

Thomas Believes

Grades
3-4

BELIEVE

JOHN 20:19-31

What's happening in this story?

Jesus' grace—not Thomas's doubt—is the focus of this story. Thomas is a follower of Jesus with some questions—questions similar to those the other disciples had, and got answered, when Jesus appeared among them one week earlier. But Thomas was not there when Jesus appeared to the others, and he was not going to be fooled. People do not, as a rule, rise from the dead. He needed to know this wasn't a hoax—he needed to see and touch Jesus' wounds. Jesus gives Thomas exactly what he says he needs. Thomas responds in faith with the words "My Lord and my God!"

What does this story mean for kids?

Kids understand the need to question, and can identify with Thomas. They probably have many questions about this story, in fact—questions that should be encouraged. It is important for kids to know that God loves questions; that Jesus encouraged questions in his teaching and storytelling; and that Thomas's critical thinking and desire to be sure are important aspects of faith, just as they are important in other realms of life. God never asks us to sign onto something glibly.

Why this theme?

Belief isn't something that is above doubt. Kids will have questions—everyone doubts at some point in their life. But this story reminds us that true belief comes from asking questions, that faith is interwoven with doubt and grows from it.

AGE LEVEL TIP

As much as possible, refer to *doubt* in a positive light throughout your time together. Questions lead to growth in understanding. Encourage kids to think about what they are trying to discover when they ask important questions.



GENERAL SUPPLIES

- Markers
- Pens

LESSON SUPPLIES

- Magnifying glasses
- Assorted coins

Do some kids arrive early? Try this.

Provide magnifying glasses and coins. Invite kids to search for details on the coins that they have not seen before. Tell them that today we will talk about believing in things we can't see.

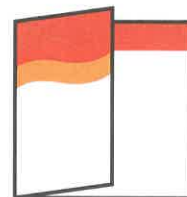
Circle up with kids for an opening conversation.

If a parent or another close caregiver told you something so amazing that it didn't even make any sense, would you believe them? What about a teacher or coach? Your friends? How about siblings? A pastor? How do you decide who and what to believe? Give kids time to discuss. When something seems too good to be true, questions can help us sort out the truth from fiction. Especially when it comes to the amazing good news of Jesus, asking questions helps us believe.

Pray together: **Dear God, thank you for the ability to think and ask questions, and for places to explore many possible answers. Thanks for helping us believe! Amen.**

Pass out leaflets and pens.

Sit in a circle on the floor. **On the thumbs-up on your leaflet, write a statement that's true. It can be about you, or it can be about something else. On the thumbs-down, write a statement that's not true. Be sure that each statement is one you are willing to share, but for now keep your sentences secret.** Give kids time to write. Then go around the circle and invite each kid to read one of their sentences. If the other kids believe it's true, they stand up and put their thumbs up. If they believe it's untrue, they stay seated and put their thumbs down. Give each kid a chance to read one sentence and share whether the statement is true or false after the rest of the group has guessed. **How did you decide which statements you believed and which statements you didn't believe?**



Gather kids around the screen where you'll watch the video.

Have you ever been playing a game with a group of friends when someone says something that upsets everyone else? That happens to our Whirl friends today as they play a game of "Favorite Disciple."

View Episode 8, "Scary Queries," on the Year Gold Spring Grades 3–6 DVD.

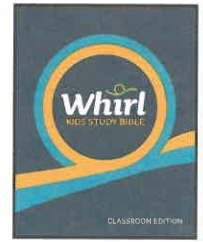
Ask kids these questions about the video:

- **On what basis did the Whirl kids choose their favorite disciples?**
- **Why did Leo name Thomas as his favorite disciple?**
- **Why were Mimi, Gabe, and Ruby upset by Leo's choice?**
- **What things from the Bible have you had questions about?**
- **How does asking questions help our faith and belief grow?**



Open your Whirl Kids Study Bibles.

Today's passage is from the book of John. It's in the New Testament in the Gospels and Acts section of the Bible. If this is your first time reading from John, invite kids to check out the book introduction and comic on page 1270.



Today we'll read about Thomas, a follower of Jesus. At the beginning of the story, Thomas knew Jesus had died. He didn't yet know Jesus was alive. Today many people call him "Doubting Thomas," saying he should have had more faith and simply believed the other disciples. Faith and belief are important, but so are questions. As we read about Thomas, think about what he learned by asking questions.

Help kids find John 20:19-31 and read it in this creative way together: **Today as we read, let's stand in a circle. We'll take turns reading verse by verse. When it's your turn to read, step to the center of the circle, like Jesus appearing in the midst of his followers in the story.**

Invite kids to check out what Gabe says about John 20:24-25.

Ask these questions after you read the story:

- **What did the disciples receive when Jesus breathed on them?**
- **Why do you think Thomas didn't believe the other disciples?**
- **What did Thomas want to see before he would believe Jesus was alive?**
- **Who does Jesus say is blessed?**
- **In what ways does Thomas remind you of yourself?**

Make your mark on the Wall Chart.

Look at the chart and find the theme for today. Give kids time to find the word *Believe*. We can believe in the good news of Jesus even while we have questions. To help us remember that it's good to investigate and ask questions, let's draw a magnifying glass in the box by *Believe*.



BIBLE BIT

In John 14:27, Jesus promises the gift of peace to his followers. He fulfills that promise in the story today.

WATCH IT AGAIN

If you watch the video again, count together the number of times Leo has to defend his decision. Would kids in your group have been as persistent?

OUR CHURCH

Jesus said "Peace be with you" both times he appeared in the room. When do you hear this phrase in your church?

RESPOND 10

Open leaflets and pass out pens.

Tear off leaflet square.

1. **Jesus' resurrection was a surprise and a mystery to his disciples, even though Jesus had told them it would happen.**
2. **Let's explore the mystery of the resurrection and see what clues Jesus gave the disciples about it. Three of these clues are shown on your leaflets. In each of these passages, Jesus says he will die and rise on the third day. But there are additional details in each one.**
3. **Get in groups of three. Each kid reads one clue. Inside the magnifying glass, write a few details you discover. After you finish reading and writing, share what you found with your group.**
4. Gather kids together. **What did you find out? What was in your clue that wasn't in the others?** Allow time for sharing. Luke tells us the religious leaders will reject him. Matthew tells us this happened in Jerusalem. Mark tells us the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was saying, but were afraid to ask for an explanation.
5. **Even though Jesus told his disciples that he would rise from the dead, they didn't understand what this *really* meant. Even if they had, when they saw the risen Jesus, it would have been very difficult to believe their eyes. Thomas's lack of belief at the moment was understandable, but he didn't abandon his faith. He just needed reassurance, which he lovingly received from Jesus.**
6. **How do you decide what to believe about Jesus? Where can you go with questions?**

LAUNCH 10

Circle up with kids for a quick review.

Why do you ask questions? Take time to hear kids' responses. **Doubt isn't a bad thing. Jesus didn't scold Thomas for questioning his resurrection, and Jesus is big enough to handle all of our questions! Asking questions is how we learn about our faith. Jesus gives us a hope we can believe in throughout our journey of faith.**

Return to the leaflet panels and pass out markers.

What question about Jesus do you have for our pastor or another leader in our church? Write your name and your question on the panel. Tell kids you will try to get their questions answered.

Send kids out with a blessing.

Circle up with kids. **God blesses all of us. And that means me** (place a hand on your chest). **And that means you** (place your other hand on the shoulder of the kid next to you). Each kid passes the blessing by repeating those words and actions. When the blessing makes it back to you, say, **Go and bless the world.**

Thank kids for coming today. Remind them of the Family Square on the other side of the leaflet.