

# Nurturing FAITH

IT'S A FAVORITE OLD STORY, the basis for myriad sermons delivered the world over, taught to wee little ones in Sunday School since its invention in the 1780s. Everyone within and without the church is familiar with the moniker, "Doubting Thomas."

But many of us have the story wrong. Even this writer got it wrong decades back when writing a monologue for the wife of the disciple, who is defending her husband's reputation. In rationalizing the "doubts" of her late husband to one of her grandchildren she explains:

There are two things you must remember. The first lesson is that God gave every person a mind of his own. Our heavenly Father isn't interested in the blind praise and empty worship of puppets. He wants everyone to choose—to *desire* a relationship with Him. And the second lesson is a result of the first: Since every person is left to make up his own mind, then not everyone will have the same kind of faith. Thomas had a more *practical* faith, and his questioning—his doubts—led him to a deeper, more vibrant faith than he had had before. And he served his Lord gladly for the rest of his life.

Wrong.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing."

*John 20:24-27*

The word Jesus chooses to describe His errant disciple—"unbelieving"—does not mean just simple questioning, seeking clarification. It does not mean "almost, but not quite, there." It means disbelieving—without Christian faith. It describes someone who is faithless.

Thomas was not questioning or expanding a faith already in place—he was not struggling with a few questions around the fringes of his faith—he didn't have *any* faith until he saw the wounds in Jesus with his own eyes.

Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and yet believed."

*John 20:28-29*

And in this moment we see the difference real faith makes in a life. Thomas had earlier declared to his brethren that, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

*Unless I can physically verify these wounds of the cross, to confirm for myself that it is really the risen Lord, he was saying, I will not believe.*

That isn't just a weak faith—that is no faith at all. But the moment he laid eyes on Jesus, suddenly faith kicked in; even though Jesus invited him to do it, such an examination was no longer necessary for Thomas. Now his relationship with the risen Christ was no longer one of disbelief, not even one of intellectual belief devoid of trust, but one of true faith-based devotion, resulting in his eloquently succinct confession: "My Lord and my God!"



The contemporary idea of "doubt" is a questioning of something that may already be in place. It represents—especially as regards faith—not necessarily obstinate disbelief, but vacillation, just a little wavering between one position and another. This suggests that there really is belief, there is faith, but it is a faith that is just a little shaky around the edges.

And in this society that is not necessarily a bad thing. We associate doubt with "healthy skepticism," with reason, and isn't that a laudable enterprise? But when we dig into God's word we learn that doubt is not really commendable at all, and is, essentially, destructive to faith.

How much better it is to nurture and possess the solid faith exhibited by the patriarch, Abraham.

In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "So shall your descendants be." Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness.

*Romans 4:18-22*

Let us resolve to nurture true, solid trust in the Lord, rather than courting doubt.

