

## The weak in faith

By [Diane Roth](#)

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I had this experience a few years ago, so I don't remember exactly how it happened.

It was after a funeral. I was sitting with a couple who were visiting our congregation, but it turned out they had connections with my husband's church, so we began to chat. And (here's where I get fuzzy) I don't know how this came up or what I said exactly, but I must have said something about "the historical view" or "the critical view" of the Bible, and they both got this stricken, deer-in-the-headlights look, a look that told me that they were afraid, very afraid of what I might be implying with just a few words. So I remember that I backpedaled, said something innocuous until they looked a little more relaxed, as if it was safe to believe again.

I had just gotten the feeling that they were, without words, telling me "If you go any farther along this line, you will cause us to lose our faith." I don't know if this is true, but those were the vibes that I got.

The Bible is a dangerous book. In many ways.

I just read something a fellow pastor wrote about those "Read the Bible in one Year" or "Read the Bible in 90 Days" programs. She said she was not sure she wanted to do that again. Last time she did, she lost a couple of families. Every time they turned around, they were reading about wars.

I know there are people sitting in the pews every Sunday, reading along with the Bible stories we read, and in their hearts they are saying, "Give us permission to question, Pastor. We want to believe, and we want to question too. Because, you know, some of this is hard to believe. And if we think we have to swallow it whole, we might just lose our faith."

Yesterday's lectionary readings included a section of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. It's about a certain practice alien to us but intensely relevant to the Corinthian church: eating meat which had been sacrificed to idols. Some people think it's okay

to eat, and some people have an attack of conscience when they see other people eating. Paul recommends abstaining from eating if it will help those who are "weak in faith".

All of this might make your eyes glaze over. It's just not something that we care much about these days. As far as I know, none of the meat at the supermarket has been sacrificed to idols. So, we're okay.

But I can't help thinking about Paul's phrase, "the weak in faith." Who are the weak in faith? I mean, these days. Because the idea is not to do something that will cause them to lose their faith.

And these days, when I think about what will cause people to lose their faith, one of the first things that comes to mind is how we read the Bible. Do we refrain from bringing up questions in and about the Bible because it might cause some among us to stumble? Or is it possible that not bringing up questions is a bigger offense?

I will tell you that I lean the second way. Because I believe that the Bible is God's Word, in all of its puzzling complexity, with all of its stories, strange or comforting.

Still, it gives me pause.

Who are the weak in faith?

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