

THINGS TO COME: If You've Ever Doubted God, You're in Good Company

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Does God really exist?

Do miracles still happen?

Does God hear my prayers?

When I was walking through a season of doubt, questions like this flooded my brain. I didn't just question God, I questioned myself. I felt embarrassed and ashamed of the feelings I had, and I couldn't tell many people in my life about it. After all, I was their pastor! I've spoken with other Christians who also felt guilty when they doubted God. They wished their faith was stronger and thought perhaps God would have answered their prayers if it was.

But here's the truth: God doesn't only answer our prayers when our faith is firm. He's at work even when our faith is flimsy.

If you've walked through a season of doubting God, you're in good company. One of Jesus' own disciples is known for his doubt; it's his claim to fame. Even if you haven't read much of the Bible, you've probably heard of Doubting Thomas. Thomas wasn't at the empty tomb on that first Easter morning, and he wasn't there the first time Jesus revealed Himself in His resurrected body to the disciples. So, when the other disciples told Thomas that Jesus was alive and present, he doubted their words. Thomas responded, "Unless I see the nail

prints in His hands, and put my finger in the nail prints, and put my hand in His side, I will not believe," (John 20:25, MEV). Doubts often arise when our expectations aren't met. According to Thomas' expectations, the Messiah wasn't supposed to die. So how could Thomas trust and believe in the midst of disappointment? Here are a few ways Thomas dealt with his doubt that we can learn from today.

1) When you don't know what to think, you can know where to go: Spoiler alert: Thomas encountered Jesus, and doubt didn't take him out. Why? Because his association brought revelation. He needed to lean into the other disciples and trust what they saw and experienced. When doubt is taking you out, hang out with people of faith. The apostle Paul says in Romans 1:12 there will be times when your faith is low, and doubt is knocking at your door. When I was in my darkest days of doubt, I purposefully surrounded myself with people of faith. My wife, Julie, and I stayed close to my parents and a few trusted friends in the church. The guys in my small group carried me spiritually. When I didn't want to pray or know what to pray, they prayed. They had faith for me when I didn't have faith for myself.

2) Reach out for Jesus and His Word: Sometimes in our doubt we push God away. We get angry with Him and blame Him for something that has happened in our lives. Instead of reaching out for God, we reach out for anything to silence the doubt and numb the pain. Some reach for alcohol, or ice cream, or binge-watch a miniseries on TV to try to fill the spiritual emptiness inside. Some reach out to other doubters to try to justify their doubts, or they reach out to their online communities to vent instead of heal. But Thomas reached out for Jesus. His movement was toward Christ, and the Bible

promises that when you move toward God, He moves toward you (James 4:8).

I remember days when I pushed God away. I was so disappointed that I thought, "Fine, then I'm not going to talk to you anymore." (As if giving God the silent treatment was going to help me or the situation.) It ended up making me feel more isolated and alone. After several days I turned back to God. And what I love about Jesus is that anytime you reach out for Him, He's reaching back for you. His arms are wide open. No judgment. No condemnation. No rejection. Jesus didn't reprimand me for my doubt, and He didn't reprimand Thomas. He didn't try to shame him in front of the other disciples. He just told Thomas to reach out and touch Him.

3) Turn your doubts into questions and your questions into prayers: It's OK to have doubts and questions, but where we take our doubts and questions matters. Jesus invited Thomas to reach out and touch His hands and side. This encounter between Thomas and Jesus tells us it's OK to question God. He can handle it.

It's OK to struggle with spiritual doubt; we all do. In fact, doubt might actually be good for you because it means you are seeking truth. Take your doubts and turn them into questions. Take your questions and turn them into prayers. Take your prayers and let them turn you to God. If your doubts cause you to seek truth, that journey will always lead you closer to God.

Todd Mullins *is the senior pastor of Christ Fellowship Church, one of the largest churches in America. Under the leadership of Mullins and his wife, Julie, Christ Fellowship has grown into a multisite congregation across South Florida. His new book, Don't Let Doubt Take You Out, is available now at .*