

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 33

CONVERSATION STARTER

If you were going to write a book about your life, what would your purpose for writing be?

ON DOUBT AND BELIEF

Doubting Thomas. Through thousands of years of Church tradition, Thomas had been boiled down to one moment in his relationship with Jesus—the moment he doubted. But is that really fair?

Thomas wasn't with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them. He didn't get to see Jesus like they did. The last thing he knew was that Jesus was brutally beaten, crucified, and buried. And dead men do not come back to life. Can you blame him for wanting to touch the wounds? His comment comes off as almost sarcastic. They are asking him to believe in something that goes against everything he knows to be true.

A week goes by like this, with the disciples wondering if what they saw was a hallucination or a dream and with Thomas doubting that any of it could be true. And yet, when they are all gathered once more in the house, Jesus appears, saying, "Peace be with you." He turns directly to Thomas now and offers him the very thing Thomas needed in order to believe. He says come, see and touch for yourself, and believe. It turns out that seeing is all that Thomas needed; He didn't need to touch after all. He gazes upon the risen Jesus and says, "My Lord and my God!"

Thomas is cast as the skeptic doubter, but in reality, Thomas is the very first person in the Gospel to call Jesus God. It's an astounding proclamation of faith. And Jesus responds, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." At first, these words seem like a rebuke. But think about the audience John is writing to—the first generation after Christ, a people who didn't see or witness anything the disciples witnessed. John speaks to them now, encouraging them to believe even though they haven't seen for themselves. He encourages them to trust in the witness of others, like those he has written about in his Gospel.

Jesus' words are for us, too. We believe even though we have not seen the empty tomb. We believe even though we cannot physically touch or see the risen Jesus. We believe even though we didn't witness the signs or miracles or even talk to those who did. And we are blessed because of it.

Thomas wanted to see and touch to believe. And Jesus wasn't angry because of it. He comes to Thomas and offers him exactly what he needed to believe. Jesus didn't hold Thomas' doubt against him, and he doesn't hold it against you either. Like Thomas, Jesus meets us where we are in our journey of faith, constantly calling us to *believe*, to trust in who he says he is and what he says he can do for us and through us.

Take a moment to discuss with your group. What are the areas in your faith where you still experience doubt? What does Thomas' story reveal about Jesus' relationship with doubt?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. In what ways are we called to take part in Jesus' invitation to be sent into the world, continuing the mission and ministry of Jesus?
3. What does forgiveness mean to you? What are the benefits of forgiveness?
4. Why do you think some people require more evidence than others to believe in Jesus? How did you come to believe confidently in Jesus as Christ?
5. What is the most difficult thing for you to believe about Jesus or the Bible?

WEEKLY PRACTICE

Even in their time of great fear and anxiety, the disciples remained together. They were united through this shared experience they'd all been through. They were doing life together, even the messy difficult parts. This kind of bond doesn't happen overnight, nor does it happen without intentionality. To find this kind of community in our lives, we have to welcome people in and allow ourselves to be vulnerable and authentic.

In the New Testament, we often find Jesus building these types of bonds over a shared meal together. This week, be intentional about carving out time to eat with someone you'd like to build a better relationship with—a friend, coworker, family member, or neighbor. Ask them how they are doing *really*?

Consider how you might make this practice of hospitality a regular rhythm for you and your family.