



Thomas – The Pessimist

Adapted from “12 Disciples” series by Dennis Marquardt.

Here’s a story is told about two boys. One was an optimist, while the other was a pessimist. Researchers took the boys to separate rooms and left them there for a little while.

The pessimist was taken to a room filled with wonderful new toys. The optimist was taken to a room containing only a few items—a pitchfork, a pile of manure, and a hay bail.

After some time, the researchers went back to check on the boys. To their surprise, they found the pessimist just sitting in the corner, having not even touched one toy! When asked why, the boy said, "I just knew if I played with a toy, it would break so I didn't touch any of them!" Now curious about the other

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boy, the researchers went to his room and when they opened the door they found a huge hole with dirt being pitched out at a frenzied rate. They looked down into the hole, and saw the boy was using the pitchfork to dig a hole; they asked him why he was doing this. He replied, "I saw the manure and the hay in here so I figured somewhere in here there has got to be a horse."

The way we look at things often affects our responses and attitudes in life. In many ways, it affects the quality of life and whether we are stifled or grow. Of the disciples, Thomas is often seen as the group pessimist. Even so, Jesus loved him and helped him to grow beyond his negative perspective.

The Bible teaches us that God loves us as we are, even if we tend to be a pessimist. He will work in our lives to develop us into more positive saints. Thomas struggled with being a pessimist because it often brought him pain (and certainly lots of doubt) but the Lord loved him and continued helping him grow.

Like many of us, Thomas was a mix of good and bad qualities, though largely negative in his perceptions. Thomas stayed committed to Christ but what he often missed along was the joy and confidence his faith should bring. Thankfully, he did make progress and grew into a powerful, positive disciple. His story illustrates the potential for any one of us who sees things as a pessimist does.

“COURAGE” Level Questions

Exercise #1: Read and answer or discuss the following.

John 11:11–16 (ESV) After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.” The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

John 14:1–6 (ESV) “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be

also. And you know the way to where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.

John 20:24–29 (ESV) Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” 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.” 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.” 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.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me?”

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

C1: Read **John 11:11-16 (ESV)** again. Jesus is heading back to a hostile place. Have you or would you ever go to a hostile place for Christ? Why or why not?

C2: Thomas is often referred to as “Doubting Thomas.” Are you or have you ever been pessimistic in your view of the world? Describe your thoughts.

C3: Read **John 14:1-6 (ESV)** again. Thomas tells Jesus that they do not know where they are going or know the way. Do you ever feel as if you do not know the way? How do you come to know the way about which Jesus is talking?

C4: Read **John 20:24-29 (ESV)** again. What did you learn from these verses?

C5: Jesus waited four days before going to Lazarus and one week before appearing to Thomas. What can you learn about waiting from these examples?

C6: How do you find the courage to wait for the things of God?

C7: Although Thomas was pessimistic, he still was committed to following Christ. What does truly being committed to following Christ mean to you?

C8: When Jesus appears to the disciples after the resurrection, Thomas was missing. Have you ever been “missing in action” when it comes to God’s work? Describe it.

C9: After the “doubting” encounter, Thomas is never again described as being pessimistic. What do you think changed within Thomas?

C10: What needs to change in you so you can believe without seeing?

“STRENGTH” Level Questions

Exercise #1: Read and answer or discuss the following.

John 11:11–16 (ESV)

John 14:1–6 (ESV)

John 20:24–29 (ESV)

S1: Thomas is regarded as a pessimist. Have you ever been pessimistic in life? Why?

S2: What does pessimism look like in a man?

S3: Thomas is most often referred to as “Doubting Thomas”. Have you ever experienced doubt when it comes to the things of God? Describe it.

S4: Although Thomas was pessimistic, he was fully committed to following Christ. How would you describe the difficulty of being committed to following Christ with a pessimistic mindset?

S5: Why do you think some men are pessimistic? Is it genetics, learned behavior, personality driven, or something unknown?

S6: Read **John 11:11-16 (ESV)** again. Jesus speaks of returning to a hostile place. Have you ever found yourself in a hostile place? How has the strength of Christ enabled you to continue forward in such situations?

Exercise #2: Are you in a hostile place right now (literally or figuratively)? Take a moment to explain it to another man, or your men's group, and pray for wisdom on how to work in that situation.

Exercise #3: Read and answer the following.

John 20:24–29 (ESV)

S7: What impact do you think Thomas' pessimistic attitude had in keeping him from being with the other disciples? Have you ever allowed a pessimistic attitude to keep you from gathering with others? Why?

S8: Thomas learned the importance of believing without seeing. How important do you think it is to believe without seeing?

Exercise #4: On a scale of 1-4 with 1 being *very well* and four being *not very well*, rate how well you believe without seeing.

How can you improve? Share your discovery with three other men to help them push past the stubborn notion of “seeing is believing”.

“ENDURANCE” Level Questions

Exercise #1: Read and answer or discuss the following.

John 11:11–16 (ESV)

John 14:1–6 (ESV)

John 20:24–29 (ESV)

E1: Read **John 11:11-16 (ESV)** again. Jesus was returning to a hostile place. Have you ever been called to share the gospel in a hostile place and then be called back again? How did you feel? What lesson(s) did you learn?

Exercise #2: Jesus helped Thomas go beyond his negative perspective. Write out a plan to help another man recognize his negative perspective, and point him towards true faith in Christ as Savior.

E2: Sometimes the answer to prayer is to wait. How can this lead to a negative attitude and what can you do to find the strength and endurance while you wait on the Lord?

Exercise #3: Although Thomas was pessimistic in nature, he was still committed to Christ, even to the point of willing to die for Christ. On a scale of 1-4 with 1 being *very committed* and 4 being *not very committed*, rate how committed you are to the Lordship of Christ?

How committed are you to sharing the Gospel with other men? Now write out a plan to improve.

Exercise #4: Read and answer the following

John 14:1–6 (ESV)

E3: Jesus shared with Thomas that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Write out your testimony. Then, develop a plan on how you can share your testimony with three men over the next 60 days. Be sure to write down how the men reacted to your testimony and what were the results of those conversations.