The Benefit of Doubt: From Doubt to Devotion
John 20:24-29

ETS: Thomas went from doubting Jesus' resurrection to calling Jesus "My Lord, and my God."
ESS: Doubt does not have to be destructive, but it can be used to fuel devotion to God.
OSS: To demonstrate how doubt can fuel a person's devotion to God
PQ: Do you turn doubts into devotion?
UW: Devotion

ME

<u>Have you heard the phrase "TNO"?</u>

- TNO= Trust No One

Based on available data, the **least trusted groups** globally and in the U.S. tend to be

- **Politicians**,
- **Celebrities**
- **Certain institutional groups** like large corporations and media.

A 2021 **Ipsos survey** found **politicians** to be the **least trusted profession** worldwide, with a net trust

score of **-52%,** particularly distrusted in Argentina and Colombia.

- In **Australia**, a 2019 ABC survey noted **celebrities** as the **least trusted group**, with only 8**% trust**, followed closely by politicians.
- In the **U.S.**, Gallup polls from **2020-2023** consistently rank **Congress** as the **least trusted institution**, with trust levels as low as **8%** in 2023, followed closely by the media at **31%**.
- **Large corporations and Big Tech** also rank low, with only 3-4% trust in a 2024 Caliber survey.

Atheists have historically been **distrusted** in the U.S., with a 2014 Pew poll showing only **45% would vote** for an **atheist presidential candidate**, though this is more about cultural perception than institutional trust.

COVID-19 eroded trust in our medical institutions and doctors

- A **2024 study** published in **JAMA** Network Open found that **trust** in **physicians** and **hospitals** in the U.S. **dropped from 71.5%** in April **2020** to **40.1% by January 2024**, a decline observed across all sociodemographic groups.

- This trend aligns with **broader declines in institutional trust**, with a Gallup poll noting a **14-percentage-point drop in trust** in medical doctors since 2021, *the largest among professions measured*, though doctors still rank near the top for public trust.

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WE

We live in world of **skepticism-and rightly so!**

Google just released a new AI video creator called Veo 3.

- The videos are so good that it is almost impossible to tell they are completely computer generated.
  - I showed my dad a video created with Veo 3 of a car salesman at an auto show interviewing people.
    - The Problem: There was no car show, no salesman and no people, but if you were to watch that video you would not know!

The **Apostle Paul** says God will send unbelievers a "Strond Delusion" in the days of judgment. I don't exactly know what that will be, but we now live in a

world where people can be **propagandized** and **fooled** like never before in human history.

It is easy to be filled with **doubt**

- I am a very **skeptical person**!
    - I **do not trust politicians** and **media** people.

What about **doubts** about **God**?

- Have you ever **struggled** with your **belief** in God?

G. Campbell Morgan had already enjoyed some success as a preacher by the time he was 19 years old.

- But then he was attacked by **doubts about the Bible**.
    - The writings of **various scientists** and agnostics disturbed him (e.g., Charles Darwin, John Tyndall, Thomas **Huxley**, and Herbert Spencer).
        - As he read their books and listened to debates, Morgan became more and more perplexed.

Did God really exist?
Could he trust what the Bible says about God?

Can I share a secret: WE ALL HAVE DOUBTS!

- Many Christians seldom speak of their doubts because of the fear of being **branded** by "spiritual" people as "**weak in the faith**."
- However, those who often **ridicule** a fellow believer's **struggle** with doubt are many times **themselves privately** going through the same battles.

Believers don't like to admit to doubts, because we have been taught that doubting is

- **A sin**
- A sign of **spiritual weakness**
- The same as **unbelief**

Ray Pritchard of **Keep Believing Ministries** lists 3 Realities about Doubt:

1) **Doubt is NOT the opposite of faith.**
    a. Unbelief is the opposite of faith.
        i. Unbelief refers to a willful refusal to believe, while doubt refers to inner uncertainty.

2) **Doubt is not the unforgivable sin.**
    a. God doesn't condemn us when we question him.

i. Both Job and David repeatedly questioned God, but they were not condemned. God is big enough to handle all our doubts and all our questions.

3) **Struggling with doubt is not a lack of faith.**
   a. Struggling with God is a sure sign that we truly have faith.
      i. If we never struggle, our faith will never grow.

The question is NOT: <u>Do you have doubts?</u>

- The question is: <u>How do you deal with doubts?</u>

GOD

Turn to **John 20**

Bible Trivia: <u>Who is the one person in the New Testament whose name is synonymous with doubt?</u> Thomas!

Background: John records the **resurrection** of Jesus Christ

- Mary Magdalene, who had come to the tomb at dawn to anoint Jesus' body, discovers the tomb is open
  - She runs and finds Peter and John

        - They go to the tomb and find it empty, except for the linen cloths
            - They return back to their hiding place
- Mary Magdalene stays at the tomb and is crying
    - She sees two angels and then she hears Jesus' voice
        - Jesus reveals Himself to Mary
            - Mary runs back to the disciples and proclaims "I have seen the Lord!"

John 20:19-24 "When it was evening on that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you."

20 Having said this, he showed them his hands and his side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you." 22 After saying this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24 But Thomas (called "Twin"), one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

Who was Thomas?

- WHY was he called "Twin"?

Thomas was one of Jesus' 12 disciples

- The Bible never states why Thomas was called "twin"
    - Remember, Jesus and the other disciples did not speak Greek, but in Aramaic
        - But the New Testament was written in Greek because that was the trade language of the day.

This is similar to our Haitian brothers and sisters

- In school, they learn to read and write in French, but on the streets, they speak Kreyol-which is similar. Many also know Spanish since they are next to the Dominican Republic, which was a Spanish colony, whereas Haiti was a French colony. Also, many speak English too.

Jesus and the other disciples did not speak Greek, but in Aramaic.

- In Aramaic, Thomas' name was (Toma) also means "twin."
    - When John wrote his Gospel in Greek, he used the Greek word for Twin (Didymus)- KJV, NIV.

History of Thomas:

- Earlier: When Jesus indicated to his disciples his desire to go to Judea to visit the grave of Lazarus, Thomas was eager to accompany him, even though some there would surely stone them both (John 11:16).
    - Thomas was BOLD: "Then Thomas (called "Twin") said to his fellow disciples, "Let's go too so that we may die with him." (**John 11:16**)
- A few days later, as Jesus tried to explain to the disciples his approaching return to the Father, Thomas candidly confessed his ignorance of the place and manner of Christ's journey \
    - "Lord," Thomas said, "we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?" 6 Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (**John 14:5-6**).

Thomas was ready to DIE for Jesus, BUT Thomas didn't understand Jesus' mission of going to the cross.

- Thomas was ready to die for Jesus because he expected Jesus to lead a revolt, but when Jesus talks about going "away" in John 14, Thomas admits that he doesn't understand what Jesus is talking about.

The crucifixion of Christ **CONFUSED Thomas** and the other disciples

- Jesus' death at the hands of the Romans and the Jews, did not make sense to Thomas.

For some reason, on the Sunday **after Jesus' crucifixion**, Thomas was not with the other disciples.

- Jesus appeared to His disciples "in the evening," so it may be that Thomas had given up and left the group.

Apparently, Thomas entered the room later that night after Jesus had left…**John 20:25** So the other disciples were telling him, "We've seen the Lord!" *But* he said to them, "If I don't see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will *never* believe."

Thomas did not believe them!

- He didn't believe the man with whom he had been for nearly 3 years!
    - He had been through storms, crowds attempting to stone them, demon-possessed people, showdowns with the religious leaders—usually, when a group goes through trauma and difficult events, it **cements the group**, but Thomas did not believe them.
        - WHY didn't he believe his fellow disciples?
            - Because HE had not experienced the resurrected Jesus!

Notice his demands:

- "If **I don't see** the mark of the nails in his hands,
- **put my finger** into the mark of the nails,
- **put my hand** into his side,
    - I will *never* believe."

Thomas is EMPHATIC—"I will NEVER believe" if I don't have a personal, physical encounter with the resurrected Jesus.'"

- Thomas was not CONTENT to go on the testimony of others, even his fellow disciples

- Thomas has the TNO (Trust No One) attitude!

That LAST THING Thomas was in the mood for was his comrades to be making up a story about Jesus' resurrection!

- Thomas was NOT in the mood!

Why did Thomas doubt Jesus' resurrection?
Why do people today doubt Jesus' resurrection?

No Personal Encounter with Christ

Most people who are skeptical about Jesus have never encountered Jesus!

- They **have never reached out in faith**, turning away from sin and self, to Christ.
  - They refuse to place their faith in Christ.
    - Thus, they doubt if Jesus' resurrection occurred.

Is there evidence that Christ's resurrection occurred?
YES!

- The empty Tomb, despite being guarded by soldiers.
  - Peter and John ran to the tomb, and they found it empty
    - So the empty tomb was verifiable

- The testimony of Mary Magdalene and the other women claims to have seen Christ
- The testimony of the other 10 disciples, having seen Jesus

Later evidence would include

- Martyrdom of Early Witnesses: Historical Tradition: Early Christian tradition holds that many disciples, like Peter and Paul, were martyred for their faith (e.g., Peter's crucifixion, per Clement of Rome, 1 Clement 5:4).
    - Argument: Their willingness to die suggests they genuinely believed in the resurrection, as opposed to perpetuating a known lie.
- Lack of Contradictory Evidence: Historical Context: No contemporary records from Roman or Jewish sources explicitly refute the resurrection or produce Jesus' body.
- Early Christian Creeds: Evidence: 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, written by Paul around 55 CE, contains an early creed (likely from the 30s CE) stating Jesus died, was buried, rose, and appeared to many. This predates the Gospels, indicating belief in the resurrection emerged very early.
    - Argument: The short time between Jesus' death (circa 30–33 CE) and the creed's circulation suggests the resurrection claim

was not a later legend but a core belief from the outset.

- Rapid Spread of Christianity: Historical Context: Christianity spread rapidly in the decades following Jesus' death, despite opposition from Roman and Jewish authorities (Acts 8:1–3, 12:1–3).
    - Argument: The resurrection provided a compelling message that motivated early Christians to evangelize, even under persecution.
- Conversion of Skeptics: Examples: Paul, a former persecutor of Christians (Acts 9:1–22), and James, Jesus' brother, who was initially skeptical (John 7:5), became believers after reported encounters with the risen Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7, Acts 9:3–6).

What if you claim to be a Christian, but you **still struggle with doubts**?
Does that mean you have never encountered Christ?

Yes, that is a possibility!

- Paul challenged those who were part of the church at Corinth to "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you yourselves not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless you fail the test." (**2 Cor. 13:5**)

How do you "Test yourself to see if you are in the faith?"

Test #1: Do you remember placing your trust in Christ?
Test #2: Were you willing to be obedient and follow the Lord in Believer's Baptism
Test #3: Do you hunger after God?
Test #4: Does your life reflect obedience to God?
Test #5: Do you have a love for other believers?
Test #6: Do you respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction?

- Earlier in **2 Cor 12:20-21**, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "For I fear that perhaps when I come I will not find you to be what I want, and you may not find me to be what you want. Perhaps there will be quarreling, jealousy, angry outbursts, selfish ambitions, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder. 21 I fear that when I come my God will again humiliate me in your presence, and I will grieve for many who sinned before and have not repented of the moral impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality they practiced."
    - Immorality, angry outbursts, quarreling, etc., should not characterize a Christian's life!

        - These things were present in the church at Corinth, which is why Paul commands them to "test yourself to see if you are in the faith"

If you struggle with doubt about Jesus Christ, it does not mean you are NOT a Christian, HOWEVER, you should use your doubt to investigate if you are a Christian!

- I'm afraid that many who identify as Christians are not true believers!
    - They have a HEAD KNOWLEDGE, but they have never had a transformative encounter with Jesus Christ!
        - That does not mean that true believers sin, because they do, but it means that they do not live in sin or excuse sin.
            - A true believer has a desire to pursue God!

Use Doubt to Drive Devotion to God

Doubt is natural, and doubt can be good!

- **Doubt can be good** when it causes you to examine your faith!
    - Don't allow doubt to paralyze you.

- Use doubt as a catalyst for you to **examine your heart**!

John 20:26 A week later, his disciples were indoors again, and **Thomas was with them**.

- Were they there **anticipating** that Jesus would appear to them again? Maybe!
  - Maybe Thomas showed up thinking that there might be a repeat of Jesus' appearance.

Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

- **Locked doors** did not stop Jesus in His resurrected body
  - Jesus' appearance to the disciples demonstrated that He was not confined to the **regular laws of physics**.

Jesus turns His attention to Thomas: **John 20:27**

"Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don't be faithless, but believe."

- In vs. 25, Thomas told his companions what needed to happen for him to turn his doubt into devotion.
  - Jesus wasn't in the room when Thomas gave his demands to the disciples.

- In vs. 27, Jesus appears and commands Thomas to do what he said he required to turn his doubt into devotion

In vs. 25, Thomas wanted to "put my **finger** into the mark of the nails"

- **In vs. 27**, **Jesus** commands him, "Put your **finger** here and look at my hands.

In vs. 25, **Thomas** wanted to "and put my **hand** into his side"

- In vs. 27, **Jesus** commands him, "Reach out your **hand** and put it into my side"

Jesus allowed Thomas to examine Him, and Thomas took the opportunity!

The result: **John 20:28** "Thomas responded to him, "My Lord and my God!"

- Thomas's statement is the high point of John's Gospel

Here is a man who was skeptical about the claim that Christ rose from the dead.

- Thomas goes from doubter to devoted to Christ!
    - Thomas calls Jesus his "Lord" or Master and his God!

Jesus' resurrection proved…

- He is the Messiah
- He is the Son of God
- He is God in the flesh
- He was sent by God to die for humanity
- He is worthy of worship

Use Doubt to Drive Devotion

The Bible doesn't say what happened to Thomas, but according to the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* (2nd–3rd century) and later church writings from Eusebius (4th century) and Jerome, mention Thomas' mission to India
, Thomas sailed to India around 52 CE, landing on the Malabar Coast (modern-day Kerala).

- He preached Christianity, converted many, including local kings and Brahmins, and established Christian communities, often referred to as "St. Thomas Christians" or "Nasranis."
    - There is evidence that this is true because e 1st-century Roman trade artifacts support early Christian presence in India
- **Martyrdom:** The *Acts of Thomas* claims Thomas was martyred in Mylapore, near modern-day Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

- He was reportedly speared to death on a hill now called St. Thomas Mount, either due to opposition from local priests or a conflict with a king (possibly a local ruler angered by conversions). The traditional date of his martyrdom is July 3, 72 CE.
  - The San Thome Basilica in Chennai on the southeastern coast of India marks the site of his supposed tomb,

Thomas's doubt drove him to investigate Jesus, and that led him to devote the rest of his life to proclaiming Jesus.

Doubt is natural, so instead of squelching it, use it to **fuel your devotion to Christ**!

If you have doubts about God, dig deep into His word

Look at **John 20:30-31** "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

- Example: If you doubt **God's love**, read and meditate on passages about His love. Talk to God about your struggles, ask Him to speak to

you as you study about His love in His Word, and talk to mature Christians about God's love.
    - Use your doubt to fuel your devotion!

Don't let doubt drive you away from God, but use it to draw closer to God!

John 20:29 Jesus said, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Thomas had an advantage: he **physically saw** and touched Christ

- We don't have that advantage!
    - However, Jesus says that we are "blessed" because we believe without seeing.
        - We are recipients of a special blessing from God because we believe.

WE

Do you remember the story of the great preacher G. Campbel Morgan and his doubt that I told you about at the beginning of this sermon? Do you know what he did?

- He cancelled all preaching engagements, put all the books in a cupboard and locked the door, and went to the bookstore and bought a new Bible. He said to himself, "I am no longer sure that this

is what my father claims it to be—the Word of God. But of this I am sure. If it be the Word of God, and if I come to it with an unprejudiced and open mind, it will bring assurance to my soul of itself." The result?

- "That Bible found me!" said Morgan.

The new assurance in 1883 gave him the motivation for his preaching and teaching ministry. He devoted himself to the study and preaching of God's Word.

G. Campbell Morgan used his doubt to fuel his devotion!

In the late 1940s, Billy Graham was a young evangelist preaching with Youth for Christ and serving as president of Northwestern College in Minnesota. Despite early successes, a spiritually challenging crusade in Altoona, Pennsylvania, left him discouraged, questioning whether evangelism was his true calling.

Around this time, his close friend and fellow evangelist Charles Templeton, who was attending Princeton Theological Seminary, began embracing theological liberalism. Templeton challenged Graham's belief in the Bible's inerrancy, pointing out apparent contradictions and arguing that modern scholarship viewed Scripture as flawed.

Graham, who relied on the Bible's authority for his preaching, found these questions deeply unsettling, as they echoed his unresolved doubts about its trustworthiness.

The turning point came in August 1949 at Forest Home, a Presbyterian retreat center in California. Feeling the weight of his doubts, Graham took a solitary walk in the woods one night. He described wrestling with God, grappling with intellectual questions about Scripture's reliability. Kneeling before an open Bible on a tree stump, unable to read the text in the moonlight, Graham prayed a pivotal prayer: "Father, I am going to accept this as Thy Word—by faith! I'm going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be Your inspired Word." Though not all his questions were resolved, Graham felt an overwhelming sense of God's presence, describing it as crossing a "major bridge" in his spiritual battle. The impact was immediate and profound. The next day, Graham preached at Forest Home with newfound authority, and 400 people reportedly committed to Christ. Weeks later, his 1949 Los Angeles Crusade, initially planned for three weeks, extended to eight, drawing massive crowds and launching him into national prominence. This

moment solidified Graham's commitment to preaching the Bible as God's Word, shaping his global ministry that reached millions.
Graham later reflected that his doubts, while challenging, drove him to a deeper faith. He contrasted his path with Templeton's, who left Christianity for agnosticism, though Templeton reportedly expressed longing for Jesus on his deathbed. Graham's resolution to trust Scripture by faith, despite unanswered questions, became a cornerstone of his ministry and a model for addressing doubt through prayer and reliance on God

PQ: Are You Using Doubt to Drive Your Devotion God?