

A Nay-Sayer Learns to Say "Yes" **Thomas**

Introduction

Are you a glass half-empty or a glass half-full kind of person? All of us have an emotional and mental grid through which we process everything happening in our lives. We pass all of our insights, decisions, feelings, and observations through this grid. This grid is made up of certain assumptions about life. These assumptions may be fundamentally optimistic, or fundamentally pessimistic. Some of us are glass half-full kind of people and some are glass half-empty kind of people

There are both kinds of people in the world. There are of both kinds in the church. There are both kinds here this morning. The church needs both kinds of people.

You've probably seen a bell curve? It is a statistical graph showing where people fit with others in relationship to a certain issue. It's called a bell curve because the majority of people tend to fall into the middle. So the middle of the graph is much larger than the edges. On any given issue 10-20% of the people fall into the leading edge of the graph, and 10-20% fall into the back side. The rest of us, well, we fall into the middle. You glass half-full people are up here. But you glass half-empty people are here. These people up here say, "Again? But that's the way we did it last week. The motto of these people back here is "We've never done it that way before."

A glass half-full kind of person has a basically positive outlook on life. They focus on what they have. They hope for the best. They are generally optimistic about the future. They tend to assume the best about people and circumstances.

A glass half-empty kind of person have a much more cynical outlook on life. They look at the world through dark-colored glasses. For them every silver lining has a cloud. They expect the worst. They tend to be suspicious of people and doubtful of circumstances. And they can be pessimistic about the future.

Thomas

One of Jesus' Apostles, Thomas, was a glass half-empty kind of person. We even know him as "doubting Thomas." How would you like to be remembered throughout history because of your doubtful nature? He earned this moniker when he refused to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, even when everyone else had witnessed the resurrected Lord with their own eyes. It wasn't just this one instance, though in which Thomas displayed a cynical outlook on life. Most of the time, when we see Thomas in Scripture, he is finding the negative in a situation.

Let's Go to Die – John 11:14-16

In John 11, the time for Jesus' death is drawing near. The winds of crucifixion were already blowing. The Jewish leaders were already conspiring. The last time Jesus and his disciples went to Jerusalem, they tried to stone Jesus. Jesus has just received word that his good

friend Lazarus has died, and he announces that they are going to his hometown, which is right next door to Jerusalem. Listen to how Thomas responds to this bit of news.

Then he told them plainly. "Lazarus is dead. And for your sake, I am glad I wasn't there, because this will give you another opportunity to believe in me. Come, let's go see him." Thomas, nicknamed the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let's go, too- and die with Jesus." – John 11:14-16

To return to Jerusalem now, would be to walk right into the face of Jesus' enemies, and Thomas knows it. He knows they would be walking into a hornet's nest, and he doesn't like it one bit.

Thomas was being realistic. He recognized the danger, but his statement is also dripping with pessimism. Thomas was fearful. Rather, than seeing the miraculous power of Jesus- including his disappearing act when they tried to kill him before- he focused on the dark side of the possibilities, and that is what dominated his thinking.

This was not a statement of courage from Thomas, as if he were saying "Yeah, Lord, we'll go with you, even if we have to die. He was resigning himself to go, even though he fully expected to die. Thomas was sincere, even though he was a pessimist.

We Have No Idea Where You Are Going – John 14:1-7

Later, in John 14, we see Thomas' skeptical side show itself once again. The scene is the upper room Jesus has washed their feet and taught them the power of serving. Jesus has just shared his last Passover meal with His Apostles He has instituted the Lord's Supper He has announced His betrayal by one of them. He now shares that He is going to prepare a place for them, but even after three years of following Jesus, living with Him, and learning with Him, Thomas still doesn't get it.

(2 Slides) "Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you. If this were not so, I would tell you plainly. When everything is real I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know where I am going and how to get there." "No, we don't know, Lord," Thomas said. "We haven't any idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had known who I am, then you would have known who my Father is. From now on you know him and have seen him. – John 14:1-7

Just listen to the negative words Thomas uses, "No, don't, haven't, can't. These are some of the favorite words of a glass half-empty person. If you're not sure of what your outlook is, look at your basic vocabulary. It will give you away.

I Won't Believe It - John 20:24-29

John 20 has the most famous encounter with Thomas. It is this passage that earned him the nickname, "doubting Thomas." Jesus has risen from the dead. He appeared to some of them. Word quickly rippled through the community of his followers. Jesus appeared to

more of them. The ripples quickly turned into tidal waves of joy and exuberance. That is, except for Thomas

For whatever reason, he was not with any of the others when Jesus made His appearances. Perhaps he was so disillusioned that he simply went off by himself to try to make sense of everything. But now, Thomas has returned. The others share their exciting news, but Thomas refuses to believe until he sees Him with his own eyes.

One of the disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him, "We have seen the Lord But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side. Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked: but suddenly, as before, Jesus v standing among them. He said, "Peace be with you. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

"My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who haven't seen me and believe anyway.

This is a characteristic trademark of glass half-empty people. They want it all spelled-out. They want every question answered. Every "i" must be dotted. Every T must be crossed. They want absolute proof before they make any step. They want evidence that is hard and fast before they commit. They always want to play it safe. They try to avoid every risk.

Notice that Jesus doesn't condemn Thomas for his attitude, but he does say that others would be blessed if they believe without seeing. You see there are times we need to step in faith. There are times you need to move, even when all your questions aren't answered. There is no such thing as faith without risk. Faith, however, means trusting God with that risk.

Faith isn't being risky and doing something foolish, just for the sake of being risky. It is doing what God has called us to do, even when we can't see the way. It is trusting God with that risk. Faith is a risk calculated on the wisdom, the love, the power, and the knowledge of God. You will not grow, if you do not learn to step in faith. A church will not grow if they do not take some risks.

Have you ever watched trapeze artists? It's fascinating. Henri Nouwen tells a story about the flying Rodleighs, a family of German trapeze artists. A trapeze act requires two people— a flyer and a catcher. The flyer, as you might expect is the one who goes flying through the air flipping and twisting. The catcher must catch them.

The scary part is that the flyer has to let go of the bar long before they are ever in the secure grasp of the catcher. When the flyer swings out and they approach the furthest approach of their swing, they have a decision to make— "Do I let go of the security of the one to grab hold of the security of the other?"

This isn't a decision you can contemplate for days. If the flyer waits until next time, she will swing back, but on the next swing out, she will be a little further away from her goal. After a few swings, she'll be at a standstill and be going nowhere.

How many of us get stuck at a standstill in life, because we are too afraid to let go of our earthly securities. We are afraid of letting go and flying through the air just hoping that God will catch us.

Here's the thing, as Rodleigh, the leader of the troupe explained to Henri Nouwen, "the real star of the show is Joe, my catcher. He has to be there with split-second precision and grab me out of the air as I come to him in the long jump." Rodleigh goes on to explain, "the secret is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher does everything. When I fly to Joe, I have simply to stretch out my arms and hands and wait for him to catch me...the catcher must catch, and the flyer must trust."

Sometimes we have to let go of whatever earthly bar of security we're hanging onto, and trust that God will catch us. If we don't, we will never learn to fly.

Thomas learned to how to fly. Yes, he was a glass half-empty kind of person. His fundamental view of life was cynical. Yet, Thomas was an Apostle of our Lord. Jesus chose him. He was faithful. He helped form the foundation of the church. He was a dynamic follower of Jesus. Church tradition says that Thomas took the gospel to India, and established the church there. He even died a martyr's death for his faith, falling mortally wounded from a sword. God was able to use this man with a pessimistic outlook on life, to make a positive difference. Jesus taught this nay-sayer to say "yes"

Let me talk directly to you glass half-empty people for just a few moments. And I say this with full confession, that many times in life, I'm one of you. Last week I mentioned that all of our personality traits can be either good or bad, depending on how you display them. Glass half-empty people are valuable assets to any family, to any employer, to any church, provided they learn display their personality in a positive way. Does that sound like a contradiction, display a negative personality in a positive way?

Let me explain.

Benefits of a Glass Half-Empty Personality

1. Keeps Us Honest

The number one benefit of a glass half-empty person is that they keep us honest. They ask the tough questions. By asking honest questions, they demand honest answers. This exposes false motives. Unfortunately, there are sometimes those in the church pursuing their own agenda. They might be able to fool most everyone, but you have that one person asking the tough questions, and sometimes it saves the church from doing something stupid, or making a bad hire, or wasting a ton of money.

2. Foster Understanding

Number two, Someone like Thomas can actually foster understanding. By asking good questions, good explanations must be given. Some ideas may sound good at first, but upon closer examination it becomes apparent that there are more problems than we first realized.

And there are some of us who will chase after any harebrained idea. It can be hard to tell the difference between a step of faith and jumping off a cliff. The glass half-empty person forces us to look at things a little closer. They can give us the wisdom to tell the difference.

3. Guards Against Rash Action

The third positive of the glass-half empty personality is they guard the church against rash action. Keep church from charging off the deep end. If you left it up to the people on the front of the bell curve the church would run headlong into one half-witted idea after another, without pausing long enough to do any planning or preparation. It can be hard to tell the difference between a step of faith and jumping off a cliff.

4. Act as a Conscience

Fourthly, they can act as a conscience. Churches can easily do the wrong thing for the right reason, or we can do the right thing for wrong reason. A Spirit-led glass half-empty person can make sure we're doing the right thing for the right reason. Walter Underwood says, "Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith"

Dangers of a Glass Half-Empty Personality

But it's not all rainbows and unicorns for you glass half-empty Thomases out there. There are some serious downsides to the this personality type as well.

1. Hinders the Church

The first danger of a glass half-empty personality is that they can hinder the church. Moving forward with caution is a good thing. But when naysayers have too much say, or too much influence, the church ends up going nowhere. Asking tough questions and needing honest answers is a good thing, but there are those are just a horse's patootie who believe they're doing the Lord's holy work. Let me be very clear – there is no such thing as a spiritual gift of being a negative nelly. Nobody ever put "We can't do that" on a motivational poster.

2. Don't Step Out in Faith

The number two danger of a glass half-empty personality is they don't set out in faith. There is a real danger in being so cautious with every step you take, that you never take a step of faith. You end up relying completely on human vision, and are never willing to trust God to see beyond the horizon of human possibility. Naysayers need to learn to rely on God.

3. Cause Division

A third danger a glass half-empty Thomas can bring to a church is to cause division and sow discontent. If Thomas' response to everything is, "Well, let's go die," What kind of effect does that have on everyone else? If your response to every announcement, every decision,

every program is to say something negative, that only stirs discontent, dissatisfaction, and division.

4. Discourage the Efforts of Others.

Number 4 this personality type can discourage the efforts of others. Naysayers can always be throwing cold water on the vision of others. When there's too much of that, here's what happens. Your glass half-full people, the leading 10-20% of the bell curve, all the creative, visionary types are going to get sick of being shot down every time they try to do something. Eventually, they will pack their bags and go somewhere else. You cannot grow a church with just glass half-empty sort of people.

There is no faith without risk. Sometimes we risk our time, our effort, our money, our reputation in order to follow Jesus. The problem is that so often those are the things that we cling to for security. It can be hard to let go of those things so that we can fly into the arms of Jesus.

If you want to hold on to Jesus, you are going to have let go of some other things. When Peter walked on water, he first had to get out of the boat. To get to Canaan, Abraham first had to leave the land of his fathers. To get to the Promised Land, Israel first had to leave Egypt and go through the desert. Thomas had to learn to stop doubting and start trusting. He had to learn to say "Yes" to Jesus.