

FOR THOSE WHO **DOUBT**

*Is It
Because of
Jesus?*

CONVERSATIONS
FOR THOSE
DECONSTRUCTING
THEIR FAITH

PEDRO GARCIA

FOR THOSE WHO DOUBT:

Is It
Because of
Jesus?

Conversations for Those
Deconstructing Their Faith

By Pedro R. García

D6 FAMILY MINISTRY
114 BUSH RD - NASHVILLE, TN 37217 - 800.877.7030 - D6FAMILY.COM

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To my wife, **Rebecca**: the messenger,
my children, **Alice & Peter**: the gifts,
my father **Pedro José**: the unconditional,
my mother **María**: the silent wisdom,
everyone who helped me become who I am today,
and to **Jesus**: the **One** who was, is, and will always be.

Foreword

By Justin Brierley

Conversations matter. That's a phrase I've often invoked across the course of my working life hosting debates and dialogues between Christians and non-believers on podcast and radio.

Sadly, we live in a digital age where good conversations are increasingly rare. The algorithms of our social-media-fueled timelines mean that we only hear from sources we already agree with, and tend to demonize those we disagree with. Our polarized online echo chambers have led to the breakdown of civil conversation or mutual understanding.

Part of the problem is that our conversations are increasingly mediated by the screens in our palms and pockets. When we only interact with others through online avatars on social media it's easy to forget that the person we are addressing is another human being, made in the image of God.

However, something very different happens when we sit down together face-to-face. We see a real person in front of us. So much more than mere words is conveyed by our tone and our posture when we talk to each other in the way we were meant to.

First Peter 3:15—"Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the reason for the hope that you have" is a verse often appealed to in the world of *apologetics* (the intellectual defense of Christian faith). But the final words of the verse are just as important—"but do this with gentleness and respect."

If our world adopted this maxim it would transform so many aspects of our toxic culture wars and polarized politics. Sadly, in the anonymized world of keyboard warriors, any hint of “gentleness and respect” is quickly thrown out the window! That’s why good conversations matter so much.

You are holding in your hands a book that is full of conversations. Yes, the characters and conversations are fictional, but the substance of what is being said is very real.

Perhaps the reason they resonate so much is because their author, Pedro Garcia, has himself pursued such conversations with seekers and skeptics through the “Ask And Wonder” event series he hosted for years. As a former atheist whose own journey to faith has been full of questions and objections (and continues to be), Pedro is wonderfully suited to writing this imagined dialogue.

For over seventeen years I presented a radio show and podcast *Unbelievable?* that aimed to do the same. I was privileged to chair hundreds of conversations between Christians, atheists, agnostics, and those of other worldviews. Yet even the hour or so of conversation I hosted each week was limited in its scope. The setting of a recording studio, with microphones and video cameras can make conversations more about “winning an argument” than “understanding.” A podcast studio doesn’t truly replicate the place where most conversations happen in reality—face to face between people who are friends.

Often the most natural conversation between my guests would happen after the recording was over, and the microphones were switched off. Relieved of the pressure of “performing,” they would often share things that were much more personal and meaningful.

Even better was when there was a chance to go eat afterwards to talk and chat. You could really get to know someone over a meal.

If our conversations remain at the level of winning arguments they can certainly be entertaining to watch. However, that kind of interaction is often more like pushing playing pieces around a chessboard to win a game—it won't result in real change.

Real conversations happen between real people in real relationships. They are rarely completed in a single sitting. They rarely come to definitive conclusions. There are plenty of loose ends and unsettled questions. They can make us feel vulnerable and uncertain because they leave room for doubt. But these conversations also humanize the person in front of us. They enable us to understand the other person, not only intellectually, but emotionally and spiritually. They are often the gateway to real transformation.

I believe we need to get comfortable with open-ended conversations that don't always reach a definitive conclusion.

Jesus had lots of them Himself. Conversations that leave you wondering what happened next...

A conversation in the dead of night with a leading member of the Sanhedrin about spiritual rebirth. We don't know how Nicodemus responded. A conversation that challenged a rich young man give away all his belongings to the poor, and follow him. The man went away troubled. An imagined conversation between a father and his older son, imploring him to join a celebration feast... we don't know if the son accepted.

Likewise, *For Those Who Doubt: Is It Because of Jesus* is a book that doesn't try to give you neat and tidy "evangelistic" conversations.

No one gets led in the sinner's prayer at the end of it. It's much more realistic than that. But in the process, Pedro models what healthy, gracious, and Christ-like dialogue might look like in the lives of the varied characters that walk into The Shire coffee shop.

In our polarized culture we need this kind of example. Better conversations can transform individual lives and the world at large.

Whether you are a seeker or skeptic, a convinced Christian or a deconstructing doubter, this book offers a beautiful way of modeling how to engage in better conversations that will lead, in the end, to truth.

—Justin Brierley, author of *The Surprising Rebirth of Belief In God* and *Why I'm Still a Christian*, and host of the video podcast *Uncommon Ground*.

Why This Book Matters

I've never read a book like this. It's an unusual story, unusually written and unusually engaging. Pedro Garcia has spent decades engaging skeptics of Christianity. Now he lets us eavesdrop, as it were, on life-and-death dialogue. If you have doubts in your mind or doubters among your friends, you'll find yourself at home in these compelling pages!

—Robert J. Morgan, author, podcaster, and
associate pastor at World Outreach Church

In a world where questions about faith often feel unsafe to ask, Pedro Garcia offers a courageous and imaginative story that creates room for honest wrestling. Through compelling characters and authentic dialogue, *For Those Who Doubt: Is It Because of Jesus?* demonstrates that the core of our doubts is rarely Jesus Himself; in fact, it's in Him that we find the clarity and hope we're searching for! This book is both a mirror for those in the midst of deconstruction and a gentle guide back to the person of Christ. A timely, thought-provoking read that invites doubters and believers alike to lean in closer to Jesus.

—Tommy Swindol, lead pastor, The Donelson Fellowship

Have you ever wrestled with the deepest questions of life? Have you ever experienced doubts about faith or God? Do you have any students who have begun to deconstruct their faith? This book is a great resource for exactly that. *For Those Who Doubt: Is It Because of Jesus?* tells the story of two friends walking through heavy

difficulties, trying to make sense of all of it. But the heart of the story is actually the conversation itself. *For Those Who Doubt: Is It Because of Jesus?* reminds us of how important it is to keep talking to one another, to cultivate the conversation, and to not be afraid to spar over ideas with good dialogue and care. This book will be an excellent resource for anyone who is considering walking away from the church, or for those who have loved ones that already have. Keep the conversation going; always point to Jesus!

—Aaron Pontious, husband, father, pastor, M.A. in
Christian Apologetics – Biola University

Some books are more than projects—and *For Those Who Doubt: Is It Because of Jesus?* is one of them. Pedro Garcia's journey from unbelief to faith has been marked by hard questions, careful thought, and honest conversations. At its heart, his story is all about Jesus. Readers will benefit not only from his study and experience, but from the way he brings it all down to earth in an engaging, personal way. The relatable characters, great conversations, and intelligently presented truths in this book will be a lifeline for those wrestling with doubt or deconstructing their faith, and a valuable resource for anyone walking alongside them.

—Mark McPeak, senior vice president of
market research at 5by5 Agency

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Prologue

Doubting, deconstructing (the process of critically and systematically re-examining, questioning, and often dismantling—and hopefully rebuilding or reforming—the beliefs, doctrines, and practices that one has inherited or previously held, willingly or unwillingly, consciously aware or unaware) or feeling as though you are losing your Christian faith is a deeply complex experience. It often isolates us, making us feel alone, even when we are not. You might be surrounded by a loving church family or supportive relatives at home, yet the loneliness lingers.

Your Christian faith isn't just a belief system; it's an ideal that shapes your identity—your worldview, how you see others, and how you understand yourself. It is how you process and filter reality. This is what makes the process of doubt so daunting. As you doubt or deconstruct your faith, you are also (intentionally or unintentionally) challenging the person you thought you were. It's no wonder it can feel overwhelming, even frightening at times. "Who am I?" or "Who can I be after this?"

You might hesitate to share your questions with Christian friends, fearing you'll make them uncomfortable—or worse, that you might sow doubt in them. But trust me, shutting yourself off is the first real step toward isolation and resentment, which can wound you for years to come. Many who start down this path eventually feel that it was *faith* that abandoned *them*, rather than the other way around. Years later, some may even convince themselves it was all a

mere intellectual journey and nothing more. However, deep down, their hearts may say otherwise.

Perhaps you've tried to be honest about your struggles, only to be met with simplistic or passive answers (a lack of faith, not enough time in prayer or Scripture, etc.). And while those offering advice genuinely care, they often don't know how to help. Maybe you confided in someone you trusted, only to feel dismissed or judged instead of heard.

If that's the case, I understand why you would pull away. However, I encourage you not to give up. There are countless churches and people who would walk with you through your questions, emotional struggles, and doubts. You might be surprised to find that many Christians—historical and modern—have faced the same challenges. Did you know that all the great figures in Scripture experienced doubt at some point? Oftentimes, when an individual battles his doubt with sincerity and honesty, it ends up becoming a necessary step toward the realization that God is calling him to be the kind of Christian he hopes to see in others.

If you are unsure where to turn or who to talk to, know that *you* are the reason I wrote this book. I don't want you to feel alone. I wish I could sit with you at a quiet coffee shop, listen to your story, and be your friend. Since I can't do that in person, I've chosen the most meaningful way to do it instead: through storytelling.

You will immediately notice the unique format in which this story is written. It will feel quite unconventional, but that is intentional. I want this to read more like a drama script than a novel. Why? Because at the heart of this book is a conversation and a central character in this story. The story is intended to feel like a living and breathing conversation between two friends, happening right

in front of you. My reason? Too many people—Christian and non-Christian—shy away from open conversations about faith. It is a topic that simply is not discussed, and therefore, does not have space within relationships to grow and develop through a healthy and honest dialogue. I want to remove the stigma of having honest and caring conversations about the most important questions in life. This book is designed to make you feel like you are part of a discussion, sitting with the characters, engaging in their back-and-forth as they explore faith, questions, doubts, truth, and everything in between.

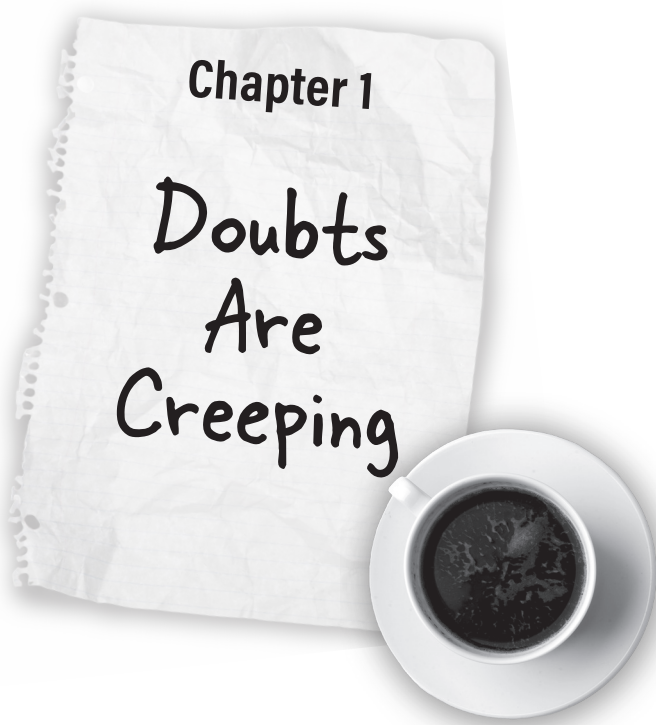
The story you are about to read, the characters you'll meet, and the situations you'll experience are a collection of moments from my own journey—from atheism to Jesus over the past 13 years. While the characters are not real, this story is inspired by my life. My hope is that you experience an array of emotions as you read: comfort and discomfort; reflection and introspection; frustration and satisfaction; despair and hope.

In my experience, it is rare that intellectual arguments are the root of the deconstruction. Deep inside, we all have an inner child yearning to belong, to feel fully known, to find answers about why the world isn't as it should be. Intellectual arguments can engage your mind, but they don't reach the parts of you that ache when no one is watching. Sometimes what we genuinely need can't be found in books but in a simple, sincere embrace. So, as you wrestle with your doubts, approach them with your heart *and* mind—not one or the other.

I wish I could hear your story. If I could, I'd ask you the one question that inspired me to write this book. When you finish reading, you'll find that question waiting for you. When you do,

pause, look around, breathe deeply, and answer honestly. But no more spoilers for now.

Go ahead, my friend.



Thursday, September 14

Thomas: *(phone ringing . . .)*

Peter: *(answers the call)* Are you alright, mate? I cannot believe you are calling me, Thomas. This better be good enough to have made you overcome your “aversion” to phone calls, haha.

Thomas: *(smiles)* Hey man, *(his voice sounds down and somber)* I was wondering if you had time to grab coffee with me today . . .

(Thomas takes an uncomfortable pause before he speaks again.)

Thomas: There is something I need to tell you.

After hearing Thomas' voice, Peter's tone changes to a concerned one.

Peter: Of course, Thomas. You don't sound good at all. Are you alright?

Thomas: Well . . . I'm not doing well and don't know what to do about it. You are the only person I trust with what I am going through.

Peter: You don't sound quite good, mate. Let me make a few phone calls to cancel a meeting I have in a few minutes so we can spend time together.

Thomas: Dude . . . you don't have to do that. I can wait.

Peter: Rubbish, Thomas. Work and meetings can wait. You cannot.

Thomas: Thank you, Peter. Man . . . are you sure?

Peter: You know what I would say, wouldn't you?

Thomas: Yes . . . I know . . . "If I say it, then I mean it."

Peter: That's right. Let me call you back in a few minutes.

Thomas: OK.

A few minutes later.

Peter: (*phone ringing*)

Thomas: Yes?

Peter: Thomas, fancy a cup of coffee at *The Shire* in 20 minutes?

Thomas: That works great for me. Coffee is on me.

Peter: We'll see about that.

They both laugh.

Thomas is anxious. He and Peter are such close friends, but he is about to make Peter aware of some things that he has been wrestling with internally; uncertainties, doubts, and a journey that seems to be taking him to a very unexpected place. On the other hand, Peter has an intuition because Thomas has been acting a bit differently lately. Peter has noticed his anxious demeanor, and he has picked up on a deep sense of unsettlement within Thomas. Twenty minutes later, they arrive at The Shire. The Shire is a small, quaint, coffee shop located a few minutes from a peaceful town in Maine. Right by The Shire is a forest trail leading to a calm and quiet lake. Lourdes, the owner and barista of The Shire, welcomes them both.

Lourdes: ¡Míralos a los dos! The same?

Peter: Yes, and it's on me.

Thomas sighs and rolls his eyes. Peter pushes Thomas playfully.

Peter: Oh, look! Our favorite table is free.

Their favorite table is next to a window with a view of the trail and the distant shimmering sun clothing the lake. There are trees on both sides of the trail, and whenever there is a breeze, all the leaves create a gentle melody that has soothed the burdened walks of many throughout the years. The two-mile walk is a metaphor for life, with its ups and downs along the smooth yet sometimes bumpy path that leads to the lake. There is no yelling, no arguing, and no pretending to be someone you are not. The Shire is a place for good, deep, and vulnerable conversations where a challenge is always welcome. There is no drive-through because The Shire is a place for weekly reunions and lengthy stays. The small building is rectangular and decorated

with a rustic cottage atmosphere. The wooden walls are painted in a gentle white that has lost its brightness over the years but has gained much wisdom because of all the conversations they have witnessed. If these walls could only speak . . . Sometimes, the coastal decorations at The Shire makes one feel as if he can hear the sea.

Peter and Thomas sit down and get comfortable. A few minutes later, Lourdes brings two coffees to their table, still wondering after years of preparing cups like these whether she would choose coffee's aroma over its flavor if she had to pick one of the two. As she approaches their table, she still has time to wonder why she faces those internal dilemmas when no one tells her to do so.

Lourdes: Here you go.

Lourdes stops for a second, frowning while looking at Thomas.

Lourdes: Thomas, are you feeling OK?

Thomas: Yes, I'm fine.

Lourdes gently taps Thomas's shoulder. She and Peter exchange a quick and worried look before she goes back to attend to other customers.

Lourdes: Let me know if you need anything else.

Thomas: Thank you, Lourdes.

Peter and Thomas both try their coffee—knowing it will probably be hot—to give themselves a few seconds to settle, anticipating what they feel will be an unusual conversation.

Peter: Yes, this is terribly hot. As Lourdes would say—“Coffee needs to be served hot to warm up the blizzard we all are journeying within us.”

Suddenly, everyone at the coffee shop hears Lourdes from behind the counter.

Lourdes: That’s true!

Peter and Thomas seem to have forgotten Lourdes can do many things simultaneously: serving coffee, attending to customers, loving people, and always paying attention to comments about her favorite subject—coffee, of course. Peter and Thomas laugh at Lourdes’ comment.

Peter: Well, Thomas, is everything going well? What is going on with you?

Thomas: Peter, I don’t know how to say this . . .

Peter: Be sure I will need you one day, as you seem to need me today. Don’t worry about me. Is it about Sofia?

Thomas: Kind of . . . ?

Thomas’ eyes fill up with tears until one runs down his right cheek.

Peter: I am sorry, Thomas. What’s going on?

Thomas: I don’t know how to tell her.

Thomas sighs and wipes the tear off his face before gathering the strength to keep going.

Thomas: I don’t know how to tell you either.

Peter: Just tell me.

Thomas leans forward to whisper something to Peter, but he needs to recompose before doing so.

Thomas: I don't think I believe Christianity is true anymore.¹

Even though Peter can still hear people talking, Lourdes preparing coffee, and many other things around him, sometimes certain words or situations silence the world around you, making you feel incapable of hearing anything else. Peter worries for his friend, yet he maintains his soft smile.

Thomas: *(nervous as if expecting a sign of disappointment from Peter)* What are you thinking? How does this make you feel?

Peter: I am proud of you.

Thomas: What?!

Peter: I am proud of you.

Thomas: What do you mean?

Peter: I am proud of you because you care enough for truth that you are not afraid of asking questions.² You never stopped being inquisitive about the world around you. Also, I am honored you would share something as personal as this with me. I care for you, Thomas, and I will still care for you wherever your journey of doubting and questioning takes you.³

Thomas seems sad and emotional.

¹ Matthew 28:17: When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!

² Luke 2:46: Three days later they finally discovered him in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions.

³ 1 John 4:8: But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Peter: Are you alright?

Thomas: Yes, I guess. I just didn't know how you were going to react. This is a harrowing process.

Peter: (*while carefully holding his coffee*) I am sure it must be. It was so for me 12 years ago when I became a follower of Jesus after being an atheist all my life. Ah! Sorry! This coffee is scalding!

Peter leans forward and, looking at Lourdes out of the corner of his eye, whispers to Thomas:

Peter: I don't know if "anyone's blizzard" needs a coffee as hot as this one.

Both Peter and Thomas smile.

Thomas: (*smiling while still emotional*) Did you lose any friends when you became a follower of Jesus?

Peter: Yes, I did.

Thomas: And how did that make you feel?

Peter: It wasn't fun at all. I miss them, but certainly, some of them changed their attitude toward me due to my faith in Jesus . . .

A sudden thought makes Peter change topics, almost interrupting himself.

Peter: Let me guess, are you afraid that Sofia might be disappointed when you tell her?

Thomas: Of course, I am. Her relationship with Jesus is everything to her,⁴ *(his voice cracks a little)* and I love her.

Peter: There is no doubt about that.

Thomas doesn't feel as comfortable having to sit that long with his feelings, and Peter knows this about him, so he shakes it off by asking Peter a question he has never asked him before.

Thomas: Peter, do you ever doubt God's existence?

Peter: I would be lying to you if I said that I do not have doubts like that. However, when I doubt, I doubt toward Him, not away from him.

Thomas: What do you mean?

Peter: I mean that there will always be questions about God and His relationship with us that I will never have answers for on this side of eternity,⁵ but my doubting has led to a discovery of a deeper love for Him. In your case, it seems that you have been doubting away from Him. Would you say that is the case?

Thomas: Yes.

Peter: When did you begin questioning your faith?

Thomas: I don't know if I can pinpoint an exact time when I began to doubt. However, a few months back, I realized my faith wasn't my own; it was my parents'. I feel like I came to believe Christianity was true because I had to, not because I needed to.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:7: For we live by believing and not by seeing.

⁵ Ecclesiastes 3:11: Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.

Peter: Huh . . . would you expound on that?

Thomas: You know? Growing up in a Christian family, the only worldview I experienced from childhood . . . I didn't come to believe in God out of necessity; or out of a personal experience with Him. I just accepted He was real from the very beginning, by default, without wrestling with it. As soon as I started asking questions about it, I realized I didn't have answers to many of my questions, making me very anxious.

Peter: (*pensively*) At the end of the day, I wonder if any of us have the answers to *all* the questions. What are some of your questions?

Thomas: I am on the fence about whether God is real or not, which in turn affects everything that many think is evidence of His existence: life, relationships, morality, big questions . . .

Peter: And what about *Jesus*?

Thomas: (*confused*) What about Him?

Peter: Because Jesus is Christianity. Jesus, God the Son, has always existed from eternity past,⁶ but Christianity could not exist without Jesus⁷. Thomas, I respect your journey. So much. But would you allow me to share something with you about my journey?

Thomas: Of course.

⁶ Hebrews 13:8: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. See also Colossians 1:16–17; Revelation 10:5–6, which together affirm that Jesus is eternal.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, 17: I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said . . . And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins.

Peter: It's all about Jesus, Thomas. This sounds weird because I love Jesus so much that, at this point, my life only makes sense because of Him—but here it is: I think there are many reasons people say no to Christianity, but none of those reasons seem to provide sufficient answers for someone to say, “No” to the person of Jesus. After all, Jesus is the one who provides the structure and sustenance of the worldview you are doubting in the first place.⁸ For example, have you ever heard about the problem of divine hiddenness?

Thomas: Yes, you mean that God is absent, hidden, or silent, and that causes many to doubt that He exists because He seems to be, well, remarkably absent from the world.

Peter: Exactly. This topic can be fascinating to explore as a thought experiment in philosophical and theological contexts. But in principle, the last thing God is doing is hiding from us because He became one of us in Jesus.⁹ God did the opposite of hiding. Instead, He presented Himself to us so everyone could see Him. If God entered history in the person of Jesus, then saying no to Jesus is the most tangible way to say no to Christianity. Trust me, my friend, it is bizarre for me to invite the thought of rejecting Jesus, but the whole premise from God was and has always been that we have the freedom to choose Him or reject Him. Therefore, seeking the truth through the many questions that we may wrestle with is a really important part of our journey.¹⁰ So, as your friend, I do not want

⁸ Colossians 1:16: for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.

⁹ John 1:14: So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

¹⁰ James 1:5: If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.

to hinder your search for truth. The pursuit of truth is the greatest endeavor that any human being can devote themselves to. In my experience, it was and is my pursuit of truth that has been so life-changing, and discovering truth has brought so much freedom in my life. But all of that started with serious, honest questions about the most important things. A person's faith should be questioned, because it is often in the questioning that we can land on a sincere, justified belief. Thomas, if I hadn't asked any questions, perhaps I wouldn't be a follower of Jesus today.

Thomas: I can see that, Peter, and it makes sense from your perspective. The problem for me is that believing in Jesus entails both that God exists and that we can trust the Bible, and I am not sure about either anymore.

Peter: That makes sense . . .

Peter sighs to relieve some tension, trying to settle in Thomas' newfound journey, seemingly moving him away from God.

Peter: What about sacrificial love?

Thomas: What about it?

Peter: Have you ever felt the tension, nervousness, fear, and uncertainty that settles in your stomach when someone you love is suffering? Have you ever come to the point that you would do anything to stop it?

Thomas: (*confused*) Yes?

Peter: God feels just like that for you, me, and the entire world. It is a level of unconditional love that surpasses all understanding. Think about someone you love this way.

Thomas remains quiet. He knows who . . .

Peter: I know that I am humanizing God, but I wonder how it must “feel” to carry this intense concern in your “stomach,” not for one person, but for the entire world. I guess Jesus, in His human nature, had to feel that too . . .¹¹

Peter winces as if the mere thought of it had already begun hurting. Peter seems lost in his thoughts for a moment.

Peter: . . . A love so profound that became sacrificial in Jesus.

Peter and Thomas look out the window momentarily since words don't seem capable of filling the void Peter's comment just opened in their conversation.

Peter: Anyway, Thomas . . . So, at this point on your journey, would you say you are saying “no” to Christianity because of Jesus?

Thomas is taken aback.

Thomas: (*doubtful*) When you put it like that, I guess not.

Peter leans back in his chair, allowing the conversation to rest a little bit.

Peter: Is there anything I can do to help you? Going through something like this can be very unsettling.

Thomas: Thank you, Peter. Would you be open to exploring all my questions and doubts about Christianity with me?

¹¹ One example is Matthew 23:37, where Jesus lamented over the city of Jerusalem because they rejected Him.

Peter: Imagine me saying no to spending time with you, talking about the big questions in life! It's not happening!

Thomas: Wait, so you don't want to do it?

Peter: Haha! No! Sorry. I meant there isn't anything else I would rather do in this world than that.

Thomas feels more at ease.

Peter: I guess the only thing I'd like to say, Thomas, is that we need to care for each other and our friendship as we explore all these questions together. I don't want to lose you as a friend in the process. Let's make a deal.

Thomas: What is it?

Peter: Let's talk about everything without holding anything back. Let's also care for each other; I mean truly knowing that behind each of our opinions is a person full of wonder, awe, fears, and insecurities—someone who knows some things and doesn't know many things, etc.

Suddenly, Peter stops and frowns, looking directly at Thomas.

Thomas: (*bewildered*) What? What's wrong?

Peter: I just want to make sure . . . (*using a mocking, robotic tone*) Is there a person behind your opinions?

Thomas rolls his eyes and sighs. There is a hint of a smirk somewhere hidden in his face.

Thomas: Oh my. Was that supposed to be a joke?

Peter: You know it, mate.

Thomas: Your jokes are horrible, Peter.

Peter: I very much appreciate your subjective appreciation of my humor. However, it still doesn't deter you from wanting to be my friend, does it?

Thomas: That's true. I guess I *do* know what sacrificial love truly means after all.

Peter laughs. Thomas smiles for a second. In a way, Peter did at least make him smile, somehow.

Thomas: Yes, I want the same. One of my biggest fears through this process is losing many of the relationships I have with my family, at church, with you, and . . .

Peter knows where Thomas' list is going.

Peter: Sofia.

Thomas: Yes, Sofía.

Thomas begins feeling uncomfortable again.

Peter: Why are you afraid of Sofia's reaction?

Thomas: Well, I am not afraid of her reaction toward me, meaning that she would stop caring for me. My fear is hurting her because she and I have rooted our relationship in God, so I am afraid that if I question God, she might think I am questioning the love I feel for her. Besides, we are engaged at this point. This could be devastating for her.

Peter: The fact that you are worrying more for her than yourself, though, says so much about the motivations of your heart.

Thomas: She is the most important person in my life.

Peter: Then, if that is so, why should you be afraid of telling her? The most important person in your life wouldn't like to see you embark on this journey without her beside you.

Thomas: Peter, what if my doubts cause her to doubt too? How could I live with the thought that I could be the reason she lost her faith in God, too?

Thomas' fear becomes Peter's fear for a moment, weighing heavily in his heart. Suddenly, something seems to catch Peter's attention outside. Two little birds fly by and perch on a tree, oblivious to their conversation. Thomas notices Peter's body language becoming more serene as soon as he notices the birds outside. Internally, Jesus' words echo in Peter's heart: "What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it."¹² Peter looks at Thomas as he sits back, gathering the words he'd been holding onto for what felt like an eternity.

Peter: "Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance."¹³

Thomas: *(smiles)* I still feel that's true. Do you think I should tell her?

Peter: I think so. Ultimately, neither you nor anyone is responsible for any other person's faith. Sofía's faith belongs to her. If your questions made Sofía doubt her faith, this would be a good thing for Sofía to face, an opportunity to grow closer to Jesus after those questions are answered.

¹² Matthew 10:29.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 13:7.

Thomas: It almost sounds like you see doubting as something . . .*good?* It's tough on me.

Peter: Perhaps I wouldn't say "good." Instead, I would say doubts are a great "opportunity" to refine what we understand about truth so that we can act accordingly.

Thomas: But what if your doubts take you away from the belief you thought was true?

Peter remains quiet.

Thomas: You don't have an answer to that question?

Peter: No.

Thomas: Or is it that you don't want to answer it?

Peter: Neither.

Thomas: So?

Peter: *(lost in his thoughts)* Um . . . Sometimes, we believe getting an answer is the only way to move forward. But, sometimes, embracing the uncertainty of not having one is ultimately better for the person we aim to become.

Thomas: OK, man. Are you avoiding my question?

Peter: Are you avoiding my answer?

Thomas and Peter smile and let it rest for a few seconds.

Peter: Thomas, you should tell her. It is the right thing to do.

Thomas: It feels the right thing to do, but that doesn't make it easier.

Peter: I know.

Thomas: OK, I'll tell her tonight and tell you how it goes.

Peter: Would you like to meet next week at the same time here?

Thomas: I'd love that.

Peter: OK, Thomas. I hope it goes well. Please don't fear your questions because God doesn't either.

Thomas: I still feel some people at church would be afraid of my questions, though.

Peter: I know, but Thomas, perhaps you might have been afraid of other people's questions at some point in your life within different circumstances. Every person's journey is sacred. The questions we ask—and even those questions we don't ask—constantly wrestle in our hearts. I believe only God and the person who is asking know about them. Please, don't focus on others' opinions. Instead, focus on your questions and this faith journey, and of course, Sofia.

Thomas: I never thought I would have to go through this. This is not like changing your opinion about whether I like this coffee or not—please don't tell Lourdes I said that! Instead, this is something that can change the way I see the world and even the way others see me. Honestly, it feels very daunting.

Lourdes did hear it.

Peter: What do you mean by the way others see you?

Thomas: Sofia, you, the church—if I stopped believing in God, would you treat me the same way?

Peter: It depends on what you mean by belief. If you mean merely “ideas” that have no consequences on behavior, then nothing will change between us. But I don’t think we are talking about that. In Jesus, we remain in Him,¹⁴ we make Him the Lord of everything that we do,¹⁵ and we live our lives on mission for Him.¹⁶ So, if you stop following Him, your lifestyle will also change as a consequence of it. In that case, if you were to begin doing something that goes against God’s will for your life and everyone’s life, I wouldn’t support it, but this wouldn’t change the fact that I would care for you all the same.

Thomas: Why do I feel that this wouldn’t be the case with all Christians? I feel that if they knew I was questioning my faith, some of them would start treating me differently.

Peter: I think you are right, unfortunately. But think about this: isn’t that the case with all of us, no matter what we believe? This is what I mean. Some of my friends began seeing me and treating me differently when I became a follower of Jesus back in England. This has nothing to do with believing or not believing. Instead, this is the natural human response to something new or something we don’t understand happening around us; we are all reticent at first. That’s all true, but I know how you feel. This is not easy because we are talking about your life and the genuine relationships that are within it.

¹⁴ John 15:4: Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

¹⁵ Galatians 2:20: My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

¹⁶ John 17:18–19: Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.

Thomas: Exactly. You know? You asked me a few minutes ago about when I began to have questions or when I began doubting my faith. Something I can tell you is this: As soon as I started having questions, I immediately felt I didn't have many friends who consider themselves Christians with whom I could openly have the conversation I am having with you right now. This doesn't help at all, and it makes me feel many people believe out of fear, not out of freedom and love for Jesus. If they are free in Christ,¹⁷ they shouldn't be afraid to ask questions.

Peter: You have a point there, Thomas.

Thomas: So, why do you think that happens?

Peter: I think no one ever stops being afraid of something, not even Christians. Christ sets us free from the bondage of our sin, meaning that I keep sinning all the time, although I don't belong to sin anymore. I don't "serve" it as I used to. It doesn't control me. I am free in Christ in that sense. Now, what do I do with that freedom once I am free in Christ? That's a totally different question. Freedom entails having more than one option. Options entail consequences, and we rarely can control the consequences of our actions. Therefore, fear and uncertainty will always be there as we follow Jesus.

Thomas: So, your belief in Jesus doesn't comfort you or change your fears?

Peter: It does. It reduces them, to be sure, but I still feel them. There is at least one thing I am not afraid of: God's judgment when He responds to injustice—including mine—in the end, because

¹⁷ John 8:36: So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.

He has already accepted me as a member of His family through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.¹⁸ When I began to follow Jesus, my destination was set, but I still had to walk the journey. Christ never promised it would be an easy one.¹⁹ All that to say: Thomas, if some Christians are afraid of your questions, it doesn't necessarily have to do with a "he is different, he is not like me" mentality. Perhaps your questions are tapping into their fears; fears that they are trying their best to not have, fears that could make them reminisce about the people they were before coming to Christ. Thomas, I have always believed that one question can be the first step toward absolutely anything. Therefore, it is expected to find people, Christians or not, who would rather live peaceful, quiet lives, and not worry about questioning how and why things are the way that they are. Who knows what is behind all the fears we have? I believe only God knows. We rarely know why people react or behave as they do; answers are usually more complicated than a simple yes or no. Therefore, I encourage you to focus on your journey for now and try to understand your reasons for doubting. And as much as we would love to, we cannot control what others think about anything, including what they think about us.

Thomas: You don't mind what others think or say about you?

Peter: Oh, yes, I do, but I know I cannot control it, so that brings me a sense of constant peace as I struggle with it. I focus on obeying Jesus and letting my actions speak of the faith I claim to carry within me. However, this is harder with people who are closer to us, like it is in the case of Sofia for you, for example.

¹⁸ Romans 8:1 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

¹⁹ John 16:33: I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.

Thomas: That's what I mean.

Peter: I know, Thomas.

Thomas looks around the coffee shop. People are having conversations, drinking coffee, and relaxing. Everything looks unsettlingly "perfect" around him. He had known this pain before, one that disconnected him from his surroundings and left him feeling stranded in a separate reality, even for a moment. Peter interrupts his moment of introspection.

Peter: Do you still pray?

Thomas holds his coffee and takes a slow sip, pretending Peter never asked him that. Unfortunately, after swallowing his coffee, the question is eagerly awaiting him.

Thomas: Praying hurts. It reminds me of all my doubts and makes me feel uncertain and confused, and the thought of having talked to a God who might not be real for so many years feels a little bit like a . . .

Peter: Like what?

Thomas: A failure?

Peter: A failure? Why?

Thomas: What if both of us have wasted our time on something that is actually not real? How would that make you feel?

Peter: It would make me feel horrible. That's how I felt when I stopped pursuing the world and began following Jesus. I felt as if I had wasted my life in some sense. Did I actually waste it? I don't

think I did. My experience in the world and what it offers helped me know how to value what Jesus did for the world itself.²⁰

Thomas, pensively, looks down at his empty cup of coffee, which for a moment reminds him that everything has an end. But even his faith in Jesus?

Peter: Thomas, take it easy. Why don't you take some time to think, give yourself time during the day when you don't think about this, and talk to Sofia. And then we meet in a week to talk about everything? You could also bring one of your questions, and we could explore it together.

Thomas: OK, sounds like a plan.

As both leave The Shire, Lourdes gestures to Thomas, waving a small bag with something inside.

Thomas: What is this?

Lourdes: *Llévate esto.*

Thomas: Lourdes, I don't know what that means.

Lourdes: It's your favorite muffin. Take it. I hope it makes you feel better. The more you think about whatever is burdening you, the more of a burden it will become.

Am I that obvious? Thomas wonders. He is thankful for the muffin, which is Sofia's favorite, too, and it reminds him of the conversation he is bound to have in a few hours with her.

Thomas: Thank you, Lourdes.

²⁰ Luke 15:11–32: The Parable of the Lost Son.

Lourdes smiles as she gets back to making coffee. Once outside, Thomas rolls his eyes in disbelief.

Thomas: They say God is omniscient . . . but, man, what about Lourdes? She is aware of everything that happens in her coffee shop. I guess I was too obvious.

Peter: We care for you, mate. I'll be . . .

Peter interrupts himself, feeling unsure.

Thomas: What?

Peter: It's OK. No worries, Thomas.

Both smile and hug each other as they walk to their cars in the parking lot. Lourdes also saw the hug through the window. Peter didn't say it to Thomas, but the first thing he was eager to do after leaving The Shire was to find rest in the solitude of the trail. Another burdened walk on the trail that leads to the lake.

Peter: *(whispering while seeing Thomas drive out of the parking lot)* I'll be praying for you, Thomas.

The Conversation Continues



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Pedro R. García, born in Córdoba (Spain) in 1985, is a saxophonist, philosopher, and Christian apologist whose journey from atheism to a vibrant faith in Jesus fuels his passion for ministry. A finalist on *Spain's Got Talent* in 2008, Pedro has traveled the world, performing and teaching. Currently, he serves as outreach director at The Donelson Fellowship, leading ministries like Ask and Wonder. Pedro, along-

side his wife Rebecca and daughter Alice, is dedicated to helping people explore faith and life's biggest questions.

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