

# DOUBTERS WELCOMED

By Jeff Brawner

**H**ave you ever struggled with doubts you simply couldn't shake — doubts that actually shook you?

Maybe there is someone in your life you thought you knew and could trust. Then, something happened, and now you are no longer sure. Perhaps you're plagued with doubts about yourself, or your confidence has been compromised by some mistake you've made.

On a deeper level, you might have doubts about God that sink deep down to the salvation story itself. Was there really an empty tomb? Did the Resurrection really occur?

In church, we tend to discount our doubts or pretend they don't exist. Yet these questions are normal and inevitable, and we are far from the first to experience them. Jesus' closest friends (eyewitnesses, no less!) struggled with

serious uncertainties. Even so, they experienced the first Easter in a personal and life-changing way — and so can we! There are two very important reasons why.

## *1. Jesus never writes off doubters*

We need to remember that doubt is not the opposite of faith. It comes from a word that suggests having two minds or struggling to choose between opposite directions. So, doubters aren't always people who refuse to believe; often they are people who are struggling to believe. And you'll never find Jesus abandoning or dismissing people who honestly wrestle with doubts.

In Mark 9:17-27, a desperate dad brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus.

The father pleaded, "If you can do anything, please have a heart and help us."

Jesus responded, "If I can? Anything is possible if a person believes!"

"Lord, I believe," the father replied. "Help the part of me that doesn't."

In other words, "Help me not to doubt." Jesus didn't walk away from this man saying, "Sorry. If your faith isn't 100 percent, you're out of luck." Instead, the man went home with a healed son.

Of course, the "poster child" for all doubters is the disciple Thomas. On that very first Easter night, he happened to be away when Jesus appeared. Here's what happened when Thomas reconnected with the other disciples:

"The other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not

believe it' " (John 20:25, NIV).

Thomas never actually refused to believe. He simply needed more than a secondhand encounter with Jesus. That need was met the next weekend when Thomas was with the other disciples and the Lord showed up again.

"Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe' " (John 20:27). Jesus was telling Thomas, *Don't be lacking in faith; be full of faith.*

Thomas had been swimming upstream with all his might against a rushing current of doubt. Jesus wasn't about to let him be swept away. Rather than writing off the doubting disciple, Jesus empowered Thomas to experience Easter in a personal and life-changing way. He'll do the same for you and me.

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## 2. Jesus challenges us to work with Him

When Jesus died and rose again, He provided everything we would ever need to live an eternal and supernatural life. But, like those furniture items that you buy in a box, some assembly is required. We must put the pieces together by working with Jesus (and letting Him work with us) if we're going to experience the life-changing potential of Easter.

• Jesus works with us by giving us the evidence we need to trust Him. Faith (or trust) in God isn't a leap in the dark; it's a step into the light. It's real, and it has a basis.

Consider the evidence Jesus gave His followers. Besides the empty tomb and the collapsed grave clothes, He ate food in their presence, cooked breakfast for them and did a number of things dead people simply don't do.

You'll find a more complete list in two books I highly recommend: *The Case for Faith* and *The Case for Easter*, both by Lee Strobel, a former atheistic journalist.

• Jesus works with us by giving us the time we need to trust Him. Long after you and I would have rolled our eyes, shaken our heads and given up in frustration, Jesus still waits faithfully as we work through our doubts. "The Lord is ... patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

• We work with Jesus by giving Him our willingness. All the evidence in the world won't convince someone to trust in Jesus if they are completely unwilling to do so. Matthew 28:17 tells us there were some who saw Jesus after His resurrection, but still refused to believe. Obviously, the "don't confuse me with the facts" mentality is not a new phenomenon.

God will never force us into faith, because He has chosen not to cross the picket line of our free will.

• We work with Jesus by giving Him our worship. Worship is more than singing songs; it's offering our life — everything we are and everything we have — to God.

"So then, my brothers, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer" (Romans 12:1, TEV).

When we give everything we are and have to God, we don't lose our lives or our stuff. Rather, we discover their real meaning and purpose! That's when we

experience life as it was meant to be lived.

If there are doubts standing between you and God's promise of new life, join the club! The disciples who saw Jesus face to face and lived with Him day in and day out struggled with doubts too. Don't ignore your questions and concerns. Confront them with openness and sincerity. Just as you would with the furniture in a box, start putting the pieces together. As you do, you'll begin to recognize the reality of Easter with all its promise and potential ... without a doubt! **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to [tpe@ag.org](mailto:tpe@ag.org).

## ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

### A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

### Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

### B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

### Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

### C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

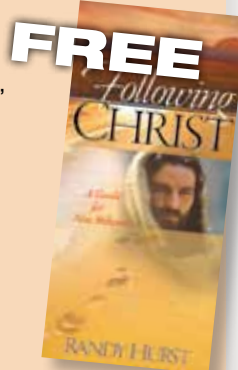
"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

# 1-800-4PRAYER

Assemblies of God National Prayer Center



# You can help set them free.

During the past five years, more than 5,600 incarcerated men and women reported committing their lives to Jesus Christ after reading *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*. In 2008 alone, 1,310 inmates made salvation decisions.

**Lives are being changed through the Key Bearers ministry, which provides thousands of Evangelicals to hundreds of correctional institutions every week.**

You can help liberate men and women from the bondage of sin. For as little as \$1 per week you can put 200 copies of the *Evangel* or the Spanish-language *Evangelio Pentecostal Hoy* in the hands of prisoners over the next 12 months.

## You can become a Key Bearer by:

- Donating via credit card at the *Today's Pentecostal Evangel* secured Web site, [www.tpe.ag.org](http://www.tpe.ag.org)
- Mailing your gift with the form below to Light for the Lost, 1445 N. Boonville Avenue, Springfield, MO 65802
- **Calling 1-877-840-4800** and designating project 028001-0085928

For more information, e-mail [lftl@ag.org](mailto:lftl@ag.org).

## Yes! I want to reach inmates for Christ!

You can reach behind prison walls by providing *Today's Pentecostal Evangel* via the Key Bearers program. Every dollar donated provides copies of the *Evangel* or the Spanish *Evangelio Pentecostal Hoy* to the incarcerated.

To donate by mail, fill out this form and send it with your offering to: Light for the Lost, 1445 N. Boonville Avenue, Springfield, MO 65802.



Enclosed is my offering to provide *Today's Pentecostal Evangel* to the incarcerated.

- 200 issues annually for \$1 per week or \$52 total.
- 400 issues annually for \$2 per week or \$104 total.
- 600 issues annually for \$3 per week or \$156 total.
- 800 issues annually for \$4 per week or \$208 total.
- Here is my one-time gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.
- Here is my monthly recurring gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

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As your commitment is an agreement between you and God, it is understood that you may revise your commitment at any time.

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