

DOUBTS ARE OVERCOME



+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

While all are invited to believe in Jesus, not all are willing to place their faith in Jesus so that they might be saved.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

John 20

+ **SETTING:**

Luke 24:36-49 and John 20:19-23 tell the same story from different perspectives. John added a little more detail: not only did Jesus appear to the Eleven and some other disciples, He also showed them His hands and side, offered peace, pledged the Holy Spirit, and gave them instructions on forgiveness. What a moment! When the small group of followers had been contemplating whether or not to believe the testimony of a few, Jesus Himself showed up and removed all doubt. His visible, tangible, spiritual, and emotional proof gave them what they needed to believe. And Thomas missed it.

DAY 1

READ:

John 20:24-29

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 20:24-25

NOTES

I wish I had known Thomas personally. I'd like to know if he was quick to believe or guarded in his trust. I see that he trusted Jesus in other Scripture passages, but it seems his trust perhaps didn't extend to the other disciples. Or perhaps he had simply lost his resolve when he lost his hope that Jesus was the Messiah. Or maybe he was tired of hearing their story of Jesus appearing in a locked room; maybe he was just tired of feeling left out.

We all have our own personalities, emotions, tendencies, and back stories. God made us beautifully individual, but often we take our quirks or natures and use them as excuses: "I can't believe because I'm skeptical." "I'll believe anything because I'm accepting."

Jesus sees our personality tendencies; He sees our frustrations and our emotions. He knows when we've tried to believe and when we've crossed our arms and simply refused. And yet He loves us regardless. But He doesn't allow us to sit in our unbelief or doubts simply because that is our first inclination. Jesus calls us to believe Him. That may mean a deeper study, more intense prayer, or simply waiting for His response.

What reminds you to cling to Jesus when you're struggling to have faith?

DAY 2

READ:

Luke 24:1-12

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 24:11

NOTES

My husband does wildlife education programs, and a few days ago he was giving a presentation to a group of eight-year-old boys. He asked a question about a particular animal, and one of the boys answered it perfectly. "Great job," he told the youngster. "How did you know that?" The boy, chest out, replied, "Well, I am older than all these other kids."

We Christians sometimes look like that: we're proud of our great knowledge of God and our faith. We see the same idea in John 20:25, when Thomas wouldn't believe and the other disciples continued to testify that they had seen Jesus. If you took this passage out of context, you might want to commend those ten for believing so quickly. But a quick glance at Luke 24 reminds us that they too didn't believe the first time. The women who went to the tomb and saw it empty and encountered the angels there told the disciples about their experience, but the disciples didn't believe them (v. 11).

And so we take off our own pride, our own pretension, and our oh-so-holy faith and sit with that person who has legitimate doubts. We remember the struggles we had in our own faith, and we share those. We point to the Bible, but we also point to God's grace to lift us when we fall.

When have you struggled to believe and with whom can you share that this week to encourage them that sometimes it's okay to doubt if you're truly searching for truth?

DAY 3

READ:

John 20:24-29

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 20:26-27

NOTES

I love the power of a group of friends. When I started college, I claimed that I wanted to start running so that I could avoid the “freshman fifteen.” (I say “claimed” because I had not actually started running.) One day in class, I heard a girl sitting nearby say that she wanted to run in the mornings. I jumped into her conversation: “I’ll run with you! What time?” When she told me 6 am, I had to ask myself if I really wanted to run. It was going to take intentional action on my part. But I found that though the 5:45 alarm clock seemed to hurt every morning, I would faithfully get up and run because I knew she would be waiting for me.

Being part of a group can encourage us to do things we may never otherwise do individually. That can have positive or negative effects on our lives. But the group of disciples who had followed Jesus for three years had done a great thing: for two Sundays in a row, they had gathered. The one guy who felt left out—Thomas—was there in the middle of them.

What are you doing to bring others into your group?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“We have abundant assurance that we shall receive all the strength we need to perform any duty of obedience; and refusing to do anything which we ought to do, we find ourselves at once out of harmony with God’s law and God’s providence, and cannot escape the consequences of our failure.”¹

—J. R. Miller (1840–1912)

DAY 4

READ:

John 20:24-29

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 20:28-29

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #8: PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE

God has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity through the text of Scripture, having inspired it and directed it to be free from error. God has also acted providentially throughout the course of history to ensure the biblical text is faithfully preserved for future generations. Our belief in the preservation of Scripture is supported by investigation into how the canon of Scripture was formed and how manuscripts were faithfully transmitted throughout the centuries.

My daughter and I are reading through a middle-school-level book on logical reasoning. One main point of a lesson was: go to the firsthand accounts. You want to hear about that car wreck from someone who saw it, not from someone whose brother knew someone who saw it.

Firsthand accounts are a powerful testimony. They work better in courtrooms, and they tell truer stories. Thomas had heard more than ten firsthand accounts of Jesus's resurrection, but he didn't believe. Jesus was loving enough to show up and give him proof. Jesus reminded Thomas that though he saw and thus believed, blessing will come to those who have not seen but still believe.

That's where the firsthand account comes in: the Gospels are full of firsthand accounts that we can trust in their historical validity.

Matthew and John were Jesus's disciples who had firsthand accounts. Paul heard Jesus on the way to Damascus. Jude and James were Jesus's half-brothers. And all these wrote down their firsthand accounts.

In considering the Old Testament, Moses spoke with God face to face (Exodus 33:11), the prophets heard Him speak to them individually, and David's relationship with God was unlike any other. So as you pick up your Bible, remember the faithfulness of those testimonies: they are firsthand accounts written in Scripture for us!

How does the historical resurrection of Jesus and its validity bring you peace and encouragement?

DAY 5

READ:

1 Peter 1:3-9

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Peter 1:6-9

NOTES

Out of nowhere, my cell phone stopped working yesterday. With no access to any internet through my phone, I began to realize just how blind I felt without it: How would I navigate traffic during rush hour? Was my husband safely where he set out to go? Was a friend trying to reach me? I am embarrassed to admit how very quickly my life, which seemed to be so full of faith, felt so very faithless simply because I didn't know for sure what was going on.

Thomas may have felt the same way in John 20:24-29; everyone had seen Jesus except for him. And though Jesus made a special trip just to bring back Thomas's faith, He gave a warning: the blessing comes not from seeing, but believing despite not seeing.

Peter, who was in that room, later wrote about the same idea in today's passage. Grief is something all people face, even believers. Peter assured us that when we suffer, our faith is tested and strengthened like gold tried in a furnace. Those trials refine us because we find joy in believing Jesus though we can't physically see Him (1 Peter 1:6-8).

So whether it's down cell service, an out-of-control child, health concerns, or a financial crisis, we choose to believe Jesus is with us. He offers us peace. He hears those prayers. Our faith leads to blessing.

How is Jesus asking you to believe even without sight?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Never further than Your cross; Never higher than Your feet; Here earth's precious things seem dross; Here earth's bitter things grow sweet. Here we learn to serve and give, And rejoicing, self deny; Here we gather love to live, Here we gather faith to die."²

—Elizabeth Charles (1828–1896)

POINT 1: Belief is passed down by faithful witnesses (John 20:24-25).

As witnesses of Jesus, we are called to tell others what we have seen and experienced concerning Him.

? Why is it difficult for some people to be faithful witnesses of the gospel?

When we are truly searching for truth but doubting, God will meet us there.

? How does knowing God honors our search for truth remind us that our faith is not blind?

POINT 2: Belief is based on the historical resurrection of Jesus (John 20:26-27).

We can be assured that our belief in Jesus is true because of historical evidence of His life, death, and resurrection by many eyewitnesses.

? From Day 4: How does the historical resurrection of Jesus and its validity bring you peace and encouragement?

KEY DOCTRINE #8: PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE

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Knowing the Bible is true and reliable, what are some ways we can encourage ourselves and others to read and study it more?

POINT 3: Belief is grounded in confessing Jesus as Lord (John 20:28-29).

When we are brought to the point that we believe Jesus is exactly who He declares Himself to be, we see clearly that He is our Lord and God.



How have you submitted to Jesus as your Lord and God this past week?

Generations will be blessed because of the testimony of others as we believe even when we haven't seen.



How do you feel "blessed" through your faith in Jesus?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced the blessings of following Jesus, we proclaim Him to others, calling on them to place their faith in Him for salvation as well.

- **HEAD:** In what spiritual situation or question have you chosen to doubt because you haven't seen proof?
- **HEART:** How can you worship Jesus now for answering a cry of your heart this past month?
- **HANDS:** How does today's text encourage you to speak the truth of Jesus to someone who doubts?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Give me a new, a perfect heart, From doubt, and fear, and sorrow free; The mind which was in Christ impart, and let my spirit cleave to Thee."³

—Charles Wesley (1707–1788)