

FAITH & DOUBT—Part 2

(John 20:19-30)

1. **REMEMBERING** Think back to a time when you experienced a “crisis of faith.” What role did faith and doubt play before, during, or after this crisis, and what was the result?
2. **REFLECTING** Read the “Quotes of Note” on faith and doubt. Which ones speak to you and why?
3. **DISCOVERING** Read John 20:19-30 describing Thomas and answer the questions that follow.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

*²⁴Now **Thomas** (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”*

*²⁶A week later his disciples were in the house again, and **Thomas** was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”²⁷ Then he said to **Thomas**, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

³⁰Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

- What advantage did the disciples have over Thomas when confronted with the risen Jesus?
- Speculate for a moment. How likely was it that the disciples had similar doubts as Thomas?
- What do you know about the disciples and human nature that would support your conjecture?
- Where do the doubts of Thomas ultimately lead him?
- How do vv. 29-31 provide insight into this struggle between faith and doubt?
- How do the following two passages provide insight into the kind of person Thomas was?

*He told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead,¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”¹⁶ Then **Thomas** (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” (John 11:14-16)*

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.”⁵ **Thomas** said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:1-6)*

4. **CONNECTING** Where do you see yourself in Thomas’ journey between doubt and faith?
5. **RESPONDING:** What steps will you take this week to strengthen your belief and trust in God in one specific area of life?

QUOTES OF NOTE

Jesus offers a peace that involves new turmoil, a rest that involves new tasks. The “peace of God which transcends all understanding” promised in the New Testament is a peace in the midst of warfare, a calmness in the midst of fear, a confidence in the midst of doubt. (Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God*)

The only thing more difficult than having a relationship with an invisible God is having no such relationship. (Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God*)

It is not as a child that I believe and confess Jesus Christ. My Hosanna is born in the furnace of doubt. (Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Russian moral philosopher)

Doubt always coexists with faith, for in the presence of certainty, who would need faith at all? (Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God*)

An agnostic is somebody who doesn't know for sure whether there really is a God. That is some people all of the time and all people some of the time. (Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*)

Whether your faith is that there is a God or that there is not a God, if you don't have any doubts, you are either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving. (Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*)

We both believe, and disbelieve a hundred times an Hour, which keeps Believing nimble. (Emily Dickerson, poet)

Doubt isn't the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith. (Paul Tillich, theologian)

Faith can survive periods of darkness but only if we cling to it in the midst of the darkness. (Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God*)

In His relationships with people God places a premium on faith, which can only be exercised in circumstances that allow for doubt. (Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God*)

But why should it be possible to mistrust—
 Nor possible only, but its opposite hard?
 Why should not man believe because he must—
 By sight's compulsion? Why should he be scarred
 With conflict? Worn with doubting fine and long?
 No man is fit for heaven's musician throng
 Who has not tuned an instrument all shook and jarred.

Therefore, O Lord, when all things common seem,
 When all is dust, and self the centre clod,
 When grandeur is a hopeless, foolish dream,
 And anxious care more reasonable than God,
 Out of the ashes I will call to thee—
 In spite of dead distrust call earnestly;
 Oh thou who livest, call, then answer dying me.

(George MacDonald, *The Diary of an Old Soul*)