

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>Study of John</i>
	OCTOBER 3	21

THE EMPTY TOMB

JOHN 20:1-18

OCTOBER 3, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying John 20:1-18. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: JESUS HAD JUST BEEN CRUCIFIED. COMING TO COMPLETE THE BURIAL PROCESS, HIS DISCIPLES AND FOLLOWERS FOUND ONLY AN EMPTY TOMB. JOHN, WITHOUT SEEING THE RESURRECTED JESUS, UNDERSTOOD JESUS WAS NO LONGER DEAD, BUT ALIVE. MARY MAGDALENE, THE FIRST TO ENCOUNTER THE RISEN LORD, PROCLAIMED THE GOOD NEWS OF HIS RESURRECTION TO THE DISCIPLES.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: WE ARE TO LIVE OUT A LIFE FILLED BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD —“I NO LONGER LIVE, BUT CHRIST LIVES IN ME” (GALATIANS 2:20).

GOSPEL CONNECTION: WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN NEW LIFE THROUGH THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 What are some specific moments in your life that made you the person you are today?
- 2 When has something that happened to you completely changed your perspective?
- 3 How can looking at our lives from God's perspective change our own perspective?

There are moments in life that drastically alter our outlook and perspective. Graduating from college, the birth of a child, the death of someone close to us—all these events change and shape who we are.

The most significant and life changing event that has ever occurred is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection changes everything. Paul said the resurrection proves Jesus is the Son of God in power. (See Romans 1:4.) The same power that raised Jesus from the grave allows each and every believer to live a life guided by the Spirit of God as we deny ourselves and follow Christ.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 20:1-10.

After Jesus' crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea placed Jesus' body in the tomb but was unable to finalize burial preparations. Jewish law did not allow burial work on the Sabbath, which began at sundown on Friday and lasted until sundown Saturday. Sunday morning was the first opportunity to finish the task.

Mary Magdalene was first at the scene and found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Thinking that the Roman or Jewish authorities had removed the body, she was alarmed because she did not understand what she saw.

- What do these verses reveal about the relationship Jesus had with His followers?
- What did Mary's response indicate about her feelings? What did she do? What were Peter's and John's responses to Mary's news?
- If you were in this situation, what's the first thought that would go through your mind? What would you do?

Mary, John, and Peter were all faithful followers of Jesus, and His death turned their world upside down. Peter, John, and Mary all responded in very human ways. Their concern for their Teacher and Friend is evident in their response. Undoubtedly, they experienced tremendous grief in the days following Jesus' crucifixion. While dealing with this devastating loss, they received word that Jesus' body was gone. Think about John and Peter's situation for a second: They'd buried a close friend and mentor, and then they got word that the body was missing.

- Mary thought Jesus' body had been taken. Should the disciples have known Jesus would rise from the tomb?

Notes:

- Read Luke 9:21-22. How was the empty tomb part of Jesus' plan? Why didn't they remember Jesus saying this?

Jesus Christ knew what He was getting into. He knew He would die, and He told the disciples that after He died He would be raised on the third day. The idea of their leader dying was difficult, and they missed out on Christ's glimpse into God's plan. They did not believe because they were heartbroken over His death and resurrection seemed impossible.

- Read Deuteronomy 17:6. Why is it significant that both Peter and John saw the empty tomb?

No detail of God's plan is left to chance. Jewish law states that evidence was admissible on the testimony of two male witnesses. Peter and John were those witnesses. At the time, they were likely overwhelmed and unable to connect the dots from their faith to their current situation. Only later, when aided by the Spirit, were they able to understand.

- How were Peter's and John's responses to the empty tomb different? What did this reveal about each disciple's personality?

Scripture says John "went inside. He saw and believed" (John 20:8). For John, it was that simple. Everything that occurred in John's life led up to this moment—his light-bulb moment. A switch was flipped. From that point forward, John firmly believed the truth of the Messiah. He understood that Jesus was the Son of God.

- Have you had a light-bulb moment in your relationship with Jesus? If so, explain when it was, what caused it, and how it changed you. What did the empty tomb prove to the disciples? To us?

Notes:

- What does the resurrection mean for our own understanding of Jesus and His mission?
- How is belief in the resurrection a Spirit guided process?

Faith inherently implies a belief in the supernatural. Though Jesus had shared God's plan with the disciples, they were unable to fully understand these events until the Holy Spirit guided them. Like the disciples, our faith is based on an unseen God. Also like the disciples, we understand more of who God is and what the gospel means as we increasingly abide in the Spirit of God.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 20:11-18.

- How did Mary respond to these events? How was her response different than John's?
- Would you have responded more like Mary or more like John?

When faced with the same evidence, Mary and John responded differently. While John responded with simple belief, Mary wept. Though we are separated from that day by 2000 years, people still respond to Jesus in the same way. For some it is simple, while others require more evidence. Ultimately, no amount of evidence can cause belief. The Holy Spirit's ministry opens our eyes and allows us to experience life in Christ.

- What does Jesus' pursuit of Mary tell us about Him?
What does it tell us about our relationship with Him?

- How do you see the good news of the gospel in Mary's interaction with Jesus?

Notes:

We can't respond appropriately to Jesus until we recognize who He is. Numerous theories suggest why Mary didn't recognize Jesus at first. Scripture doesn't say why. We do know that once Jesus called her name, she knew and understood that it was Him. Jesus then commissioned Mary to go tell the disciples all she had seen. She became the first person to encounter the risen Lord and share an eyewitness account of the good news of His resurrection. As we allow Christ to fill and guide us, we live a life that relies more on Him and less on us. We like, Mary, share our account of the resurrection.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- How did Jesus first open your eyes? Who can you share your testimony of the resurrection with this week?
- What hope does the truth of Christ's resurrection give you? What other areas of life are influenced by the events of Easter morning?
- Read Galatians 2:20. Does this describe your life? What does it mean to die to yourself and live for Christ?

PRAY

Thank God for opening your eyes and allowing you to see His glory. Pray that God would give you the grace to live every day in the power of His Spirit.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - Would you be able to share your resurrection story if you only had a few minutes? Consider writing out your story to help you better communicate it to others.
 - Where are the areas of unbelief in your own heart? Pray for the Spirit to reveal these areas further to you.

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize John 20:18.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: John 20:19-30.

JOHN 20:1-18

20:1-2. We know from Matthew's account that Mary Magdalene was not alone on this visit (see Matt. 28:1). If we follow the flow of Matthew's text from 27:55 through the burial and resurrection, it would appear that "the other Mary" refers to Jesus' mother who had already taken a secondary place before the resurrection. Luke tells us it was early. This word refers to the last of the watches, probably between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. John did not give us the details available in the other Gospels, but used the word *blepo* (saw), indicating that Mary Magdalene glanced at the tomb. See the parallel account in Luke 24:1-12 for more context.

Notes:

Startled, Mary ran to the disciples. John mentions Peter by name while implying he was the other recipient of this message. Luke tells us her report was rejected (24:11), so unbelieving were the disciples regarding Jesus' promise to rise again. Mary's fear and frustration must have propelled her back to the disciples' hiding place. It is interesting that she recorded her findings to the person who had betrayed the Lord at the fire of the enemy. With no thought of a miraculous resurrection, Mary must have entertained all kinds of possibilities, none of which seemed to her a happy outcome.

20:3-5. This passage talks a lot about running. Mary ran back to the disciples. Although John made it sound as though they immediately dashed off to the tomb upon hearing her report, Luke gives a slightly different picture in Luke 24:11-12. All this is quite interesting since in first-century Palestinian culture, grown men did not run. In fact, the only other literal New Testament use apart from these verses appears in Matthew 28:8, describing the same event. The disciples had walked hundreds, maybe thousands, of miles with the Lord for three and one-half years. Now an empty tomb accelerated their pace.

John was certainly younger than Peter, and he may have been faster. He reached the tomb first and looked at the strips of linen. The text uses the same word for saw that appears in verse 1 describing Mary. Like Mary, John did not enter the tomb. We sense a certain hesitation and uncertainty, perhaps even fear. What lay beyond in that darkness? What horror might they find in the shadows of the burial cave? John was the only disciple to have seen the crucifixion, so we need not wonder at his unwillingness to look at that broken body again.

Notes:

20:6-7. Whether motivated by shame or just acting according to character, Peter plunged into the darkness. We assume one of the men carried some kind of lantern or torch. The text says that Peter saw what John had seen and in addition, the burial cloth. But the word changes to one with a slightly different meaning, perhaps best translated as “noticed” rather than “looked at.” Notice that the burial cloth was folded up by itself. This was obviously an intentional act on the part of someone. How clearly Peter must have remembered this night years later at the home of Cornelius (see Acts 10:39-43).

20:8-9. Three of Jesus’ followers saw the empty tomb, but John was not finished with his report. He wanted his readers to know that after Peter entered the tomb, John himself finally found enough courage to follow him. Now we have yet another use of the English verb saw and yet a third Greek word appearing in the original text. This time John uses a word that means “to perceive with understanding.” That is why our text reads that John saw and believed. But lest readers of this Gospel get the wrong idea about the quality of the disciples’ faith at this point, John appended a parenthesis telling us that neither he nor the rest of the disciples yet understood the connection between scriptural prophecy and the resurrection. That would await Jesus’ post-resurrection teaching followed by the infilling with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

What Scripture might John have had in mind when he wrote verse 9? Quite possibly Isaiah 53:10-12 or even Psalm 16:10. What did he actually believe if he did not understand the biblical background of resurrection? Perhaps the best option in the text is to conclude that John believed Jesus was alive but could not figure out why or what would happen next. That fits well with the great surprise of the disciples at post-resurrection appearances. Nevertheless, once they understood, the message of the living Savior permeated their preaching throughout the next thirty years.

Notes:

20:10-12. The phrase “you will be my witnesses” or “we are witnesses” does not appear in this chapter of John, but the Lord used it in Acts 1:8 and we see it repeated in Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39. In all four of those passages, it is always spoken by Peter, and the context always describes the crucifixion and resurrection. But here the primary witness was not Peter but Mary. Peter and John had left, but Mary stayed at the tomb and John offered this loving and passionate account of the first post-resurrection appearance of our Lord.

Mary wept as we would over the loss of a dear friend. Then suddenly two angels appeared, and a fascinating conversation took place. We know from Luke’s record that Mary had been cured of demon possession (see Luke 8:2) and also had helped support the Lord financially. We must not confuse her with the prostitute of Luke 7 or with Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Empty tomb or not, her grief was unbearable—so deep that she could not take her eyes off the grave to perceive the living Lord.

No Bible reader is surprised to find angels at the empty tomb. From the birth of Jesus (see Luke 1:11,26) to the announcement of the Holy City (see Rev. 22:8-9) we find angels announcing God’s plan. They not only heralded the resurrection and showed up at the ascension; they even prophesied the second coming (see Acts 1:11). One of the major duties assigned these “ministering spirits” was to appear at crucial times and places to announce God’s plan

to individuals or groups. This is the only place where John mentioned angels in his Gospel.

20:13-14. John records that Mary saw Jesus. She noticed a person standing there, but she had no idea who it was. Many interpreters have wondered about this passage. How could she not recognize Jesus? Certainly there are many plausible explanations. She had experienced deep trauma; her eyes had filled with tears; it was still dark; she was very confused. But perhaps most important, she had not considered the resurrection a possibility. So the idea that she might be talking to a living Christ never occurred to her. She was looking for a body; she did not expect a resurrection.

Notes:

20:15-16. Mary finally asked the person she thought to be the gardener where the body might be so she could retrieve it. Then Jesus spoke her name and tragedy turned to triumph. The early words of verse 16 remind us of John 10:4 where Jesus said that “his sheep know his voice.” This first appearance to a woman shows us the grace and openness of the gospel. This historic narrative describes what really happened. Jesus did not show Himself to Peter and John but spoke first to Mary.

20:17-18. Many ideas have been put forth to explain the words, do not hold on to me. But such conjecture is unnecessary, since Jesus told us this statement was connected with His ascension. The people who love Jesus on earth—beginning with Mary—must learn to live without the physical support of His presence. Mary thus witnessed the resurrection, and her first act upon leaving Jesus was a report to the disciples. It is difficult to know from John’s account whether this report or the one in verse 2 was rejected by the disciples. But for whatever reason, the women who believed the reality of the empty tomb could not convince the other disciples what had happened.