

DOUBTS ARE OVERCOME

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Belief is passed down by faithful witnesses (John 20:24-25).
2. Belief is based on the historical resurrection of Jesus (John 20:26-27).
3. Belief is grounded in confessing Jesus as Lord (John 20:28-29).

Background Passage: John 20

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

While all are invited to believe in Jesus, not all are willing to place their faith in Jesus so that they might be saved.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

While the resurrection of Jesus can be supported with evidence, ultimately, belief in the gospel comes by faith. All who place their trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus by faith are blessed with eternal life.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have experienced the blessings of following Jesus, we proclaim Him to others, calling on them to place their faith in Him for salvation as well.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **When have you missed something that seemingly everyone else experienced?** (answers will vary, but there may have been an episode on television when a sitcom, sports event, or movie aired and you missed it; or perhaps you were out of town when something big happened in your area; some people who have moved into an area feel that they missed an entire history of a friend group simply because they didn't grow up there)

TRANSITION: Thomas was one of Jesus's chosen disciples, those who had walked with, eaten with, and learned from Jesus for a three-year period. But when Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples, Thomas wasn't there. We don't know where Thomas was on resurrection morning. We just know he hadn't seen Jesus like the other disciples and definitely missed out.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Luke 24:36-49 and John 20:19-23 tell the same story from different perspectives. John added a little more detail: not only did Jesus appear to the Eleven and some other disciples, He also showed them His hands and side, offered peace, pledged the Holy Spirit, and gave them instructions on forgiveness. What a moment! When the small group of followers had been contemplating whether or not to believe the testimony of a few, Jesus Himself showed up and removed all doubt. His visible, tangible, spiritual, and emotional proof gave them what they needed to believe. And Thomas missed it.



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POINT 1

BELIEF IS PASSED DOWN BY FAITHFUL WITNESSES (JOHN 20:24-25).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 20:24-25a** from his or her Bible.

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. **25a** So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.”

INTERACT: Do a quick character study on Thomas, splitting your group into three smaller groups. Give each group the selected passages: (1) Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; (2) John 11:11-16; and (3) John 14:1-5. Ask the groups to read these appearances of Thomas in the Gospels, discuss, and then report to the large group. Use the points below to add anything missing from the groups’ answers.

- Thomas’s name was explained to mean “Twin” twice (John 14:5; 20:24), but we don’t know who his twin was. Thomas was named three times in lists of the Twelve (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). “The Twelve” referred to those twelve people who were closest to Jesus and were sent out to spread the message of the gospel.
- Thomas also made an appearance in John 11:16. Lazarus had become sick, and his sisters reached out to Jesus in their desperation. Jesus had intentionally stayed where He was. After news of Lazarus’s death reached them, Thomas saw the danger of going to Bethany—since it was very close to Jerusalem—due to the conflict brewing with the religious leaders. But Thomas responded boldly, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”
- In another instance, as Jesus described at the last supper that He was going away to prepare a place for His followers (John 14:1-2), He assured the Twelve: “You know the way to where I am going” (v. 4). Thomas responded, “We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (v. 5). Thomas listened carefully and tried to understand Jesus’s teaching.

EXPLAIN: Thomas was a faithful disciple, but he wasn’t there when Jesus appeared. He needed to rely on the words and witness of the other disciples as seen in **verses 24-25a**. Explain the following main idea (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 30):

As witnesses of Jesus, we are called to tell others what we have seen and experienced concerning Him.

- In verse 25, we see the phrase, “So the other disciples told him.” The translation is a Greek verb tense indicating the disciples kept on telling Thomas. We shouldn’t see this as an irritation or bother; they could have simply wanted Thomas to believe as they did or, in their excitement, continued to tell him of Jesus’s appearance because of its importance.

ASK: (DDG p. 30)

Why is it difficult for some people to be faithful witnesses of the gospel? (they're afraid of how people might respond; they're unsure of their words; they feel like they have to prove everything; they can't find the right opportunities)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 20:25b** from his or her Bible.

But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

INTERACT: Answer in groups of 3-4, "Is Thomas reasonable in his doubting and skepticism? Why or why not?" (yes and no; sometimes it's good to want proof—we can't blindly believe everything we hear; sometimes faith is all we can have to hear or see God move; God values discernment in our faith as there are many false prophets as well)

EXPLAIN: Thomas was a faithful disciple, but he wanted proof. Explain the following (DDG p. 30):

When we are truly searching for truth but doubting, God will meet us there.

- Thomas had spoken words of courage as Jesus went to Bethany after Lazarus's death, and he had been there when Lazarus walked out of the grave. But Thomas wanted proof of the truth. He wanted to see it for himself.
- Perhaps Thomas is like many of us. In a world of false prophets and conspiracy theories, sometimes it is right to be a critical thinker and ask for proof. Yes, he was doubting and wanting visible evidence, but we'll continue to read that Jesus appeared and gave him the evidence he asked for.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 30):

How does knowing God honors our search for truth remind us that our faith is not blind? (God will meet us where we're at in our spiritual journey and reveal to us more of Him as we truly seek Him; Christianity is not based on a myth but reliable evidence; God honors logic and reason that build on faith and trust in Him as our faith is based on objective truths)

TRANSITION: The disciples who had seen Jesus in His glorified body were eager for their friend Thomas to share in their faith. Thomas, however, simply wouldn't believe unless he had proof. But Jesus loves His own even in their doubts and will reveal Himself in His time.

POINT 2

BELIEF IS BASED ON THE HISTORICAL RESURRECTION OF JESUS (JOHN 20:26-27).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 20:26-27** from his or her Bible.

26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” **27** Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

DIG: Ask someone to read John 20:19-20 of when Jesus first appeared to the other disciples. Ask, “What do you notice are some similarities with this appearance?” (doors were locked when Jesus appeared; He greeted with peace; He showed them visible proof) Thomas was no different than the other disciples. John wrote that Jesus had to show them His hands and His side too for them to truly see and believe Him.

HIGHLIGHT: Using **verse 26**, highlight the main idea below (DDG p. 30):

We can be assured that our belief in Jesus is true because of historical evidence of His life, death, and resurrection by many eyewitnesses.

- Jesus was buried on a Friday and raised on a Sunday. On that first Sunday, He appeared to His disciples and the Eleven (minus Thomas) in the locked room (Luke 24:36). He would continue to appear to many other witnesses before His ascension forty days later.
- Jesus again greeted them with peace. Though the English renderings of Luke 24:36 (“Peace to you”) and John 20:26 (“Peace be with you”) are slightly different, they both come from the same Greek words. At Jesus’s first appearance, John recorded this phrase twice (John 20:19,21). Jesus had also promised peace as a parting gift after the last supper (John 14:27). The Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6), whose ministry turned the religious world on its head, was most certainly pointing out that He brought peace with God. The word “you” in “Peace to you” is plural; His offer of peace is to all.
- Jesus didn’t call Thomas “Doubting Thomas,” but He addressed Thomas’s doubts. He invited Thomas to touch and look at the proof of His resurrection: the hands where the nails had entered and His side where He had been pierced by the spear.
- Doubt and disbelief are not the same thing. When we doubt something, we either don’t understand it or need more proof (whether concrete or mental). But when we don’t believe, we have chosen to harden our hearts and not trust God. Doubts are common among the faithful: John the Baptist doubted (Matt. 11:2), Peter doubted (14:31), and even some who saw Jesus resurrected doubted (28:17). We must take our doubts to the Lord and allow Him to open our minds. On the other hand, we must confess our unbelief for the sin it is and ask the Lord to help us overcome it (Mark 9:24).

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

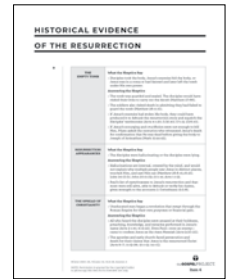
“Never further than Your cross; Never higher than Your feet; Here earth’s precious things seem dross; Here earth’s bitter things grow sweet. Here we learn to serve and give, And rejoicing, self deny; Here we gather love to live, Here we gather faith to die.”¹

—Elizabeth Charles (1828–1896)

ASK: (DDG p. 30)

From Day 4 in the DDG: **How does the historical resurrection of Jesus and its validity bring you peace and encouragement?** (what we're trusting in is not a false hope but a real one; knowing Jesus is real makes the rest of the Bible real as well; we can trust in God's promises and plans)

DISCOVER: From **verse 27**, we see that the disciples and Thomas saw Jesus's hands and side and believed. We don't have that luxury, but we do have other proofs and evidence of Jesus and His resurrection. Use **PACK ITEM 4: HISTORICAL EVIDENCE** to show such evidence to the group. Allow the group to read or skim over the handout. Ask: "What proof seems compelling to you and why?" After people answer, say: "If all we had were the Gospel accounts, these are sufficient because they are the inspired Word of God. The preservation of Scripture by the providence of God reinforces our faith in the Scriptures, in God, and in the resurrected Jesus for our salvation."



EXPLAIN: Invite someone to read the key doctrine (DDG p. 30):

Key Doctrine #8: Preservation of Scripture: God has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity through the text of Scripture, having inspired it and directed it to be free from error. God has also acted providentially throughout the course of history to ensure the biblical text is faithfully preserved for future generations. Our belief in the preservation of Scripture is supported by investigation into how the canon of Scripture was formed and how manuscripts were faithfully transmitted throughout the centuries.

SAY: We praise God for the preservation of the Scriptures, both the passages of Jesus and the apostles and all of the Old Testament. Throughout the whole Bible, we see God's faithfulness, His holiness, His commitment to righteousness, His authority, and His compassionate love for His people. In Jesus, we see that God's promises are fulfilled in Him, and we find hope for our own lives and purpose.

ASK: (DDG p. 31)

Knowing the Bible is true and reliable, what are some ways we can encourage ourselves and others to read and study it more? (be more consistent in going to a Bible study, small group, or Sunday School class; watch or listen to a reliable podcast that dissects the Scripture well; take notes in church or while listening to other sermons; buy commentaries or books to supplement our study of Scripture)

TRANSITION: Imagine your own reaction. Jesus has come to you in the midst of your unbelief. He's looked you in the eye, invited you to view His body, and instructed you to believe Him. What would you say and do?

POINT 3

BELIEF IS GROUNDED IN CONFESSING JESUS AS LORD (JOHN 20:28-29).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **John 20:28-29** from his or her Bible.

28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" **29** Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

HIGHLIGHT: Read the following main idea as seen from **verse 28** (DDG p. 31):

When we are brought to the point that we believe Jesus is exactly who He declares Himself to be, we see clearly that He is our Lord and God.

- John's Gospel is a great source of the testimony as to the identity of Jesus as Lord and God. John the Baptist called Him "the Son of God" (1:34); Nathanael declared, "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (1:49); Peter called Him "the Holy One of God" (6:69); Martha said, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (11:27); and John himself concludes with these words: "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31).
- The Bible doesn't record that Thomas actually placed his finger into the hands and side of our Lord; maybe he didn't need to. Regardless, Jesus offered up His own body as the proof of His identity, and Thomas responded with faith. As Jesus reveals Himself to us, we also should open our mouths and speak aloud what we have heard, seen, learned, and believed.

INTERACT: On the board, make a chart with two columns that have the headings "My Lord" and "My God." Ask the group to fill out the chart, saying, "How is Jesus our Lord and how is He our God?" (Lord: He guides us, He loves us; we submit to Him; we obey Him; we trust Him // God: He is supreme, His ways are not our ways; He is all-knowing; He is all-powerful; He is God with us)

ASK: (DDG p. 31)

How have you submitted to Jesus as your Lord and God this past week? (I try to live my life for His glory; I pray and read His Word; I try to tell others about Him; I look to Him for my joy and peace)

EXPLAIN: We should get very excited when we read the words of Jesus in **verse 29**. Call attention to **PACK ITEM 5: YOU HAVE SEEN ME** as you explain how Thomas believed because he saw the proof of the crucifixion in Jesus's body, but we are blessed if we "have not seen and yet have believed." Explain the following statement (DDG p. 31):

Generations will be blessed because of the testimony of others as we believe even when we haven't seen.

- The Greek word translated "blessed" is the same word used in each of the similar statements found in the Beatitudes. Just as Matthew 5:3-11 guides us to live in accordance with the righteousness of God, Jesus's final statement in John 20:29 promises that we are blessed when our faith comes not from sight but from faith in God's Word.

LIST: As you ask the question below, consider making a list on the board so your group can see the abundant blessings of faith (DDG p. 31).

How do you feel "blessed" through your faith in Jesus? (He gives me peace; I feel loved; I know I have eternal life; I know He sees me and is with me; I have a forever friend; He gives me joy, even in trials; He helps me have an eternal perspective; He helps me love others; I feel forgiven)

TRANSITION: We see what happened when Thomas opened his heart to the truth of Jesus. The question then becomes this: What will we do with the faithful testimony of Jesus's resurrection?



MY RESPONSE

SAY: While the resurrection of Jesus can be supported with evidence, ultimately, belief in the gospel comes by faith. All who place their trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus by faith are blessed with eternal life. Because we have experienced the blessings of following Jesus, we proclaim Him to others, calling on them to place their faith in Him for salvation as well.

HEAD:

God made us curious and inquisitive. This makes us good at problem solving and exploring. But these traits can also lead to doubts, creating a stumbling block for faith when we want to have proof of what Jesus tells us. But belief can go beyond tangible proof. Sometimes God asks us to trust Him simply because He is trustworthy. Waiting for proof before accepting the Lord's Word isn't faith; it's doubt.

In what spiritual situation or question have you chosen to doubt because you haven't seen proof?

HEART:

Jesus calls us to obedience and faith. Yet, as He did for Thomas, sometimes He reveals Himself boldly even as we struggle to believe. Thomas responded with overwhelming faith at the true identity of Jesus. As we come to see Him clearly in our own lives, this should lead us to worship and full submission. Open your heart to the mercy and grace of Jesus; He has called you to see and believe.

How can you worship Jesus now for answering a cry of your heart this past month?

HANDS:

Thomas, a disciple of Jesus, went a full eight days in stubbornness, even though the other disciples kept telling him that they had seen the Lord. But the picture of the pleading, encouraging, loving disciples should be us. We will not stop telling and sharing the amazing news of Jesus's resurrection. Don't give up on that friend or loved one; keep sharing!

How does today's text encourage you to speak the truth of Jesus to someone who doubts?

PRAY: Lord, You alone are Lord and God. Please meet us in our doubts and forgive our unbelief. As we see You clearly, may we respond in faith, worship, obedience, and evangelism.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Give me a new, a perfect heart, From doubt, and fear, and sorrow free; The mind which was in Christ impart, and let my spirit cleave to Thee."²

—Charles Wesley
(1707–1788)

EXTRA

POINT 1: BELIEF IS PASSED DOWN BY FAITHFUL WITNESSES (JOHN 20:24-25).

+ **COMMENTARY**

“It is not known what was the ground of the incredulity of Thomas. It is probable, however, that this was the effect of deep grief, and of that despondency which fills the mind when a long-cherished hope is taken away. In such a case it requires proof of uncommon clearness and strength to overcome the despondency, and to convince us that we may attain the object of our desires. Thomas has been much blamed by expositors, but he asked only for proof that would be satisfactory in his circumstances. The testimony of ten disciples should have been indeed sufficient, but an opportunity was thus given to the Saviour to convince the last of them of the truth of his resurrection. This instance shows, what all the conduct of the apostles proves, that they had not conspired together to impose on the world. Even they were slow to believe, and one of them refused to believe even on the testimony of ten of his brothers. How unlike this to the conduct of men who agree to impose a story on mankind!”³

+ **ILLUSTRATION**

Before digging into the text for this point, open with the questions: “Has anyone in here ever been a courier or used a courier? Has anyone ever served as a messenger in an official role?” Be sure to have read through the following article by searching for “Runners World Great Messengers of the Past” [<https://www.runnersworld.com/advanced/a20808052/great-messengers-of-the-past>]. This short article gives an overview of notable messengers who carried news, mail, and even supplies over treacherous terrain. Be prepared to read some of the highlights of the article.

After sharing about a couple of the messengers, say something like this: “We should be amazed and astonished at the determination of these messengers. They knew they had vital information that needed to be delivered. But those ancient messengers should also inspire us today: We too have vital information that changes not just lives but eternity.” As you open today’s passage, point out that the first disciples as well as Christians today should see themselves as messengers; we should devote ourselves to the high calling of carrying our witness everywhere we go.

EXTRA

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

As you open the group time, state: “In July of 1969, Neil Armstrong walked on the moon.” Ask for a show of hands of people who believe that statement. Then ask: “Are there some people here who doubt the truth of that?” You may get a few hands. Say: “Just because most people believe something, that doesn’t mean all people do. In today’s passage, we’re going to see that most of the disciples had already believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead. But that didn’t convince one in the group.”

POINT 2: BELIEF IS BASED ON THE HISTORICAL RESURRECTION OF JESUS (JOHN 20:26-27).

+ COMMENTARY

“What was it that Thomas would not believe? The reports of the other Christians that Jesus Christ was alive. The verb said in John 20:25 means that the disciples ‘kept saying to him’ that they had seen the Lord Jesus Christ alive. No doubt the women and the Emmaus pilgrims also added their witness to this testimony. On the one hand, we admire Thomas for wanting personal experience, but on the other hand, we must fault him for laying down conditions for the Lord to meet. . . . But let’s give him credit for showing up the next week. The other ten men had told Thomas that they had seen the Lord’s hands and side (John 20:20), so Thomas made that the test.”⁴

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Bring three small items to the group that you can easily hide in the palm of your hand. They should be something that most people would like, such as a quarter, a wrapped piece of candy, or a small toy. Walk up to a good-natured group member with the treasure hidden in your closed hand and say: “I’ve got something in my hand that you would probably want. If you’d like it, reach out your hand.” Some will accept the gift; others won’t. But as they see that the gifts are decently desirable, they will likely be willing to take it. Say: “In this passage, we see Jesus invited Thomas to reach out his hand and find confidence in the resurrected Jesus.” As a group, discuss how your faith can inspire others to find confidence in Christ.

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Write the word “peace” on the board. Ask: “Do we live in a peaceful world? Do most people consider their lives to be peaceful? Why or why not?” Before class, find the following link [<https://peacealliance.org/tools-education/peace-inspirational-quotes>] by searching “peace alliance inspirational quotes,” and read through several of the chosen quotes. Share what you found, including notable people and their ideas for peace in the world. You may want to point out that Wendell Berry finds peace in “wild things” and the “presence of still water,” or that Albert Einstein said, “Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.”

Say: “There are many quotes on peace, and many opinions on what it takes to achieve it. Jesus approaches this differently; He simply gives peace. Let’s consider His words carefully today.”

POINT 3: BELIEF IS GROUNDED IN CONFESSING JESUS AS LORD (JOHN 20:28-29).

+ COMMENTARY

“Thomas’ response, My Lord and My God! is the high point of the Gospel. Here was a skeptical man, confronted by the evidence of Jesus’ resurrection. He announced that Jesus, the Man of Galilee, is God manifest in the flesh. Thus the truths in the first chapter were realized personally in this apostle (1:1, 14, 18). The Resurrection (a) demonstrated that what Jesus predicted about His being raised was true . . . (b) proved that Jesus is the Son of God . . . and was sent by God . . . (c) testified to the success of His mission of salvation . . . (d) entitled Jesus to a position of glory . . . and (e) proclaimed that Jesus is the ‘Lord.’”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

Stress the following from John 20:29: “Have you believed because you have seen me?” Ask: “Are there any sayings in our culture that link seeing and believing?” (Learners may suggest “seeing is believing” or “a picture is worth a thousand words.”) Ask: “Have you used that phrase lately? Is it true? Is it always true?”

Search for the “Invisible Gorilla” video through your search engine but don’t draw attention to or let the group see the title. Explain that they are about to watch a video and must count how many times the players wearing white shirts pass the basketball. Play the video and see if anyone actually notices the person dressed in a gorilla costume moving among the basketball players. Explain that in the original experiment in 1999, half of the people counting the passes missed the gorilla. According to the website: “This experiment reveals two things: that we are missing a lot of what goes on around us, and that we have no idea that we are missing so much.”⁶

Engage learners in considering a link between this video and our faith: have you seen the fingerprints of God this week? Has the Lord revealed something to you in His Word, in nature, or in your worship that should have brought you greater faith? As a group, consider how we don’t always “see” with our eyes. Faith requires that we choose to see Christ and then believe in Him.

References

1. Elizabeth Charles, *The Epworth Hymnal*, No. 235 (Boston, MA: Harvard University, 1900), 205.
2. Charles Wesley, *Hymnal of the Methodist Episcopal Church with Tunes*, No. 528 (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1878), 195.
3. Albert Barnes, ed. Samuel Green, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical, on the Gospels* By Rev. Albert Barnes Condensed from the American Edition (London: Oxford University, 1851), 827.
4. Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 314–15.
5. Edwin A. Blum, “John,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 343–44.
6. Christopher Chabris, Daniel Simons, “The Invisible Gorilla,” 2010, http://www.theinvisiblegorilla.com/gorilla_experiment.html.