



Dealing with the Doubters Around Us

Prepare: Read Luke 4:24-30

Is there anyone in your life who doesn't accept you for how much you've grown spiritually? Is there someone who doesn't believe you about the faith? Have you been falsely accused of doing something you never had any intention of doing? Have you been dismissed as incapable of doing what you have in fact learned to do?

In Luke 4:24-30, Jesus shows us how to handle these people.

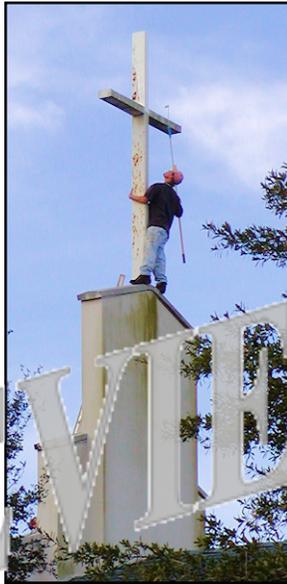
First, it helps to realize that such rejection is normal for a follower of Jesus. As Jesus says in his Gospel reading, "No prophet is accepted in his native place." We rise above it by connecting our suffering to Christ's suffering. Rejection unites us to God; the time gap between his unfair treatment in Nazareth and today disappears. What a privilege!

Second, in love we give others a second chance to see and accept what God is offering to them through us, as Jesus did. He always gave his persecutors an opportunity to discover: "Aha! I need to learn from this guy!" Perhaps one out of a hundred will have an "aha" moment. By patiently persevering, we find that person.

Not everyone from Nazareth rejected the messianic ministry of Jesus. James (often called a "brother of the Lord", i.e., he was a relative from the extended family -- see Matt. 13:55 and Mark 6:3) became one of his most devoted followers. James even wrote a letter that was accepted into the canon of the New Testament.

God has a James for every one of us. But how does he want us to deal with those who continue to disbelieve us?

The third step, in imitation of Christ, is to walk away. Jesus did not nag people into changing their minds about him. He did not stomp his foot and pout and whine and all that other silly stuff that we do to win someone's attention. Neither did he stay there and let them attack. The day would come to be nailed to a cross, but not this day. Like Jesus, we must always seek the Father's will to discern when it's time to go to the cross for someone and when it's time to simply walk away.



Walking away sounds easy and inviting, but it's not our first desire. We usually want to stay and wait until we are finally accepted. We don't like to ignore this feeling of being rejected. We want to be verified by the same people who disbelieve us. We want them to validate us and our faith and our giftedness.

Our second desire is usually to persist for the other person's benefit. We grieve that they're missing out on something valuable, and we feel guilty if we give up on them.

However, there comes a time when we must walk away from the doubters and move on to where we will be accepted and our gifts will be put to good use. Doubters drain us. Doubters slow down our spiritual growth. Doubters give us no support when we stumble and trip on our journey, nor do they encourage us when we feel weak and need a cheerleader on our journey.

Walking away does not necessarily mean that we walk out of their lives. Often it *does* mean that, but when we are married to the doubter or we're working with doubters or are in some other way obligated to remain with doubters, walking away means that we stop trying to convince them of who we really are and of the rightness of our beliefs. We need to remember that only God's opinion of us really matters. It's okay if others misjudge us because *God* knows the truth about us and is very pleased.

Whether we walk out of someone's life or walk away from trying to change their minds about us, we must always seek and find people who share our values and our faith and who have similar spiritual goals. These are the people we need to spend time with. These are the people who are able to identify our giftedness and our calling from God. They will build us up and encourage us and draw the best from us. They will allow us to give to them what God has given to us. By being in community and personal friendships with these people, we will be free to jog along on our spiritual journey at a pace that's as fast as we'd like to go.

As Psalm 42:3 says, "My soul is thirsting for the living God: when shall I see him face to face?" When

others reject us, we thirst for acceptance that only God can provide. Our thirst is quenched when we walk away from doubters and surround ourselves with people who are open to what God is doing within us. We see him face to face when we immerse ourselves in a community of people (including close personal friends) who are capable of accepting the gifts that God has given us to share.

Are you currently in such a community? If not, get up, walk away from this lonely life, and join a Charismatic prayer group or a faith sharing group or a Rosary group or a Bible study group. Seek out those who are working hard on their own spiritual growth. This type of person is able to recognize what God is doing in your life. When others reject you, run to these companions for comfort. When you need assurance or encouragement, they will be able to give it to you.

I guarantee that God has — right now — a community of believers ready for you!