

Don't Get Stuck in Your Doubt

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I saw a message title the other day that made me laugh a little. It was in a series called "I have a friend who..."

This particular message was I have "a friend" who has doubts about God

It's like, years ago when I was in youth ministry, having teenaged boy tell me they had "a friend" who was tempted to sleep with his girlfriend

I mean – it's a friend that's tempted! He wasn't tempted to sleep with his girlfriend... gross – but his friend – his good hearted, strong-moraled, devout Christian friend... that guy was tempted

When we say we have "a friend" who has doubts about God – many of us are just covering ourselves a bit

All of us have had doubts

And many of us have doubts on a regular basis

I think God understands that

That's why He tells us " Be merciful to those who doubt " - Jude 1:22

In churches all over our country today, Doubters feel the need to live in the shadows

Afraid of being discovered by their "more faithful" friends

But here, writing to Christians, Jude was saying, the church should be a place where doubt is shown some empathy

Be merciful... Because we've all been there

Let's talk about Jude a minute

Jude was Jesus' brother

He knows a thing or two about doubt

Jude doubted that his brother was the Messiah the whole time until *after* the resurrection

Jude and his other brothers even went, in Mark 3, to get Jesus because they were all convinced He had lost His mind

He was saying He was the Son of God...Crazy!

Now, he's a leader in the early church, Jude's coaching his followers – 'take it easy on the doubters among you'...Be merciful...Because I get it

The fact is, there are many famous doubters in the Bible:

John the Baptist

He was Jesus' cousin

Called by Jesus the greatest man ever born

But he doubted whether Jesus was the Messiah when he was in jail

Mary & Martha

Two of Jesus' closest friends

Doubted Jesus when their brother died

Peter

Leader of the 12 apostles & the primary leader of the early church

One of Jesus' closest friends

Doubted Jesus – even denied know who He was

When faced with the pressure of Jesus' arrest

I want you to notice a common thread here

All of these examples:

John, Mary & Martha, Peter

All of them faced doubt when things were hard

I rarely, if ever, have someone describe their doubt to me apart from pain

Pain in a relationship

Pain in a hardship

Pain – pressure & pain – can lead us to doubt a God who would allow us to face that

If you're feeling doubt

Take a step back and ask yourself...Honestly

What role pain has in your doubt?

Doubt is rarely hypothetical

Doubt is deeply personal

And real

And painful

Can I be honest this morning?

I was surprised this week looking at all these verses

I had read them before

But I don't think I realized how universal the doubting was among Jesus' closest followers

After Jesus rose from the dead

Right before He ascends into Heaven, we have this verse:

Matthew 28:16-17 - Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him

The next verses, verses 18-20, Jesus gives some of His most famous words

He says, Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you – and I will be with you always, to the end of the age.

They are there – worshipping Him

He's about to give the Great Commission and ascend into Heaven

Perfect ending

A life well lived

Sayonara

But I left something out

Matthew 28:16-17 - Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him;

but some doubted.

This wasn't the multitudes

This was His 11 closest followers
And this wasn't early in His ministry
After they had just met
This was after He was crucified
After He had risen from the dead

In fact, look at what Jesus said to a group of His closest followers

Right after He rose from the dead

Let me make sure you caught what I just said

Jesus was crucified – publically
All of His followers saw it
He was buried
They were in mourning
Then He rises from the dead that first Easter morning
And appears to them
Bodily
Standing in front of them

Look what He says:

Luke 24:38-40a – He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

His family

His closest friends

Even people who saw Him after He rose from the dead had doubts

So Jude says

Take it easy on those who doubt

Luke 24 goes on to say:

When He had said this, He showed them His hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it...

These are the leaders of the early church

They had walked and talked with Jesus for 3 years

They had seen Him tortured and killed

Now they're looking at a *Risen Savior*

And He's showing them nail marks on His hands & feet

And they're still not sure

Are you kidding me?

I agree with Jude

The church should take it easy on those who doubt

Luke goes on to tell how He continued to show them evidence after evidence that it was really Him

It culminates in verse 45:

Luke 24:45 - Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

This is an important prayer for many of us here

Here were the disciples

But even *they* doubted until He opened their minds

Unless our minds are opened so that we can understand

We will always be plagued with doubt

I am praying this morning – and I want to ask you to pray now – that God would ‘open our minds’ this morning

This is a prayer I've been praying

And asking the staff to pray this week:

Ephesians 1:17-18a - I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you

Prayer

We just read in Luke 24 about Jesus appearing to His disciples

John 20 also records that scene

And then John 20:24 says: **Now Thomas (also known as...**

Somebody help me – what was Thomas also known as?

Didymus)

Right

You've already forgotten that Jude said to be merciful to those who doubt

Perfect

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

Now they didn't tell him that they doubted

They didn't tell him that He had to fuss at them

And show them the nail marks in His hands & feet

They whitewashed all of that

"We have seen the Lord," they said

"We are sooo faithful," they said

So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

John 20:25b-28 - 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."

He doubted just like they did

And the church has judged him ever since

He was just brave enough to say it

Jesus knew the others were doubting

But because they didn't say it

We've named him Doubting Thomas

Maybe we should call him Blunt Thomas

Or Thomas the candid

Because look what happens

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!" 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."

And once again, Thomas' blunt answer makes sense to me

Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

But I have a really important question

A question that an author named Tyler Staton got me to thinking about

Why wasn't Thomas there?

Jesus was crucified

They're all huddled together for protection

They're scared of the Romans

But equally scared of the reality that Jesus is really gone

That it was all a hoax

They're grieving their friend

But they're also deeply disappointed at the death of this vision that they
had given their lives to

And yet

They're all there but Thomas

Where was Thomas?

There's just something about doubt that drives us to isolation

Maybe we assume no one else is struggling

Maybe we assume that everyone else has it all figured out

Maybe we're afraid – maybe we're embarrassed

But there's just something about doubt that drives us to isolation

So here you have Thomas

When they all needed each other more than ever

Because they're all in pain

They're all afraid

They're all confused

So they're all together

Banded together

Grieving together

Supporting each other

And Thomas is... gone

I was talking with someone this week

This series has brought out lots of conversations about doubt and faith and such

And they were telling me about when they lost their mom

And they were angry at God

And they were angry at their pastor for saying that God had a plan for their life

And they didn't want to be around all of the church people who were apparently buying into that stuff

And they just got away from all of it for a while

They isolated

But eventually they gave church another try

And they realized that no one was judging them for their doubts

And no one was pointing their finger

And that God – turns out – does have a plan for their life

Don't let your pain lead you to doubt

And then thru doubt lead you into isolation

Instead:

Proverbs 3:5-6, 8 – Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight... This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.

The Hebrew word translated "body" here is actually the Hebrew word for naval

It's the center of who you are

Trusting God will bring health to the center of who you are

Dallas Willard – "We live in a culture that has, for centuries now, cultivated the idea that the *skeptical* person is always smarter than the one who believes. You can be almost as stupid as a cabbage, as long as you *doubt*."

Doubting is not the brave option

Anybody can doubt

Anybody can shrug

Belief requires courage

Courage to stand for something

Courage to commit

The church shouldn't judge people for doubting

We should "Be merciful", as Jude says, to those who doubt

But we should also honor those who move past doubt

Into commitment

That takes guts

I think it's powerful that they all doubted

But we give Thomas a hard time because he had the courage to say it

But all the disciples doubted

That means, if we had God's eyes to see, we would be keenly aware that some of you are doubting this morning:

Doubting the words of Scripture

Doubting that God could be good because your life's falling apart

Doubting the Bible because of science

Doubting faith because of organized religion

Or because of the Christians in your life that are jerks

It's ok if you're doubting

Just don't live there

The Nashville International Airport is a great place to travel through

Unless you get stuck there

It'd be a terrible place to sit

I65 is a great way to get from Spring Hill to Nashville

Unless you get stuck there

It'd be a terrible place to sit

James 1:6b - The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

Doubt can be a great way to get you from pain to faith

Unless you get stuck there

Doubt is a terrible place to live

Blown and tossed by the wind

One of the most damaging things churches have done over the years

Is to encourage people to hide their doubts as if they don't exist

So this morning – instead of asking the doubters to live in the shadows

I want to take the remainder of the message to speak straight to you

Right in the middle of your doubt

We see that very differently here

Behave / believe / belong

belong / believe / become

We want you to find community so that you'll have a few tour guides as you work through your doubt

Because doubt can really help you on your spiritual journey

Unless you get stuck there

Doubt is a terrible place to live

Look at this quote from David Brooks:

David Brooks – “We are all fragile when we don't know what our purpose is, when we haven't thrown ourselves with abandon into a social role, when we haven't committed ourselves to certain people, when we feel like a swimmer in an ocean with no edge.

If you really want people to be tough, make them idealistic for some cause, make them tender for some other person, make them committed to some worldview that puts today's temporary pain in the context of larger hope.

Emotional fragility seems like a psychological problem, but it has only a (spiritual) answer. People are really tough only after they have taken a leap of faith for some truth or mission or love. Once they've done that, they can withstand a lot.

Another question about this story

Why did Jesus wait a week?

He appeared to 10 of the disciples

Thomas wasn't there

He comes back a week later

And sees Thomas

Why did He wait a week?

Jesus was not scared of His doubt

So why did He not come back sooner?

Thomas needed some time

Thomas needed to work through his doubts

Doubt can really help you on your spiritual journey

Jesus just didn't want Thomas to get stuck

Let me end this morning by telling you one more story of a famous doubter

Job

Job was a great guy

He always tried to do the right thing

He was generous with his time

He was generous with his money

He always took his kids to Sunday School

And then

All hell broke loose

He lost everything

He went from this charmed life

To bone tired

Seemingly overnight

And the book by his name records him wrestling with his doubt

It's interesting

Job's in the middle of the Bible

But most scholars think it was the first book of the Bible written

So Job lived after the first chapters of Genesis

But his book was written before Genesis was

So the first book of the Bible was a book about doubt

Interesting

God's never been afraid of your doubt

Look at this honest statement from Job:

Job 23:8-10 (NirV) - "But if I go to the east, God isn't there. If I go to the west, I don't find Him. When He's working in the north, I don't see Him there. When He turns to the south, I don't see Him there either."

Ever feel that way?

Job is in serious pain

Relational pain

Financial stress

The pain of grief & mourning

Job is in serious pain

But Job has the wisdom to know that his feelings may not be telling the whole story

He doesn't get stuck in his doubt

He declares:

But He knows every step I take. When He has tested me, I'll come out as pure as gold.

God knows you have doubts about Him

That doesn't scare Him off

God knows you have doubts about Him

But He doesn't have any doubts about you

And He knows every step you take

And when you come out

Don't get stuck

And when you come out

Notice Job is still in the middle of it

"I will come out"

And when you come out

You'll realize He never left you

He was there all along

It felt like He had left

But your feelings don't tell the whole story

Right before Jesus was arrested, He spoke with Peter...

Luke 22:31-32 - "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Even now, Jesus is praying for you

Even now, Jesus has a plan for your life on the other side of your doubt

Even now, Jesus sees you and loves you and feels your pain