

Caring for One Another

Wrestling with God: Questions of Faith



Opening Questions (select 1 or 2 questions)

- If you were to plan a worship service, what is something you'd like to include (a hymn, Bible text, message you'd like to share...)?
- Identify a situation or a time in life when someone might question their faith.
- If you knew someone who was doubting their faith, would that change how you feel about them

What Does the Bible Say?

*Habakkuk 1:2-5 (NRSV) - (huh-**bak**-uh k)*

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous — therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

John 20:24-29 (NRSV)

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So, the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Think About... (optional, depending on time)

- What words or phrases stand out for you?
- Have you ever felt like Thomas? What was that like?

What Do Others Say?

After I was confirmed at 16, I remained active in my church in a small northern Minnesota town. There was a youth group I was part of which met frequently for fun group activities and to help the church with tasks such as serving morning donuts. Once a year the youth group would take over the morning worship service on the Sunday after Easter. Some of you will recognize this Sunday as the "Doubting Thomas" Sunday.

On this Sunday we hear more about Jesus' resurrection and his first appearance to his disciples, but Thomas was not present. Thomas later hears that Jesus appeared to the other disciples, but he did not believe them. Jesus appears a week later to the disciples when Thomas is there, and Thomas sees that Jesus is alive and exclaims that he believes! Jesus doesn't exactly rebuke him but tells all the disciples that "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

I was one of the two people picked from our youth group to give a 5-minute sermon for this Sunday. My friend had connections and he was able to come up with sermons that had been written by someone else, so we did not have to write them from scratch. The sermons we practiced were as dry as dust and not at all interesting and engaging. I remember practicing the sermon to the group and realizing I was total losing everyone's interest, after just a minute into the sermon.

On the night before I was to deliver that sermon, I suddenly became very motivated to re-write the sermon to make it my own. I got out my manual typewriter, put a blank piece of paper in there, and surprisingly the words just started flowing from my mind to my fingers. I myself have had many questions about God and often wrestled with my faith. The new sermon came from my heart and from God. I still remember the amazed looks on everyone's faces as I gave the new sermon that they had never heard before.

My sermon talked about the fact that we all have times when doubt creeps into our lives. When we hear about bad things happening to good people and bad people not getting what is coming to them, doubt is understandable. We wonder where God is in all of this and how God could turn a blind eye to the world's problems, or even more important ignore MY PROBLEMS.

My own doubts extended further as I was passionate about science growing up. I tried to understand how the world could be billions of years old, while the Bible's account for people is less than 10,000 years. I wondered did God create the dinosaurs. What was he thinking, was he just having fun? Did he then erase his mistake and start over with Adam and Eve? I always had too many questions and I was seldom convinced the Bible held the answers. I wanted proof!

Where do we look for proof of God? How can we be confident that our faith has not led us in the wrong direction?

Technically we live in an incredibly complex environment. Our planet, our universe, all arrived at a point where people could exist and thrive, which is amazing considering everything that had to go right for us to be here from a science perspective. How did the universe even get started? Scientists have an answer with their Bing Bang theory. But they are silent on how everything showed up before it all exploded.

We continue to learn more about God's handiwork as scientists, doctors, researchers and others explore the world around us and also us! Our human bodies with our DNA are so incredibly complex that every cell in our body is made up of over 3 billion combinations of DNA. Each type of cell is an incredibly complex structure that together allow us to move, and be creative, and to love.

Instead of proof, I discovered God at work in the creation of the universe. And, I discovered God is constantly at work directly and indirectly in our world and in people's lives. I experienced this the night I was writing the sermon. I've also experienced God's work in the wonder of a newborn baby, the joy of relationships and the possibility of an impossible healing. You can look for God all you want, but God is right here where God has always been.

God knew I wanted proof, but God gave me presence. God helped me to see God's work in my life and all around me. I had many questions for God that I couldn't answer. I have to say some of them are still not answered, can't be answered this side of eternity. But I've learned that there can be room for doubts, questions, and uncertainty in a life of faith. After all, Thomas doubted and Jesus still showed up for him, offering him peace.

At the end of the service and after I gave my sermon, I was feeling relieved to have it behind me. I saw the minister walking up to me and I figured my last-minute change wasn't as acceptable as I hoped. He shook my hand and told me I should consider the ministry. I was astounded. I have no doubt that God helped me write that sermon that night. The enjoyment I had and the ability for words to flow from my mind to my typewriter were nothing I have ever experienced before or since. At that very point I knew that God existed and was active in my life. It was not the beginning of the journey, but rather God shining a light onto the path where God has been present all along and now continues to be.

—Reflection written by Steve Dorr

Think About... *(select one or more questions)*

- Who is someone who has encouraged you in your faith?
- What questions or doubts have you had about God?
- Does questioning your faith help or hurt?
- If someone asked you if God exists how would you respond?
- Who or what has been helpful when you've questioned or doubted your faith?
- When have you had a sense that God was present and active in your life?
- What are some of the common, big questions about faith that you've wondered about (for example, why does God let bad things happen or is grace available to everyone)?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, open our eyes to see the wonders you have created, the miracles that can happen every day and how you work around us and in us. Remind us that faith does not come from what we see, but from your love for us. Thank you for accepting us as we are with our doubts and questions and confusion. Help us to trust in what we cannot see and believe in Your presence.

Connecting Faith with Daily Life...

(for individual reflection & action)

- Take time to reflect on the past few days, where have you seen or experienced signs of God's presence.
- Take a blank sheet of paper and start writing about one or more of your questions for God. See where your writing and reflection takes you.
- Spend some time in prayer. Lift up situations in the world or in your own life where you'd like God's presence and guidance.
- Ask a friend or family member what they would like to ask God about.
- Pray for the other people in this small group.

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