



Biblical Counselling UK

Talking Church

How personal conversations
grow local congregations

Mon 21 – Wed 23 March 2022



WORKSHOP 4

Conversations
with those
experiencing doubt

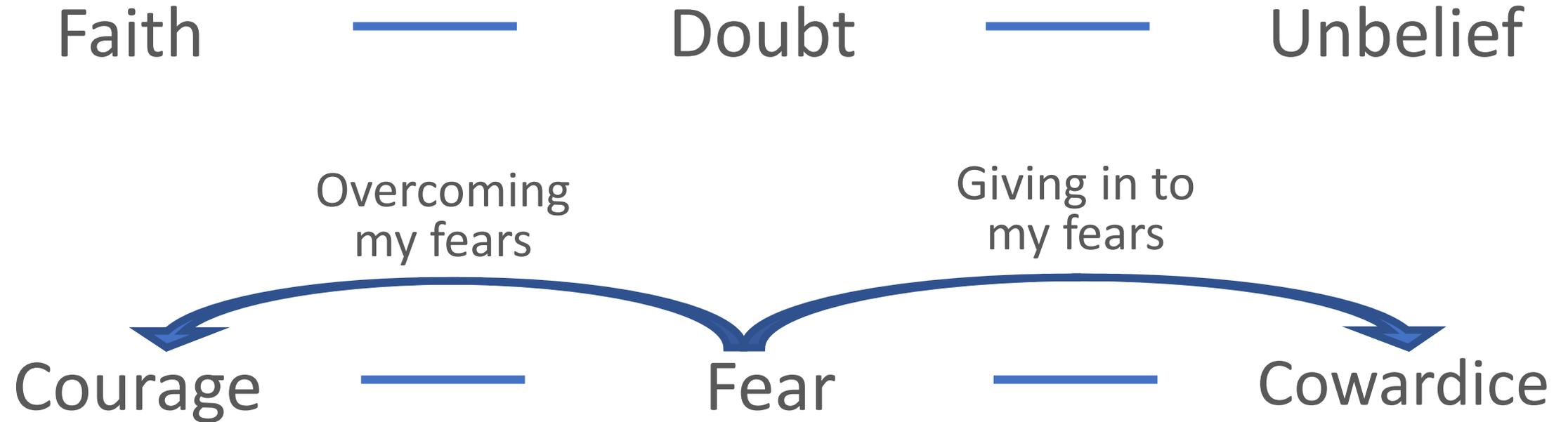
Steve Midgley

Discussion: What is 'doubt'?

- *'Doubt is the opposite of faith'*
- *'Doubt, like cynicism, is a hallmark of our age'*
- *'Doubts need cultivating – they are a sign of health'*
- *'Having no doubts is like having no antibodies – very vulnerable'*
- *'The person who doubts is spiritually unstable'*
- *'Doubting people need to purify their sinful hearts'*
- *'Doubt helps create much needed flexibility in our faith'*
- *'Doubt is essentially proud'*
- *'We are too negative about doubt – there's lots that's good about doubt'*



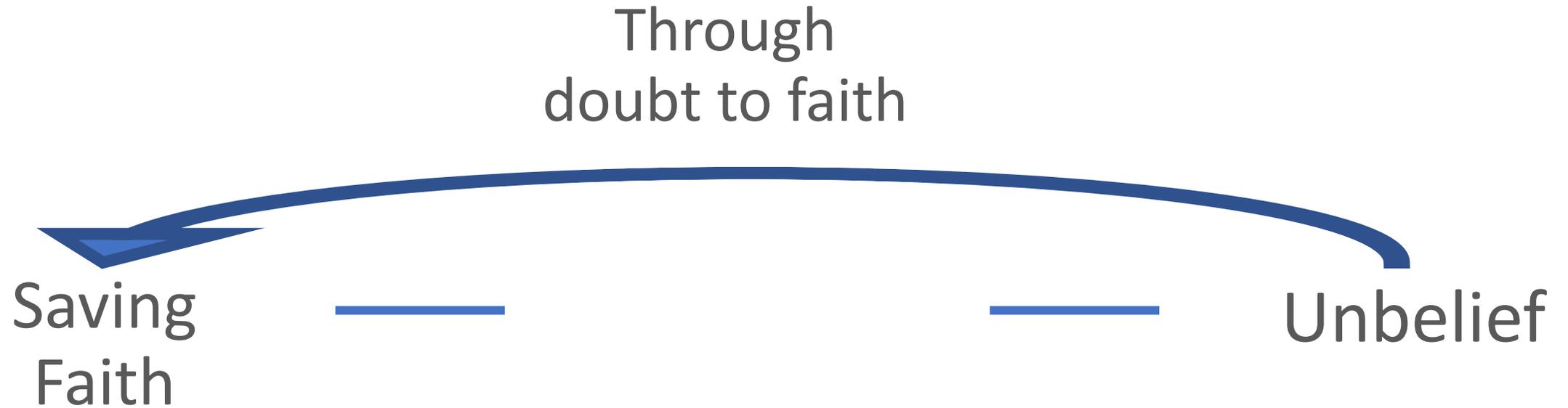
Faith and Doubt aren't opposites



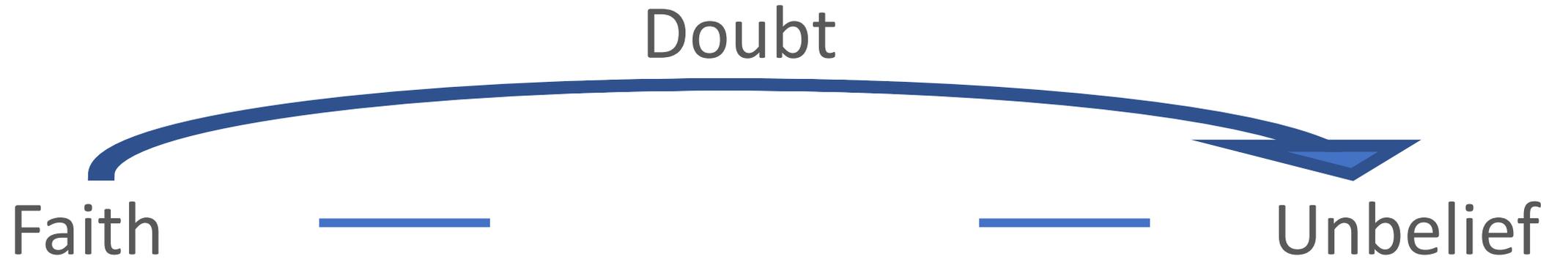
Doubt like a lobby... with different directions of travel



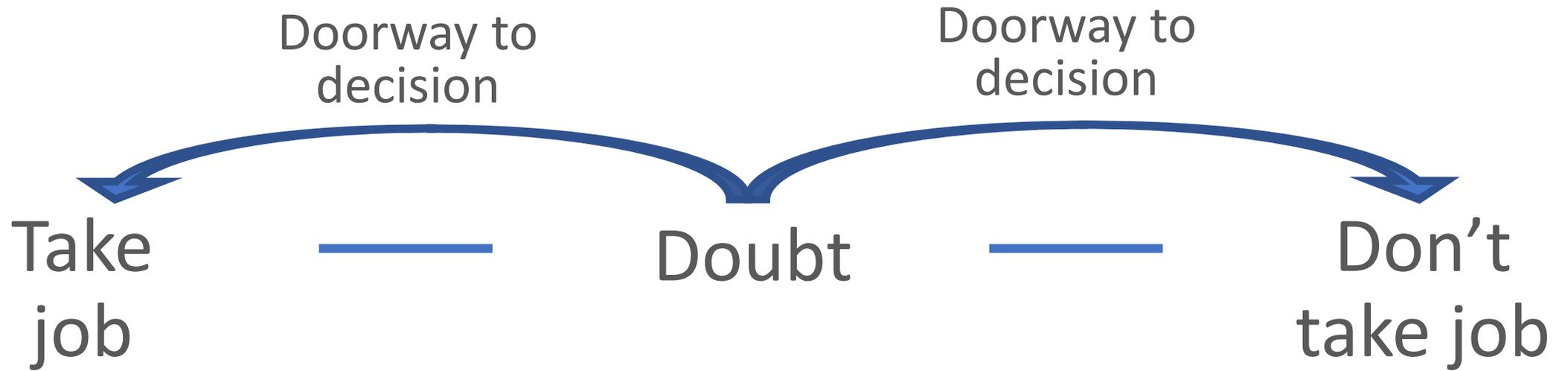
Doubt about saving faith in Christ



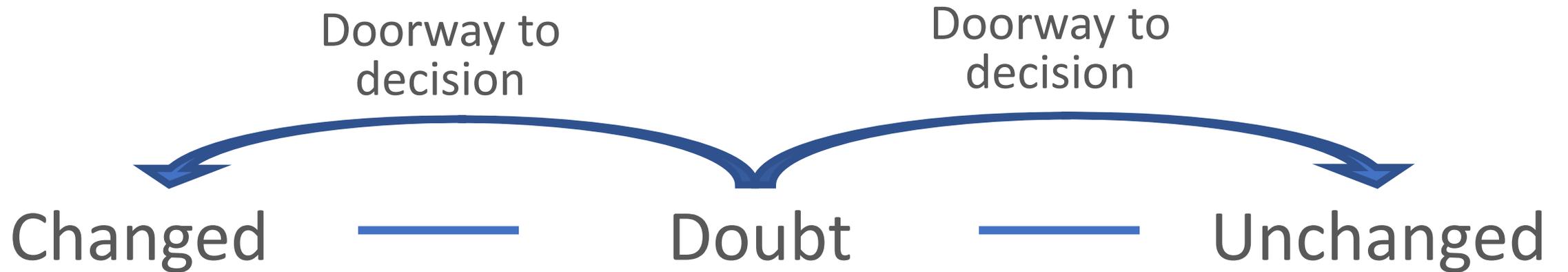
Doubt about saving faith in Christ



Doubt about a decision



Doubt is often a counsellor's friend



‘I believe, help my unbelief’

Mark 9:21-15

Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?”

“From childhood,” he answered. ²² “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

²³ ““If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

²⁴ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, **“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”**

²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”



Discussion: life examples

A man comes to see you about his marriage. He and his wife are both believers and a year ago she disclosed that she had been having an affair for 6 months. She was repentant and had already ended the affair. She regretted what she had done and wanted to make their marriage work. He agreed to forgive her and work to repair their marriage. Now, a year on, he is worrying that he made the wrong decision and is beginning to doubt that he has the strength to carry on in the marriage.



Discussion: life examples

A woman is three and half months pregnant. At 11 weeks into the pregnancy, she discovered that she was carrying a baby with Down's Syndrome. She took advice and decided to carry on with the pregnancy.

But now she is having second thoughts and has begun to doubt that she has the strength to care for a child with Down's syndrome. She is thinking about a termination.



Discussion: life examples

A man doubting his ability to stay in a marriage after his wife's affair.
A woman doubting her ability to care for a child with Down's syndrome.

- **How will you talk with each of them about these doubts?**
- **What principles about doubt, decisions and godliness will shape your approach?**
- **What differences can you see about the doubt in these two situations – will that affect your counsel?**



‘Doubt – faith in two minds’

James 1:5-8

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.



‘Doubt – faith in two minds’

James 4:7-10

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.



Discussion: life examples

You meet with a 30 year old man from your church. A mutual friend in the church has told you that this man is struggling with doubt and asks if you would see him to try and help. That's all you know.



Conversation A

When you meet and talk, he is very unforthcoming. He plays down the severity of his doubt but does acknowledge that his questions about the faith seem to have grown as he has got older and particularly over the past year.

He doesn't identify any specific intellectual struggles he is having in relation to his faith, nor does he seem to have any particular questions he wants to ask you.

The conversation meanders and you can't quite work out where to take it...



Conversation B

When you meet and talk, it is soon clear that this man is stuck in regard to faith. He grapples with all sorts of intellectual issues.

He says that he used to believe and still respects the belief of others but is increasingly thinking it would be intellectually dishonest to do so while he has so many unanswered questions.



Discussion: life examples

One man has doubts but you aren't sure what they are all about...
Another man is deeply troubled by a range of issues and is actively exploring them.

What approaches would you take to these two men?

Do they need to hear arguments for the faith, warnings about unbelief or something else?

How would you suggest talking things through with them both?



Mike Emlet on religious scrupulosity

Because of this quest for absolute certainty, there is a constant search for the highest authority whose knowledge will eliminate all ambiguity. But ultimately the sufferer becomes the highest authority: “What if I’m right and you’re wrong?” becomes the end game because “How can others know my mind?” Ultimately, this is a self-referential epistemology.

