

# THOMAS, HESITANT BELIEVER

Destiny sat in her growth group meeting as she listened to another young woman share about troubles with a coworker. Destiny tried not to compare herself to all the people around her, but she couldn't shake the feeling that so many of them seemed secure and settled, with families who attended church together and problems that seemed manageable.

When her turn came to give a prayer request, Destiny had a big one. She cleared her throat and began, "Well, you all know that my husband doesn't come to church with me. It's been years that he has felt too angry to be in church. He calls himself an outsider, and I can't tell you how often I've asked Jesus to do a work in him."

She could see kindness in the faces who were listening, and she continued. "Well, this week I need more prayer than ever. We've been talking a lot more, and David has agreed to come to church on Sunday."

Amid interjections of "Hallelujah!" or "Thank you, Jesus!" Destiny felt the need to add a word of caution. "Now, this doesn't mean he's changed his views. I think David's just reached the point where he doesn't mind coming. I hope you all know what it means that he's going to meet some of you for the first time. He carries a heavy load, but I feel like Jesus is working in him."

"He sure is!" said another person across the room.

**1 What are some of the hardest questions that you have had to bring to God?**

**2 How do you think that Jesus reacts to our honest questions?**

<sup>14</sup> Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup> And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.

<sup>16</sup> Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellowdisciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.

...

<sup>5</sup> Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

<sup>6</sup> Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. <sup>7</sup> If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

<sup>8</sup> Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

<sup>14</sup> So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, <sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

<sup>16</sup> Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

<sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

<sup>8</sup> Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

## Thomas Seeks the Way

If you know the disciple named Thomas, you probably know him by his unflattering moniker, “Doubting Thomas.” Thomas shows up in four chapters of John’s Gospel. Together, they paint a portrait of a fiercely loyal disciple who was willing to voice his honest thoughts.

**Scene One (John 11)**—Lazarus, a close friend, has died (v. 14). The disciples had misunderstood Jesus and assumed that Lazarus was merely sick and resting. But when Jesus says, “I am glad I was not there” (v. 15), He is acknowledging His own ability to have prevented Lazarus’s death. He isn’t *glad* Lazarus has died, but glad for an opportunity to grow the faith of His disciples.

And this is the moment when we get the first line of dialogue from Thomas. In John 11:16, Thomas is responding to Jesus’ plan to return to Bethany, just outside Jerusalem, which is the area that is increasingly hostile to Jesus. A few verses earlier, the group of disciples had

discouraged Jesus from going back (John 11:8). Now that Jesus is willing to return to where opponents had tried to stone Him, Thomas communicates a reluctant resolve: “Let us . . . die with him.” Already, Thomas understands enough to know that following Jesus is risky; but he is willing to encourage the group to go along.

**Scene Two (John 14)**—We are skipping past the miraculous resurrection of Lazarus, a sign that leads many people to believe and also makes Pharisees and chief priests hate Jesus all the more (John 11:45–48). Jesus and His disciples are entering Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, right before Jesus will be arrested and killed.

He tries to comfort the disciples with assurances that He is going ahead of them to “prepare a place” in the Father’s house for them to join Him (John 14:1–4). As before, Thomas speaks up to express what the other disciples must have felt. How can Jesus expect them to understand? How can Jesus expect them to follow if He does not describe where He is about to go and the “way” to get there (John 14:5)?

Thomas’s frank question gives Jesus the opportunity to declare, “I am the way. . . . No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). It is a gracious response and confirmation that, questions or not, abiding with Jesus draws all people closer to God. Jesus is the embodiment of truth and the giver of life. He raised Lazarus in Bethany, and soon He will triumph over the grave.

Jesus explains that to know Him is to know the Father (John 14:7). Anyone following Jesus is, by definition, following God. Jesus shows exactly what God is like. Those who know Jesus “know [the Father] and have seen him” (John 14:7). Now it’s Philip’s turn to chime in to ask Jesus to “show us the Father,” hoping for a display of God’s glory (John 14:8).

**1 Why was Jesus glad in John 11:15?**

**2 What sorts of things does Thomas’s question in John 14:5 reveal about him?**

**3 What does Jesus’ response in John 14:6–7 reveal about Him?**

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord.

But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

<sup>26</sup> And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. <sup>27</sup> Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

<sup>28</sup> And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

<sup>29</sup> Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

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<sup>1</sup> After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. <sup>2</sup> There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples.

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> 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.”

<sup>26</sup> A 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!” <sup>27</sup> 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.”

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

...

<sup>1</sup> Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

## Thomas Seeks Confirmation

**Scene Three (John 20)**—Thomas is unfortunately not present when the risen Jesus first appears to His gathered disciples (see John 20:19–23). Thomas had to hear from them secondhand, “We have seen the Lord!” (v. 25). But their testimony wasn’t enough for him. He wanted to experience what they had experienced. He wanted physical evidence—opportunity to touch the nail marks and Jesus’ side, which was pierced by a Roman spear. It’s the one story about Thomas that gets told again and again.

We should not project a view that Thomas’s requests for evidence are somehow ridiculous, or that his disbelief is unwarranted. None of the disciples clearly understood that Jesus would return to resurrected life, and belief in ghosts was common in those days (and even today). Thomas was demanding the same experience as the rest of the disciples, so be kind to him.

He had his chance a week later. While they were together and the house’s doors were locked, Jesus appears and says, “Peace be with you!” (John 20:26). Exactly as He had appeared a week earlier, Jesus returns. He gives Thomas an answer to his questions and the proof he requires, inviting him, “Stop doubting and believe” (John 20:27).

Thomas reacts to the risen Jesus by making an incredible declaration of faith: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)—words that recognize the deity of Christ. In verse 29, Jesus offers a blessing upon all who believe—whether through sight (as with Thomas) or without sight (as with readers). The words encourage every believer who was not able to witness the risen Christ.

**Scene Four (John 21)**—Finally, in the last chapter of John, Jesus appears again to His disciples. Thomas is among them, a witness to the resurrection and a disciple whose faith grew beyond his initial skepticism.

**1 Why do you think Thomas wanted to see and touch Jesus for himself?**

**2 How would you describe Jesus’ response to Thomas’s doubts?**

**3 How should Thomas be remembered?**

## He Carries Us Along

I was listening to an interview with a well-known New Testament scholar. He was asked, “How much does a person need to understand about Jesus and the cross to be a Christian?” The answer surprised me! He said, “Very little.” He paused to explain that a Christian confesses Jesus as Lord and believes God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). A Christian trusts that what Jesus did on the cross somehow overcomes death to restore a relationship with God. But understanding the mechanics of how all that works? That’s not a requirement. Faith is what matters, childlike faith.

I was a little taken aback, coming off the heels of a seminary education. I remember slogging through systematic theology textbooks in a library basement. I felt overwhelmed by the complex ways of describing precisely how Jesus saves—what theologians call theories of *atonement*. I still want to know how it all works, or at least be a pastor with informed opinions! But my self-assurance is not what makes me a Christian. Faith in Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life—that is what makes me His follower.

By all means, let us seek an ever-deepening understanding of who Christ is and what He has accomplished. But let us not despair if there are things about God that we don’t understand. Jesus meets us in our quest for understanding. When given the opportunity, He graciously carries us along, if only to surprise us from time to time.

A teacher told me, “God doesn’t always display the big picture. God gives us just enough light for the next step. Faith grows when we see that next step, and we take it.” I think of Thomas as he followed Jesus around, listening, watching, struggling to wrap his mind around it all. Jesus eventually answered Thomas’s questions when the time was right. He gave Thomas exactly what he needed.

**1 How much did you understand about Jesus early in your faith journey?**

**2 How does Jesus meet people who are trying to understand?**

**3 Share a time when you had enough light for the next step of faith.**

## More than a Label

Thomas has gone down in history as nothing more than a doubter, but he was also a person of great courage as a faithful companion of Jesus. What times have you experienced doubt in trusting the Lord? Meditate in the truth that you are fully forgiven as a beloved child of God. Your misgivings are separated “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps. 103:12).

**I don't want to be known for this:**

**Instead, may the love of God shine through these characteristics of my personality:**

### Key Text

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. —John 20:27 KJV

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.” —John 20:27 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of August 3 through August 8

**Mon.** Revelation 7:9–10, 13–17—A Great Multitude.

**Tue.** Revelation 12:7–11—The Word of Their Testimony.

**Wed.** Acts 6:7–14—Stephen's Arrest.

**Thu.** Psalm 116:1–9—Delivered from Death.

**Fri.** Psalm 116:10–19—Precious Deaths.

**Sat.** Acts 7:1, 44–53—Stephen's Bold Message.

**Next Week:** Acts 6:7–10; 7:54–60

*Thomas and Jesus' other disciples faced persecution later in life. Before we talk about Stephen next week, name a time that following Jesus felt unpopular.*