

How can I avoid being a doubting Thomas?

We should thank God for the example of "doubting Thomas"! The famous story of the disciple Thomas is recorded in John 20:24-29. All Christians suffer doubt at one time or another, but the example of doubting Thomas provides both instruction and encouragement.

After His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus appeared alive and glorified to His disciples to comfort them and proclaim to them the good news of His victory over death (John 20:19-23). However, one of the original 12 disciples, Thomas, was not present for this visitation (John 20:24). After being told by the other disciples of Jesus' resurrection and personal visit, Thomas "doubted" and wanted physical proof of the risen Lord in order to believe this good news. Jesus, knowing Thomas's human frailty resulted in weakened faith, accommodated Thomas.

It is important to note that Jesus did not have to fulfill Thomas's request. He was not obligated in the slightest bit. Thomas had spent three years intimately acquainted with Jesus witnessing all His miracles and hearing His prophecies about His coming death and resurrection. That, and the testimony Thomas received from the other 10 disciples about Jesus' return, should have been enough, but still he doubted. Jesus knew Thomas's weakness, just as he knows ours.

The doubt Thomas experienced in the face of the heartbreaking loss of the One he loved is not unlike our own when facing a massive loss: despair, heartbreak, and exceeding sorrow, all of which Christ sympathizes with (Hebrews 4:15). But, although Thomas did in fact doubt the Lord's resurrection appearance, once he saw the risen Christ, he proclaimed in faith, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Jesus commended him for his

faith, although that faith was based on sight.

As an extra encouraging note to future Christians, Jesus goes on to say, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29, emphasis added). He meant that once He ascended to heaven, He would send the Helper, the Holy Spirit, who would live within believers from then on, enabling us to believe that which we do not see with our eyes. This same thought is echoed by Peter, who said of Christ, “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9).

Although we have the Spirit within us, we can still experience doubt. This, however, does not affect our eternal standing with God. True saving faith always perseveres to the end just as Thomas’s did, and just as Peter’s did after he had a monumental moment of weakness by denying the very Lord he loved and believed in (Matthew 26:69-75). This is because, “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). Jesus is “the author and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). Faith is the gift of God to His children (Ephesians 2:8-9), and He will mature and perfect it until He returns.

So how do we keep from doubting as Thomas did? First, we must go to God in prayer when experiencing doubt. That may be the very reason God is allowing a Christian to doubt—so that we will depend on Him through prayer. Sanctification is the process of growing in Him, which includes times of doubt and times of great faith. Like the man who brought his demon-possessed child to Jesus but was unsure whether Jesus could help him, we go to God because we believe in Him and ask Him for more and greater faith to overcome our

doubts, crying, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:17-27).

Second, we must recognize that Christians fight a spiritual battle daily. We have to gear up for the battle. The Christian needs to daily be armed with the Word of God to help fight these spiritual battles, which include fighting doubt, and we arm ourselves with the “full armor of God” (Ephesians 6:10-19). As Christians, we must take advantage of the lulls in spiritual warfare to polish our spiritual armor in order to be ready for the next battle. Times of doubt will become less frequent if we take advantage of the good times to feed our faith with the Word of God. Then when we raise the shield of faith and do battle with the enemy of our souls, his flaming darts of doubt will not hit their target.

Doubting Christians have two things doubting Thomas did not have—the indwelling Holy Spirit and the written New Testament. By the power of both the Spirit and the Word, we can overcome doubts and, like Thomas, be prepared to follow our Lord and Savior and give all for Him, even our lives (John 11:16).