

**INTRODUCTION** What do you do when you have questions about God, but you don't have any easy answers? You might have really prayed and believed by faith that God would heal your friend who had cancer, but your friend died anyway.

What do you do when you want to believe in God, but you face spiritual doubts? Or maybe it's not you who are struggling in your faith, but maybe it's somebody you know and love.

What do you do when you have spiritual questions and you can't find easy answers?

**DOUBT IS NOT THE ENEMY OF FAITH, BUT IS OFTEN A PATHWAY TO A DEEPER AND MORE MEANINGFUL FAITH.**

It doesn't mean that you're losing your faith, it's often an invitation to wrestle with some real questions, and to grow into a deeper faith.

Now, to introduce some scriptures today, there's something called the relatability principle. It shows that you tend to dislike and distrust people whose lives seem perfect.

And you tend to trust and connect with those people who have similar problems to you. For example, you don't like the person at work whose desk is always organized, they're always getting praised, their life looks perfect.

Then you go to the store, and you see that person with their kid and their kid's having a meltdown at the grocery store. And you think, **"Hey, we could be friends. You're my people."**

And what's interesting is, whenever I hear somebody else dealing with a doubt, it's actually strangely comforting to me.

Let me show you in scripture some of the most faith-filled people who had the same questions you might have about their faith and relationship with God.

We'll start in the Old Testament with Sarah and Abraham, when God says, **"You're going to have a child."** And they say, **"God, you're kidding me? At this age?"**

We also look at the Israelites. God delivers them miraculously from the Egyptians. They walk through the Red Sea, and they think, **"God, you've done miracles before, but we're not sure you can do 'em again. We're not sure we trust you now."**

Gideon, he's thinking, **"Hey, God, if you're really with me, prove it, again, one more time. I know you've been faithful the last 47 times but give me a sign one more time."**

John the Baptist devotes his life to preparing the way for Jesus. And John looks to Jesus and says, **"Hey, Jesus, I knew you were the one. Now, I'm not so sure."**

And then there's Thomas, doubting Thomas, who says to Jesus, after the Resurrection, Jesus is raised from the dead, and Thomas says, **"Jesus, I won't believe unless I see it with my own eyes."**

It's strangely comforting to me to see the people in the Bible who were full of faith also occasionally battling with faith questions. And it reminds us, if we ever find ourselves doubting or struggling just a little bit, it shows us doubting doesn't make us bad. It makes us human.

After Jesus gave his life, when he was risen from the dead, before the Ascension, he's up on this mountain. He appeared to the disciples and he's having breakfast with them.

And Matthew 28:16-17 says, ***<sup>16</sup>Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.***

That makes me feel so normal. They're standing right in front of the risen Christ. And some worshiped and some doubted. Those three words, **"But some doubted."** Those were his disciples - the guys who saw him walk on water.

These were the guys who saw him multiply the loaves and fishes and cast out demons and raise the dead. And some worshiped and some doubted.

So, what do you think Jesus did when his boys doubted? Jesus continued to love them.

The text says, **"But some doubted."** The very next verse, Jesus gave them the most important assignment in the history of the world.

Matthew 28:18-20 says, *<sup>18</sup>Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Jesus said to go into all the world and make disciples, because doubt isn't the enemy of faith, but doubt is often a pathway to a deeper and more meaningful faith.

Let's try to identify why you doubt. And then over the next three weeks, let's talk about what you do about your doubt. Why is it that most of us have questions? There are three big reasons.

### **1. You have questions that you can't answer.**

You see something that doesn't seem fair. Something in the Bible doesn't make sense. Someone raises a question, and you think, **"I can't make sense of this."** You have questions you can't answer.

### **2. You face situations that seem unfair.**

Why did that happen? How could they do that? Where is God? And then why would somebody who calls themselves a Christian do this?

### **3. You experience hurts that you can't resolve.**

I cannot even believe that someone would do that. Where is God in the middle of my pain? If you have questions you can't answer, and hurts you can't resolve, and you got challenges with your faith, you wonder.

Where do we tend to go wrong? Some of us in the Christian body need a little flexibility. Some Christian parents may need a little flexibility.

Your kid comes in and asks questions, and you think, **"How can you do that to me?"** They're not doing it to you. They're looking for real answers. It's not a time to panic; it's a time to process it and talk about it.

One of the best things parents can do when their kids tell 'em things, don't freak out, just roll with it. You want to keep 'em talking? Just don't show emotion and keep on talking. And the church and the home should be the safest places to ask hard questions.

Thomas did this in the presence of Jesus. If Jesus made room for questions, shouldn't we?

John 20:24-25 says, *<sup>24</sup>One of the twelve disciples, Thomas ... was not with the others when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>They told him, "We have seen the Lord!"*

*But [Thomas] replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."*

And that's the reason we call Thomas, doubting Thomas. Thomas's doubts don't make him bad; they make him human.

In John 14, Jesus said, **"I'm going to go to heaven to prepare a place for you."** And Thomas asked a question.

Thomas said this in John 14:5, *<sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"*

In other words, **"Jesus, we're with you, just give me some details."** Peter's probably thinking, **"I'm glad he asked that, I didn't want to ask that, but I'm glad he asked that."** Remember when Lazarus died, Jesus said, **"Let's go to him."**

John 11:16 says, *<sup>16</sup>Then Thomas ... said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."*

**“If Jesus is going to give his life and Lazarus already did, we might as well die with Jesus too.”** That's not weak faith. That's bold loyalty. The guy had questions, but his questions didn't ruin his faith.

And see how Jesus responded to Thomas's questions.

John 20:26-28 says, <sup>26</sup>*Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them.*

Eight days later, Thomas came back. He still hasn't seen Jesus, but he came back. Sometimes one of the most faith-filled things you can do is come back. He didn't leave the church.

No, he came back, just like if you are struggling with some kind of doubt right now and you are in church, you came back. You're trying to work through it. And eight days later, he showed back up.

*Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them.*

Jesus isn't in the room; the doors are locked. So, he's in a physical body and yet he walks through walls and shows up.

And he's standing there, *“Peace be with you,” he said.* <sup>27</sup>*Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!”*

And Thomas touches them and sees the wounds, <sup>28</sup>*“My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaimed.*

Jesus doesn't shame Thomas for his questions, but he gives him exactly what he needed to believe in Jesus. And I believe God will do the same thing for you. Why? Because I promise you,

**GOD IS NOT DISTANT IN YOUR DOUBTS.**

So, if he feels far off, reach out to him. Why? Because he's reaching out to you. And he can handle your questions.

And because Thomas asked questions, Thomas got answers.

You know what he should be called? Faith-filled Thomas. He should be called that, because it's believed that he actually traveled to India in 52 AD and he started preaching the gospel.

And Thomas was starting churches from 52 AD until 72 AD, according to tradition.

Enemies of Christ came up to Thomas and said, **"Stop preaching Jesus. Stop preaching the resurrected Christ."**

And according to tradition, Thomas refused to. So, they took a spear and drove it through his body.

Think about this. Thomas, the disciple who didn't believe until he saw the spear wound, was killed by a spear for the faith that he once questioned, showing us that your doubts don't disqualify your faith. Jesus will meet you in your doubts.

In the 23rd Psalm David said, ***Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; ...***

Maybe you're not walking through the valley of the shadow of death, but you're walking through the valley of the shadow of doubt. I want you to remember that he is with you. And what do you do when you're in a valley?

You keep on walking. You keep walking, you keep asking, you keep searching and you show back up, because Jesus makes room for your questions. And he'll often give you exactly what you need, faith, belief.

And I hope you understand; faith is not a destination. No, it's an ongoing journey.

**DOUBT IS NOT THE ENEMY OF FAITH, BUT IS OFTEN A PATHWAY TO A DEEPER AND MORE MEANINGFUL FAITH.**

**PRAYER** God, I pray we would walk with others with grace and with love, showing grace and truth, helping others experience your goodness.

We're not going to let doubt be a dead end. We're going to walk through the valley of the shadow of doubt, God, because you are with us.

Would you just pray? Heavenly Father, forgive me for all my sins. Save me, make me brand new. Fill me with your Holy Spirit, so I could know you, so I could do your will, God, so I could show your love.

Thank you for new life. I give you all of mine. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

**THE END**