



How to believe

ANSWERS FOR THE
STRUGGLING SEARCHER *and*
DOUBTING DISCIPLE

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*F*or the Struggling Searcher and the Doubting Disciple

If that describes you, then I have written this booklet with you in mind! Together, we will discover how to believe by looking at it from several perspectives. What is the process of belief? In *Real Needs*, What are your four needs and how are they met in Jesus Christ? In *Unbelief Diagnosed*, What are the nature and consequences of unbelief? And in *The Searcher*, How does Jesus Christ deal with Thomas' doubt? He deals with your doubt in the same way. Let's dig in.



How to Believe

John 4:43-54

When truth is given, it then becomes the responsibility of the one who receives it. That responsibility is gauged by your reaction to the truth. In other words, if you don't like anything about the teaching of Christ and if you choose to reject it all, you will never be able to say, "Nobody told me." So, if you don't want to hear the truth, stop reading right here.

If you are a skeptic or have ever been one, then, chances are, you have had the experience of going to a Christian, asking about his or her faith, only to receive a "You just believe, that's all" in response.

I don't know about you, but I remember feeling frustrated by that. To tell a pagan simply to believe is silly!

Jesus had a lot of amazing things to say about belief. He said we could move mountains and that, with Him, nothing would be impossible. But the problem is—How to believe. What is the process of belief?

Belief is born in need (John 4:47). If you have no need to believe, then you will not believe.

In the text, this father had a son who was dying. That is need. Perhaps it began when his little boy had a sore throat. He didn't get over it; it only got worse. The boy's fever rose, death drew near and out of fear, panic and need, his father went to Jesus. When your kid is sick, you will do anything. This was a man of power and influence, used to giving favors, not asking for them. He had a need and without that need, the man would never have believed.

The difference between strong faith and weak faith is need. The paradox: the strongest Christian is the weakest Christian (2 Corinthians 12:9). God is in the business of putting His children in holes so deep that they can't get out without His help.

What is your need right now? Whatever it is, God is going to teach you how to believe.

Belief is nurtured in Christ (John 4:47). Whether or not belief grows depends on the object of your belief. When God digs your hole, make sure you reach out to the proper "helper-outer."

The fact is, belief, unless vested in the proper object of belief, will die. Are you hurting? Go to God. That is how you nurture belief.

In John 14:12, Jesus teaches that, "He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." Jesus does not say that "He who believes in the power of positive thinking (in the power of the church, in the power of himself, in the strength of theology) . . ." Belief will not grow unless the object of that belief is proper—Jesus Christ Himself.

Belief grows in faith (John 4:50). Jesus said to the father, "Go your way; your son lives." If it were me, I would have said to Jesus, "Would you do me a favor and go down to Capernaum with me? If I get there and my son isn't well, then I will have to come all the way back to Cana and my son might die in the meantime." That isn't what happened. The man accepted what Jesus said as reality . . . even when he didn't know the reality for himself at that moment.

You say you believe? How much are you willing to bet on that belief? Your money, your life, your relationships, your family? Without risk, there can be no belief.

In John 5, When Jesus told the man who had been sick for a lot of years, "Take up your bed and walk," the man could have said, "Are you out of your mind? I can't walk!" If the man had said that, he would have remained a cripple.

Acts 3 describes the time Peter and John went to the temple and saw a lame beggar. Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold, but what I've got, I'll give you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk." What if the beggar had said, "No, that's impossible! I can't walk." If he had said that, he would have stayed at the temple gate, begging until the day he died.

When I was just out far enough on the limb to hesitantly believe, I was afraid to talk to people about it. Someone might challenge my faith and I was afraid to risk. One of the great discoveries of my life was that faith in Christ is true. It holds water.

Within the context of your faith, God is asking you to risk. Maybe it is money, maybe it is a relationship, maybe it is in witnessing, maybe it is in a moral error. Belief grows in proportion to faith. And Another word for faith is risk.

Belief is matured in fact (John 4:51). The mature believer is the one who has seen God act in direct and specific ways and whose faith cannot ever be shaken because it is built on fact. How do you get there? You have to have a need; you have to risk; you have to invest in a proper object and then, God acts in ways that will simply leave you speechless.

I don't want you to miss one of the most exciting things about this text: “. . . And he himself believed, and his whole household” (John 4:53). Not only was the son healed, but the father, the mother, the siblings and the servants were also healed.

Paul got it right: “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20). A mature Christian is not the Christian who says, “Lord, zap me with faith and belief, so that I can move mountains.” The mature Christian is the one who has gone through the process of need, Christ-centered help, faith and risk . . . and has seen God literally stagger that Christian with His faithfulness.

Maturity never comes in shallow water. I will never forget the day, when I was a little boy, my father let me go in water over my head. I then had the absolutely thrilling experience or realization that I was in deep water and I was swimming! I laughed in excitement and my father laughed, too. In the area of faith, the Heavenly Father laughs for the same reason.

Real Needs

John 6:22-40

Two sideroads before the teaching: Jesus is concerned with practical needs. Right before this text, Jesus fed 5000 people real bread and real fish because they were hungry. Jesus talked about priorities, but within that priority was the practical. The God I serve comes when I pray, sing and worship, but He is concerned about my family, too. God is concerned about eternal life, but He is also concerned about my present life.

It has been said of some Christians that they are so heavenly-minded that they are of no earthy-good. You can't say that about the Father. When you can't pay your bills, you don't know where to turn, you wonder where you're going to get your next meal, go to God. Those concerns are His concerns, too.

A second sideroad: The world says, "Seeing is believing." Jesus says, "Believing is seeing." I believe that when you are given an alternative explanation for the acts of God, it is at that point you can see more of God. A lot of Christians are stunted in their spiritual growth because they haven't moved forward with the Father at the point of belief and have missed the sights. Believing is seeing.

Now, to the teaching. One of the principles here is that Jesus will define the questions He will answer—the real questions. Likewise, Jesus will define the needs He will meet—the real needs. And Jesus will define the hurts He will heal—the real hurts.

In this account, it is interesting that, at every point, Jesus did not deal with the verbalized questions or the expressed needs; He dealt with the real questions and the real needs. For example, the people asked Jesus, "When did you come?" And Jesus answered with an explanation of why.

The crowd needed four things, the same four things you need. In all four cases, they were unaware of the need, as you may be, as well.

First, *the crowd really needed someone to help them* (John 6:28-29). There is a process here. The crowd started with the physical (looking for something to eat); they moved on to the moral ("What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"); and then Jesus took them one step further to the spiritual ("This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent").

The then President of Columbia Bible College told about a girl named Debbie who came to him to complain about the rules and regulations of the college. "What is it you want?" he asked. "I don't like the rules," Debbie answered. "Well, which ones?" the college president asked. The student said, "None in particular. I just don't believe you ought to force your thing on someone else." "Do you believe that there ought to be any rules?" "No," she answered. Finally, he said, "What if it were my thing to kill you?" "Well," she said, "I wouldn't like it, I would resist it, but if it is your thing . . ." The President said that Debbie left after one semester and six months later, she committed suicide.

Her verbalized need was freedom from rules, but her real need was structure and rules. Jesus would have gone one step further. He would tell her how, given her dislike of rules, she would be able to obey the rules. That was the point of this account in John.

Most people who come to Christ pass through a process. First, they think that if they are good enough, God will love them. They try and try, only to fail every time. At that point, they either go to Christ or they give up. If they go to Him with the question: "Jesus, I'm really tired and I just can't make it. What can I do?" His answer is always, "Child, you have the cart before the horse. First, you need forgiveness and then you need power. You get both from me."

The fact is, we need help and Jesus is that help. Ask Him for love, for purity and for obedience.

Second, *the crowd needed someone to accept them*—"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37).

I don't know about you, but I'm tired of running around, trying to get people to accept me . . . but I still do it, anyway. Don't we all? I need someone who will accept me—really accept me—just the way I am. In this life, you should consider yourself fortunate if you have two or three friends. The reason is that we wear masks. We are afraid to

let anyone look behind the mask because if they see the garbage, they might not like us.

I still remember years ago, watching an interview on television with the mom of the cheerleaders for the Los Angeles Rams. They had tryouts for the cheerleaders and predictably, the organization picked the prettiest, the most shapely and the most perfect. This elderly lady went out as a joke. Wonder of wonders, they chose her to be a part of the new squad of cheerleaders! She became the chaperon of the group and joined them in the cheers. I don't think I have ever seen anyone as happy as this lady. She had been accepted when she didn't think it would ever happen.

The good news of the Christian faith is that, if you go to God, He won't cast you out. For once, someone will accept you, without checking out how much you smile, how pretty or smart you are, how much money you have or how pure you are. Just come. God will not cast you out. He said it and He doesn't lie.

Third, *the crowd needed someone to hold them* (John 6:39). You are accepted by God. Not only that, you are accepted forever. Once you come to Him, God will hold you forever.

A young man came to me for counseling a while ago. He seemed hesitant to talk, so I told him, "Look, there is nothing that you can tell me that will shock me and probably nothing you can tell me that I haven't heard before. Furthermore, there is nothing that you can say that will cause me to reject you." I could see a little light go on in the young man's head as I watched his eyes. I suspected he was thinking to himself, "I don't believe that, but we'll see." Then, some of the most profane, frightening statements and confessions came pouring out of his mouth. Once the young man finished talking, I said, "Do you think you shocked God or me with that?" He said, "Well, I tried." I said, "Well, you didn't." From that point on, the young man was open to what the Bible had to say to him.

What was happening? The young man found out that I had accepted him when he came, but he found out a whole lot more. He found out that he could say anything and I would still accept him. Do you know where I learned that? I learned it from the Father. He showed me how.

There are a number of Christians who believe that, once you become a Christian, you are sort of on your own. If you blow it, you lose it. I honestly believe that those Christians who see it that way, simply don't know how bad they really are. If I believed that God accepts me, but will let me go if I get out of line, I couldn't sleep at night because, in His grace, God has allowed me to see how bad I really am. A contract has been signed, not in my blood, but in His. God holds me; I don't hold Him. The crowd needed to hear that; the crowds still do. You still do.

Fourth, *the crowd needed someone to raise them*—"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40).

A while back, I talked with a Christian friend and he asked me, "Steve, do you know what I'm going to do for the first million years in heaven?" I allowed that I didn't. He said, "I'm going to sit on the front porch of my mansion in a rocking chair and look out over the Kingdom." He continued, "Do you know what I'm going to do the second million years in heaven?" Again, I allowed that I didn't. He said, "Then, I'm going to start rocking." I like that because it says that I have a million years to sit, a million years to rock and a million years to waste, if that's what I want.

You may have a need for eternal life. It is expressed in a number of ways and nobody but God would know for sure. You may express it in the rush and busyness of life; in the jumping from one fad to another; in the constant complaint that things aren't fair. But the need is real and the Father knows the real need.

Those who follow the world will die when the world dies. Those who follow Him will die when He dies and He never will. If you already have eternal life, thank God for it. If you don't have eternal life, ask God for it.

I remember a youth director in a church I once served telling me about an interesting situation in which two people of vastly different temperaments and commitments had died on the same day.

One death occurred in Los Angeles. A young woman was hit by an automobile and a man, trying to help, bent over the dying woman. With her last breath, she said, "Mister, don't let me die. I haven't begun to live yet."

The second death was of a missionary who had gone to serve in South America. In her youth, the missionary had been engaged to a physician. After her commitment to Christ, she had gone to her fiancé and told him about her need to serve her new Master. He said, "You must choose between me and Christ." She chose and ended up serving her entire life on the mission field.

When the missionary died, the drums of the natives began to beat with the message across the jungle: "Everybody's mother has died."

The story of two lives: One life snuffed out without a purpose except self. The other life given in the name of Christ.

Jesus Himself put it this way: “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him” (John 6:27).

Unbelief Diagnosed

John 12:36-50

For the unbeliever, the following information is of eternal importance. What are the nature and consequences of unbelief?

First, *unbelief is often the result of unbelief*—“But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: ‘Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’ Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: ‘He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them’” (John 10:37-40).

To see these words in context, they teach that there is a point along the line of willful unbelief when it is impossible to believe.

A while back, I had a prayer breakfast to attend. For some reason, I woke up early (perhaps because of a guilty conscience). I remember thinking, “I have an extra hour this morning. This is really nice. I don’t have to rush.” Do you know what happened? I was late.

The point: You have a tendency to dillydally when you have lots of time. It is very horrible and very clear: Don’t dillydally with God. You don’t have lots of time. If God calls, go to Him quickly. If not, He will quit calling.

Second, *unbelief is often the result of fear*—“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him” (John 10:42).

If you are familiar with John’s Gospel, you are aware that John sometimes separates unbelievers into two groups (for example in the 8th chapter). The first group is simply hard in their unbelief, while the second group is affected, drawn and enamored, but not saved. In other words, their belief is not saving belief. It is unbelief.

In this case, fear kept a mild sort of belief from becoming saving, life-changing belief. Fear of what? It is the fear that the consequences of belief will be just too much to bear, in this particular instance, excommunication.

In walking with God, every day of my life, I am confronted with decisions, most of them clear-cut, black and white. God says: “Son, it’s either me or your anger, your lust, your pride, your temptation.” I used to think of a day as a whole; rather than, as a series of little decisions for or against God the Father.

A friend of mine sent me a piece on management with an interesting phrase: “nibbled to death by minnows.” In this, the writer referred to a fist full of small things that happen each month, yet without us seeing what the small things do. The quote: “The piranha, generally six to eight inches in length, is a fish not much larger than a minnow, and it is one of the deadliest creatures in the water. Traveling in packs of hundreds, they can reduce a grown cow to bare bones in less than an hour. Yet their razor sharp teeth rarely bite off more than a portion about the size of the tip of one’s fingers. Frequently, the victim is not even aware that he’s been bitten . . . the teeth are that sharp.”

It is that way for a believer. When we understand that the little decisions in which we choose between God and something else, make up the big picture. Those small decisions are very important.

In the big decision for Christ, there comes a time in your life when Christ says to you, “you must choose me and come to me, no matter what the circumstances.” Remember that Jesus Christ will accept no preconditions for belief. “If I follow you,” Peter could have said, “will you insure that I will get a greater number of fish?” We ask, “If I follow you, will you promise that I will be happy?” “If I follow you, will you promise me that I will get married?” “If I follow you, will you promise me that my family problems will work out?” The answer: “No.”

I remember in a recent editorial, there was the following: “The first law of wing-walking on a plane is this—Never leave hold of what you’ve got until you’ve got hold of something better.”

In order to follow Christ, you may just need to break that law in faith. Jesus said it this way: “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). I don’t know what your fear is, but cast it to the wind and follow God. Sometimes you have to choose, so choose quickly.

Third, *unbelief is often the result of improper need*—“for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43). There were people who would have been followers of Jesus if it had not been for other people.

One time, I had an opportunity to attend the State of the Union message of the President. It was an interesting evening. I don't remember much about what the President said, but I do remember the actions of a very prominent Senator at the time who, at one particular point in the message, was so excited about what the President said that he rose from his seat as part of a standing ovation. The Senator looked behind him and noticed that he was the only one standing. He blushed and sat back down. I thought: “Don't blush. You expressed how you felt. You're to be a leader. Don't continually turn around to see if everybody agrees with you.”

Many people are like that about belonging to Christ. As long as it is in, acceptable and proper, then they are willing to follow Christ. Let the wind change, then it is another story altogether. The best followers of Christ are those who follow Him in the famine, not in the feast.

What is it that prevents you from following Christ? Perhaps you are afraid that your friends won't like you; perhaps there is an academic community that won't accept you; perhaps it will hurt your business. Do it anyway. You see, when it is easy, He may not be there. The Singer may have gone home.

Fourth, *unbelief is often the result of secrecy*—“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him” (John 12:42). An observation I have often noticed: Belief will destroy secrecy or secrecy will destroy belief.

A number of years ago, I performed a marriage ceremony for a couple. All the plans had been made; the parents were happy; the church was prepared. When the groom came, I asked him for the marriage license. He called me over to a corner and said, “There isn't a marriage license.” I said, “Son, you aren't going to get married without a license.” The groom explained, “But you don't understand. We have been married secretly for two years.” I said to him, “No, you haven't been married, you've had a piece of paper.”

The very nature of marriage, it seems to me, is such that one ought to shout it from the rooftops. The very nature of the Christian faith is that, except under very extraordinary circumstances, it is a public kind of thing: “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9-10) and “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32).

Belief will destroy secrecy or secrecy will destroy belief. If you're a Christian, it is important that you walk the talk. Not only that, talk the walk.

Fifth, *unbelief is often the result of a refusal to recognize authority*—“Then Jesus cried out and said, ‘He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me . . . For I have not spoken of My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak . . . Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak’” (John 12:44-45, 49-50).

The most important decision you will ever make is the decision about the nature of Jesus. If He is a good man with some nice things to say about love, you don't have to bother with Him. If He is gentle Jesus, meek and mild, then you can ignore Him. But if He is an absolutely accurate reflection of God you had better pay attention. Many people are not believers simply because they have never faced the issue of Jesus' authority.

I have a friend who was speeding in the mountains of North Carolina. A plainclothes policeman saw my friend and took off after him. The policeman kept motioning for my friend to pull over and my friend refused. Finally, the policeman flashed his badge out the window, still my friend refused to pull over. In court, my friend explained, “How was I to know? He could have been a gangster.” The Judge ruled my friend “guilty” because the question of whether or not the policeman was a policeman was settled at the moment the badge was flashed.

Jesus was the authority of God—His badge is the empty tomb. Jesus was the authority of God—His badge is the Church. If you haven't checked out Christ's authority, then the most important thing you can do is to check it out. His badge is open to investigation.

Sixth, *unbelief is often the result of missing the point*—“I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness . . . And I know that His command is everlasting life . . .” (John 12:46,50). These words were spoken in the context of unbelief.

I mentioned earlier that Jesus Christ will accept no preconditions for belief. That is true. Perhaps that is bad news, but the good news is this: Christ’s business in your life is so wonderful that it can only be described in terms of light. His ultimate destination for you is eternal life.

Light here—life there. In other words, when you go to God, you don’t have to be afraid. God won’t make any deals with you, but He will make some covenant promises. He will never let you go; He will forgive you; He will give your life meaning; He will grant you peace; He will give you abundant life . . . so abundant that it will never end.

Many people don’t go to Christ because they are afraid that He will send them to Africa or Alaska. They are afraid to trust God because He may betray that trust. They are afraid to follow God because He might lead to places where one would rather not go.

A long time ago when she was young, I went in to wake up my daughter, Jennifer. I suppose she had been having a bad dream. When I touched her arm, Jennifer screamed “No!” thinking that I was a monster in her nightmare. Then, my daughter opened her eyes, realized that it was only a dream and that I was her father, and said, “Good morning, Daddy.”

It is that way with us. The Hound of Heaven—God—is not your enemy; He is your friend. God is not against you; He is for you. God won’t make deals, but He won’t turn you away either.

If you have not yet become a Christian, it is of eternal importance that you recognize the dual nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The purpose for which Jesus came into the world was, He said, that the world might be saved . . . not judged.

To illustrate: Let’s assume that a bridge goes out. The city prepares a sign warning people that the bridge is out and not to go beyond a certain point. Now, that sign is there to prevent people from going off the bridge, not to cause them to go off. However, if people ignore the sign, the very words “Bridge out” is not good, but bad.

It is the same with Jesus Christ. He is the lighthouse. That lighthouse will either be good news or bad news, depending on how you turn your boat. Jesus makes the offer of life and light . . . that is what the cross is all about. But you have to accept the offer, a trade between the mess and the Messiah. He won’t change it, He won’t make deals, He will not beg, but go to Him—the alternatives are terrible.

Someone tells the story of a ship sailing through black water on a black night. The seaman on watch saw a light ahead. He reported to the Captain who immediately ordered the following message sent: “Request that you alter your course 10 degrees south.” The reply: “Request that you alter your course 10 degrees north.” The Captain, now angry, sent another message a little more terse than the first: “Request you alter your course 10 degrees south. I am the Captain.” The reply: “Request you alter your course 10 degrees north. I am a third class seaman.” This time, the Captain became furious: “Request you alter your course 10 degrees south. I am a battleship.” The reply: “Request you alter your course 10 degrees north. I am a lighthouse.” It is up to you.

The Searcher

John 20:24-31

A man told me once, “When I first became a Christian I thought that I would never have doubts. I had come from a barren wasteland of unbelief and I figured that when I found the truth I would never doubt it again. My problem is that I am plagued with doubts. What can I do about them?”

So, for the skeptic searching for truth: What does God, if there is a God, require of you? And for the believer who is insecure in his or her belief: What does God require of you?

In the New Testament, there are two or three words that are translated in the English by our word doubt. One word means “to be without resource,” another means “to judge diversely.” But the word that best describes the kind of doubt you may experience literally means “to be divided.” The word portrays a man standing at the crossroads, knowing that he must choose to walk one way or another and yet unsure of the road he should take.

This kind of doubt applies to you if you’re honestly searching for faith, trying to make a choice between alternatives, as well as to you if you’re a believer, having already chosen the right road, but keep looking back at the intersection, thinking that maybe, just maybe, you have made a grievous error.

At the church I once served, I had a skeptics forum, a group to which skeptics were invited, where they could ask questions and challenge the faith. I was the only believer present. At one of these meetings, a young lady sat in the corner, crying. I asked her what was the matter. She said, “Oh God, I wish this were true.” It is true.

What are the prerequisites for faith? What are the conditions you must fulfill when you have doubts? Specifically, what was it about Thomas that caused Jesus to deal with his doubts?

First, Thomas was a man who was *willing to risk*—“Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him’” (John 11:16).

Thomas was not a mere dabbler in religion. He was a follower and a follower even unto death. He was willing to risk in order to discover. If you aren’t willing to risk, forget it.

The old story of Socrates illustrates the point: A young man came to Socrates, asking for knowledge. Socrates grabbed the young man and held his head under water, until he was gasping for air and struggling to come up. Socrates then explained, “When you want knowledge the way you just wanted air, then you shall have it.”

Look at the end of the text: “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31).

Life, abundant life and eternal life are all serious business. In your search for it, if you yawn a lot, you are probably not going to find it. If your doubt doesn’t bother you enough to do something about it, to do anything necessary to resolve it, then you will hold on to your doubt. Searcher, if you aren’t willing to do anything, anything, to discover the truth, you will never discover the truth.

I am afraid of flying. I don’t like airplanes and feel that they are unsafe. Now, the only way I can resolve my doubts about whether or not my plane is going to make it to its destination is to get on it. I have to risk to resolve the doubt. It is the same way with spiritual doubts. If you doubt the Bible, read it as if you believed it. If you doubt that God exists, act in a manner consistent with His existence.

If you are comfortable in your unbelief, you will stay in it. If your unbelief doesn’t keep you awake at night, then you will sleep with it. Thomas was a man willing to risk to see if that risk would reveal truth.

Second, Thomas was a man who *refused to run on somebody else’s gasoline*—“The other disciples therefore said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ So he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe’” (John 20:25). The fact is, you can’t share anyone else’s belief.

In order to resolve doubt, you have to decide to have the experience of God yourself. I have a friend who went out into his backyard, Bible in hand, and said, “Lord, I’m not trying to put you to the test, but if you don’t speak to me,

I'm going to take this Bible and throw it away." Now, that is not an appropriate way to go before God, but my friend's heart was right. He was saying, in other words, "I've been playing a game and running on the gasoline of others. I have to meet you now or I'm going to die." Like my friend, Thomas refused to accept secondhand belief.

Third, Thomas was a man who was *unafraid of questions*—" [Jesus speaking] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.' Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?'" (John 14:3-5)

I believe that the only dumb questions are the ones that aren't asked. God would say that, too. Questions that concern your doubts do have answers, but when they aren't asked, you won't find answers.

Will Rogers once said that he believed in college because it took kids away from home just at the point when they started asking questions. There may be something to that, but if the home or the church can't be open enough to any question that anyone asks, then we have a serious problem.

The business of the church is to deal with doubt. Never expressing doubt before your brothers and sisters in Christ is mistaking the reason for the church's existence. It is like going to a doctor because your stomach hurts. When the doctor asks you, "Where does it hurt?" you reply, "I'm not going to tell you because you might think I'm sick." Thomas was a man of questions. That is why he got some answers.

Fourth, Thomas was a man who *verbalized his doubts*—"Unless I see . . . I will not believe" (John 20:25). This point ties in with the last one, but it also has an additional overtone: One of the problems with the church is that many of us play pretend when we are hurting.

I used to swim on a swim team. At the time, I was also a lifeguard at the swim club and the coach wanted me to work especially hard. I would come in early in the morning, swim 20 or 30 laps, kick 15 and then pull that many laps with my arms. That was hard enough, but I had to work out with the girls' swim team right after my own workout. I went through the same routine a second time with the girls. By then, I was absolutely wiped out. I could hardly walk, but there wasn't a chance I was going to let those girls know. So, when I finished the entire workout, I couldn't even see. I would hold myself up and follow the handrail into the men's locker room. As soon as I got beyond the door, I would collapse on the floor.

There are a lot of Christians like that. When we are hurting—and doubt is one of the greatest hurts—we keep quiet about it. As a result, we never get our needs met. If you have doubts, don't go off in a corner and lick your wounds. That is what the church is for. Thomas verbalized his doubts.

Fifth, Thomas was a man who, *when he found answers, was willing to accept them and to act on them*—"And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'" (John 20:28).

Have you ever met a person who liked to travel, but didn't care if he or she got anywhere? We had a German shepherd like that. You could jingle Calvin's chain and he immediately knew he was going to get a ride in the car. Sometimes it was to go swimming, sometimes it was to get a shot at the vet. Calvin didn't care. It wasn't where Calvin was going that was important; it was just the going.

There are a lot of Christians like that. A while back, my wife asked me to go to the grocery store for her. I put off going until it was almost time for the store to close. I just about killed myself getting to the grocery store before it closed. And when I got there, I had forgotten why I had to go in the first place.

The reason for verbalizing doubts is not to get sympathy, it is to do something about your doubts. The reason for asking questions is not to show off your deep philosophical nature, it is to get answers. The reason you risk is not to display your courage, it is to find the reality of the God of the universe. God doesn't play games. He is in the business of answering honest questions, of meeting honest doubts, and of honoring genuine risk.

Early on in our marriage, one of the most irritating things to my wife was when I would have my friends over. We would sit around for hours, talking about the great issues of theology and impressing each other with how we asked questions. That was great, but I never found God in those sessions. Instead, I found the Father when my daughter was sick at birth. I found the Father when I was so afraid that there was no meaning in the world. I found the Father when my faith became a matter of life and death.

God teaches in Jeremiah 29:13 that, “You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” When you go to the Father, expect answers to questions, but if you don’t want to know, don’t ask.

What did Thomas discover? The confirmation of faith for Thomas was geared just for Thomas. He saw the nail scars in Christ’s hand and put his hand in Christ’s side. What must have wiped out Thomas was that Jesus answered exactly, precisely, totally and completely the questions of Thomas . . . and Thomas didn’t know that Jesus had even heard the question. God will individually answer your need.

How did Jesus meet the doubts of Thomas?

First, Jesus gave an *evidential answer*—“Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing’” (John 20:27).

If you believe that there is no evidence for the truth, for the veracity of the Christian faith, then you believe a lie. So often, people will say, “Well, that is just what you believe.” I reject that. The Christian faith is credible, it hangs together and it is fully open to investigation.

A woman told me once, “I have some passing suspicions that my husband is running around, but I’m not going to try and find out because I might find out that he has been unfaithful and then I couldn’t stand it.” I had been talking to this wife’s husband and I knew that he was as “clean as a whistle.” He had not been unfaithful. I suggested to the wife that she try and find out.

That is true of Christians, too. Some are afraid that it may not be true and if it isn’t true, they would rather not know because the untruth is all they’ve got. I have some good news for you. The Christian faith is true.

If you have doubts, Jesus will meet you at those doubts, not with some sweet phrases, not with some nice, pious platitudes. He will meet you with the evidence.

Someone tells the story of a pastor, sitting at his desk, when he heard a cry concerning his grandson, John. “John has fallen in the well and He is dead! John is dead!” The pastor ran to the well as fast as possible. He peered down into the well and asked, “John, are you dead?” A voice came up from the bottom of the well, “Yes, grandfather, I’m dead.” He replied, “Well, I am glad to hear it from your lips!”

God is not dead. He still speaks in the evidence He has so graciously condescended to give us. When you waver, it is often because you doubt. If you doubt, it may be because you simply haven’t looked down into the well of truth.

Second, Jesus gave an *existential answer*—“And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came . . .” (John 20:26).

Jesus did not just give the evidence; He gave Himself. That is the magnificent fact of Christian apologetics. The evidence is there, but the One about whom the evidence speaks is also there.

C.S. Lewis said that every time he sat down to write, he felt one standing behind him, watching. He wrote, “To say that I was searching for God was like saying that a mouse was searching for a cat.”

I remember the first time I went out into Boston Harbor in a friend’s very little boat to see an aircraft carrier docked there. My friend said, “Steve, you won’t believe this thing, how big it is! It is absolutely gigantic. It holds a whole city in its hull.” I was familiar with the evidence for the existence of an aircraft carrier, but when we were right there beside it, I thought the aircraft carrier was one of the skyscrapers beside the Harbor. I wasn’t prepared for the huge ship before me. I remember thinking that something that big shouldn’t be able to float. There the aircraft carrier was before my eyes and I was confronted with the real thing.

It is true of our encounter with God, too. Jesus comes. The evidence is presented and then He says to both the shaky believer and the confirmed atheist, “Consider the evidence, but don’t forget that I’m here also.”

Christopher Morley has written: “I had a thousand questions to ask God; but when I met Him, they didn’t seem to matter.” Deal with your doubts. Meet Jesus Christ. He is waiting for you.

