who are the three or four or six people that really will join you in in the struggle here and support you and encourage you and pray for your

kids and I also think it's it's not about throwing your kids under the bus well see I we raised them right but here they went and they did this sort of thing it's like no I want to be protective of them it's like yeah hey they are in a place where they're they're exploring some things and good for them right because when they come back to Faith that will be a strengthened faith because they can doubt they can question they can Wonder

and you know so I think almost that that hope-filled message that we can offer here it's not over the story's not written here and then I think the last thing I'll say about this is that we recognize that sometimes we're grieving a loss and we had a hope and a dream and a desire and suddenly it's like oh that hurts so badly and I think we can just own that and say this hurts and and I'm

am sad about where things have gone I think there's just a a a being okay we can be real we can lament even before the Lord about those things this is not what I had expected and yet God is working he's faithful and I just love I pray this regularly for people who have walked away from faith it says in Luke 15:17 It's the story of The Prodigal Son and it says when he had come to his

senses he said what am I doing here right my father treats his servants better than this and so sometimes it's just that Lord would you help this child come to their senses there's a place there that we want to encourage each parent who's listening today it is a hard spot if you have somebody who's walked away from Faith that's close to you in particular a child uh it's a hard place but God is right there with you

and he is not ringing his hands about this he has got a purpose and a plan and uh so we would uh we would want to join you in praying for you and with you that God would draw the hearts of uh of our prodigal children as our wandering children back to himself amen thanks for that Chad I wonder Bonnie would you mind closing us with a prayer that you just pray for all the parents who are

listening to this and no matter what age their kids are their kids who are having some doubts you just pray for them right now be happy too father I just pray I pray that um you would take great Delight in our children I pray that you would Rejoice over them with great singing I pray that you would hold them fast I pray father that you would help us as parents to just be cm in our spirit that you would help us to know

that you are in control as Chad said you are not ringing your hands you are not surprised by the events of this day or the events of tomorrow but you father are so in control you want to draw near to our children your heart is for them and Lord and we know that you are going to chase after them and God would you just do a work in our homes today would you do a work first in our hearts would

you help it start with us first God I'm so grateful that you are a God who sees us a God who wants to be near us you are a God who cares you are a god that is power ful and thank you Father that you are a God who can give us peace in the midst of a storm in the midst of a struggle so we commit our children to you today and we're going to give you

the glory and the praise for what you're going to do in Jesus name amen well thank you Bonnie for being with us today it's such a pleasure to be with both of you all today yeah thank you Chad thanks for being on thanks for having us well thanks for tuning in today friends we are a listener supported organization over 50,000 parents like you listen to the podcast every month would you help us bridge the gap we are working to

close a \$100,000 Gap so that we can end our fiscal year strong your individual donation this month will make a big impact as we work to equip and encourage families thank you for considering a generous donation for more information about connected families follow us on Instagram or Facebook or go to connectedfamilies.org I will see you next [Music]

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