



Small Groups

Small Group Discussion Guide

Beyond the Tomb — Part II

Without a Doubt

John 20:19-31

Pastor Shawn Thornton

(Discussion Guide by Erin Rodewald)

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Through the ages, Christians have wrestled with the very real tension that exists between faith and doubt. Faith is not the absence of doubt. In fact, as Pastor Shawn shared this weekend, without doubt, faith isn't faith at all. Rather, doubt is the gap that exists between our own uncertainties in life and the certainty of God. Faith bridges that gap; it provides the way to overcome our doubts and draw closer to God even when we don't have all the answers.

Opening Question: What uncertainties are you experiencing in your daily life right now that might be causing doubt to creep into your thinking?

Read aloud John 20:19-31

I. Hiding your doubt never grows your faith

Thomas didn't deny his doubts; he wrestled with them honestly and publicly. Yet church history tells us that the disciple we identify as the "doubter," is the one who actually traveled the farthest to deliver the gospel.

- 1. Is doubt an indication of a weak or insincere faith?**
- 2. How might your struggles with doubt deepen your own journey of faith and your relationship with God?**

II. Doubt too easily assumes faith can't handle life's basic questions

Psalm 34:4 (ESV) "I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears."

- 1. What are some of the hard questions that trouble your heart? What does it mean to be a follower of Christ even if you don't have all the answers?**
- 2. Do you think God is threatened or disappointed by our questions? Explain why or why not.**

III. Destructive doubt belittles the faith of others, while healthy faith ponders it

Re-read John 20:27. Jesus does not belittle Thomas for his unbelief. In fact, he meets Thomas in the place of his doubts.

1. **How Has God met you in the place of your doubts? Has that made you more sympathetic to the doubt in others?**
2. **How does skepticism differ from cynicism? Is skepticism about God and his word unhealthy?**

IV. Doubt's biggest demands can't compete with faith's smallest assurances

Psalm 94:19 (ESV) "When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul."

Hebrews 11:1 (ESV) "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

3. **Even as questions or doubts may linger, little steps of faith can reveal slivers of assurance from the Holy Spirit. What are some ways you look for God even when your doubts don't want you to?**
4. **Share a time when God didn't provide answers, but he did provide you with assurance.**

V. Incremental movement towards true faith creates monumental distance from debilitating doubt

James 1:5-6 (ESV) "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind."

1. **Lasting change typically comes in small, incremental steps. What is one "faith habit" you are doing or would like to begin practicing?**

VI. An honest struggle with doubt provides grace for others to have an honest struggle of their own

In the foreword to C.S. Lewis's book *A Grief Observed*, Christian author Madeleine L'Engle wrote: "I am grateful to Lewis for having the courage to yell, to doubt, to kick at God with angry violence. This is a part of healthy grief not often encouraged. It is helpful indeed that C.S. Lewis, who has been such a successful apologist for Christianity, should have the courage to admit doubt about what he has so superbly proclaimed. It gives us permission to admit our own doubts, our own angers and anguishes, and to know that they are part of the soul's growth."

Read Matthew 28:16-17

1. **Do you give yourself permission to admit your own doubts? As you honestly wrestle with your doubts, how might that help you encourage others who are grappling with their own doubts?**
2. **Is this small group a place where there is grace to admit and wrestle with one another's doubts? How can we grow in helping one another through doubts?**