

Doubting God - Doubting Ourselves

As Pastor David has been leading us through this series on *Doubting God*, he has reminded us that even the disciples had doubts about Jesus. Peter had doubts about the power of Jesus even as he walked on the water with Him. And Thomas, the disciple who wasn't with the others when Jesus first appeared after the resurrection, Thomas doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead at all. Thomas said, *If I can't put my hands in the marks of the nails and put my hand in the wound on his side - I will not believe.*

We all experience doubts, it's what we do with those doubts that matters. What Thomas *didn't* do with his doubt was use it as an excuse to walk away from Jesus. Thomas was still with the disciples a week later when Jesus appeared a second time. Thomas hadn't given up. He hadn't walked away from what he did believe about Jesus just because he couldn't believe this one thing, and he didn't walk away from his community of faith, the disciples, just because they believed something different. Thomas stuck around and tried to make sense out of it all and that's when Jesus appeared to him and said, *put your hand in my hands. Place your hand in my side. Do not doubt but believe.*

Peter had doubts about Jesus and His ability to help him walk on water. While Peter was the one disciple courageous and faithful enough to step out of the boat, when he started to doubt Jesus, he started to sink. When things didn't go the way he thought they should, Peter didn't use his doubt to reject Jesus. He stepped into the boat and then kept going. He kept walking with Jesus when they got to shore. Neither Thomas nor Peter allowed their doubts to drive them away from their faith - it drove them deeper. They stayed around, they persevered, and they listened, explored and took small steps forward and found that their faith grew stronger through the doubts.

This needs to be our response when we doubt God. We can't walk away, we need to persevere. We need to keep walking with Jesus and see what we can learn, what God has to say to us, and what we can experience from it all.

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The other thing Pastor David shared that is so important for us to remember is that when those around us have doubts about God and their faith, our response personally and as a church needs to mirror the response of Jesus. Jesus didn't condemn or shame Thomas or Peter. He didn't put them down or push them away, He did the exact opposite - He reached out to help them.

When Peter doubted the power of Jesus to help him walk on the water, Jesus reached out His hand to save him. The hand of Jesus lifted him up. And when Thomas doubted the resurrection of Jesus, Jesus didn't force him out of the upper room, He appeared and reached out His hand to help him believe. When those around us express their doubts and questions about God, when they struggle to make sense of their faith, with love and grace we need to reach out our hands and hearts and offer them support and help.

Two important truths to remember: *when* we have doubts (and we will have them) we need to keep going and reach out to the hand Jesus offers us because it will always be there. And when those around us have doubts, we need to be the hand of Jesus and reach out in love to them. If we will live this way with our doubts, our doubts can lead us, and those around us, into a deeper understanding of who God is, what it means to follow Jesus, and how we can truly get the most we can out of our faith

But sometimes it's not our doubts about God that hold us back in our faith, it's the doubts we have about ourselves. We believe in God. We believe in Jesus and His resurrection. We believe we are forgiven because of the cross, but we just can't believe that God would forgive me. We doubt that God can love us that much. We doubt that God can or wants to use us with all our problems, insecurities, and failures. For many of us it is the doubts we have about ourselves that hold us back in our faith

If you are experiencing these kinds of doubts and find them holding you back in faith, hear what the Apostle Paul said:

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10

The word **handiwork** can also be translated as **masterpiece** and it means **a creation with a designated purpose**. In other words, each one of us was designed by God for a specific purpose. Each one of us can be used by God to shine His light, share His glory, and spread His love in ways that no one else can. But it's easy for us to doubt this. We look around and see people with more faith, more talent, more wisdom and knowledge, more gifts and skills and we begin to doubt what we have to offer.

These are doubts we all face. It's easy for me to look around and see pastors who are more gifted preachers, better teachers, more courageous visionaries, smarter administrators and simply more faithful than I am. When I see this, I begin to doubt that I am a person God can use or wants to use. There are simply so many better people out there - why would God want to use me with all my insecurities, failures, and doubts.

If you have these kinds of doubts, I have some good news for you - God delights in using people just like you for His purpose. All through the Bible we find God using people who were filled with doubts, insecurities, and failures and one of the stories that always fills me with hope that God can use me is the story of Gideon.

After the people of Israel settled in the Promised Land, they were led by various judges. There would be long periods when the people would prosper under a good and faithful judge, but when an unfaithful judge would lead them away from God, they would end up being ruled over by their enemy. After 7 years of being ruled over by their enemy the Midianites, God reached out and called Gideon to be a judge that would free His people. **Judges 6:12**

The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."

When the angel called Gideon *a mighty warrior*, he was threshing wheat in a wine press. You wouldn't normally thresh wheat in a wine press, you would do it out in the open on a rock so the chaff would blow away in the wind and the wheat would fall to the ground. But Gideon was doing this in a winepress, which would have been dug into the ground. He wasn't doing this out in the open but underground because he was afraid that the Midianites would see him threshing wheat and come to attack him. This is hardly the action of a *mighty warrior*.

Not only was Gideon afraid and insecure before God called him, he was reluctant to believe what the angel said. Gideon asked the angel to give him a sign that God was actually calling him. The angel agreed and told Gideon to come back with an offering of bread and meat. When Gideon did, the angel touched the offering and consumed it with fire. You might think this would have assured Gideon that he was God's masterpiece and that God had created him and called him for this purpose, but it didn't.

Gideon still had doubts about God and God calling him to be a leader. Before Gideon would go into battle against the Midianites, Gideon asked God to make a fleece laid out on the ground wet and all the ground around the fleece dry as a sign that he was truly being called by God. God did this, but Gideon still had doubts so asked God to make the fleece dry and the ground wet. God did.

At every turn, we see that Gideon was insecure and filled with doubt. He didn't see himself as a *Mighty Warrior* and he doubted that God could use him to lead the people of Israel, so he came with all kinds of excuses for God to go and find someone else. But God wanted him - doubts, insecurities and all.

And God wants us - doubts, insecurities and all. While we tell God why He should choose someone else or to look for someone better, stronger, and more faithful, God says, *no. I want to use you.* We don't have to be confident in our own gifts and abilities, we just

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need to be confident in God. We have to trust that we are God's masterpiece and that He has created us for a purpose.

God is calling you today because you are His masterpiece. You have been created for a purpose. God has given you gifts and abilities to use in ways that will not only declare His love in this world but draw you closer to Him and deepen your faith. If you have been sitting back watching others serve and give and shine in ministry, now it's your time to start shining and serving and giving.

In a moment we are going to have some time to reflect on how God has gifted us and how we might be able to use these gifts for God's purpose. I hope that just like Gideon, we will hear God call us a mighty warrior, or a faithful servant, or a gifted leader and step out to live into the purpose God has for us.

If you think that you can't be used by God because you have tried and failed too many times, then remember that the one man most used by God to form the early church was once a huge failure. Saul was a Jewish leader who hated the followers of Jesus. He saw them as a dangerous sect that needed to be eliminated. Saul went to towns and villages with documents to have those who followed Jesus put in prison and killed. In the book of Acts, it says that Saul stood and held the robes of the men who stoned Stephen - the first man killed for his faith and trust in Jesus. That event emboldened Saul to keep going. **Acts 8:1-3**

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

With this in his past, you might think Saul could never be used by God for anything. He had no faith in Jesus as the son of God. He failed to listen to the followers of Jesus talk about all Jesus said and

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did and while he thought he was being faithful to God, he had actually failed God, but that failure did not disqualify Saul. He was still a masterpiece created by God.

As Saul was on his way to Damascus where he was going to persecute more followers of Jesus, God showed up and stopped him in his tracks. Jesus spoke to Saul on that road. Jesus revealed Himself to Saul and Saul stopped *persecuting* the church and started to *plant* them. His failures were not final. God made him into a new person and gave him a new name, and *Paul* not only spread the gospel of Jesus across the Roman Empire, but he wrote letters that make up two thirds of our New Testament. God called a failure to do all this, which tells us that there is no failure so big that it will keep God away.

We have all failed in some way. Some failures might be big and public, some might be even bigger but private and known only to us and God. We see these failures and immediately doubt God can use us. We think our failures and doubts disqualify us, but they don't. God uses people who fail because there are no other people God can use! We have all failed and we all have doubts, but by the grace of God we are also all the handiwork of God.

Later in his life, Paul knew this and said: ***For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am. 1 Corinthians 15:9-10a***

By the grace of God, we are not who we were, and we are not who we think we are. We are not failures. We are not weak and insecure. We are not the sum of all our doubts. We are God's handiwork. We are masterpieces created by God for a purpose. We are mighty warriors, gifted servants and faithful leaders who can lean into the power and grace of God so that we can be more than we ever thought or imagined.

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If it is doubts about yourself that are holding you back today and doubts about yourself that keep you from God, hear what God says about you today. You are His masterpiece! You were created for a purpose and today God is asking you to step into the divine calling He has just for you.

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Next Steps

Doubting Ourselves

What doubts about God continue to hold back your faith?
Ask Jesus to reach out and help you.

What doubts about yourself hold you back from God and His purpose for you? Where do these doubts come from?

God used many people who had doubts about themselves:

- Moses - see **Exodus 3-4**
- Gideon - see **Judges 6**
- David - see **1 Samuel 16** and **2 Samuel 11-12**
- Peter - **Matthew 14:22-36**
- Saul (Paul) - **Acts 7:54-8:3, Acts 9:1-19, and 1 Corinthians 15:9-11**

How do these stories encourage you and give you hope?

To help us overcome the doubts we have about ourselves, God says that we are His masterpiece. (See **Ephesians 2:10**)

The word masterpiece means *created for a purpose*.

- What purpose has God created you for?
- What gifts, skills, and talents has God given you?
- How can you use God's gifts of God's purpose and glory?

Take time this week to review and reflect on the Rhythm Goal sheet provided in worship.