

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>Study of John</i>
	OCTOBER 10	21

JESUS APPEARED TO THE DISCIPLES

JOHN 20:19-30

OCTOBER 10, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying John 20:19-29. 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: AFTER JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED, JOHN RECORDED THAT MANY OF HIS DISCIPLES WERE VERY AFRAID. JESUS APPEARED TO THEM TO STRENGTHEN THEIR FAITH AND TO GIVE THEM PEACE AND A MEASURE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: LIKE THE ORIGINAL DISCIPLES, MANY PEOPLE TODAY LET FEAR KEEP THEM FROM BEING IDENTIFIED WITH JESUS. OTHERS, LIKE THOMAS, STOP SHORT OF BELIEVING IN JESUS'S RESURRECTION BECAUSE OF FEAR AND DOUBTS.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS'S RESURRECTION IS A HISTORICAL FACT, AND JESUS'S WORDS ARE TRUSTWORTHY. DEALING WITH SPIRITUAL REALITIES REQUIRES US TO HAVE FAITH IN JESUS, KNOWING WE CAN BELIEVE IN WHAT HE HAS SAID.

INTRODUCTION

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

Notes:

- 1 Can you remember a time recently when you faced fears or doubts? How did you move past them? What was comforting to you?
- 2 Has God ever used you to help someone else with their fears or doubts? If so, how?

Of the four Gospel writers, John, is the most evangelistic. He used the word “believe” over and over again. However in these verses he also recorded two stories showing fear and disbelief. Interestingly, these stories come right before John’s purpose statement in John 20:30-31. Christians are not immune to fears or doubts, but as Jesus told His disciples, there is blessing in believing in what we cannot see with our eyes.

UNDERSTANDING

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

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 20:19-23.

- What was the disciples' emotional state before Jesus appeared to them?
- Why were the disciples afraid of the Jews? Did this display a lack of faith on their part? Why or why not?

The Jewish and Roman authorities had just publicly and violently executed the disciples' leader, so it stands to reason the authorities would have found little trouble doing the same to them. From a human perspective, the disciples had reason to be afraid. However, Jesus had spent the last three years pouring His life into them, telling and showing them who He was. Clearly the disciples thought the locked doors could keep out the Jewish authorities but they did not keep out Jesus. When Jesus appeared to them, He immediately began to minister to their fears by telling them "Peace be with you!"

- Why did Jesus show the disciples His scars?
- What did Jesus direct the disciples to do in verse 21? Why do you think He repeated His initial words to them?
- What does Jesus's body teach us about the resurrection body?

Jesus showed the disciples His scars to prove to them that He was not a ghost and was physically present with them. Jesus's wounded side and nail pierced hands and feet prove that this was not simply someone that looked like Jesus, but their leader Himself. His scars are His credentials. After showing His followers that He is indeed alive, Jesus sent His disciples from the room into the world. The resurrection is proof that all Jesus taught is true.

Notes:

- Why did Jesus breathe the Spirit onto the disciples?

- How should we understand Jesus's words in verse 23?

When Jesus gave the disciples the Holy Spirit, He gave them a preview of what would happen at Pentecost. Jesus graciously provided a measure of the Spirit that would empower the disciples to understand and obey Him until the Helper He promised in John 14:16 would come in full. Additionally Jesus' words in verse 23 should not be understood to mean individual Christians or churches have the right or privilege to forgive sin. Rather through the empowerment the Holy Spirit, Christians go on Christ's authority to proclaim the gospel and urge people away from sin and toward the Savior.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 20:24-29.

- What is the tone of Thomas' statement? How do you think Thomas was feeling?

- Has their ever been a time where you could identify with him?

- How do you imagine Thomas' friends responded to his refusal to believe?

Notes:

From the first upper room experience, John shifts to report how Thomas came to believe Jesus had been resurrected. The biblical record shows that Thomas was courageous and loved Jesus. He had even expressed a willingness to die with Jesus (John 11:16). Nevertheless, he had difficulty accepting things on hearsay but wanted tangible proofs and precise definitions of spiritual matters (John 14:5). Thomas wasn't content to take someone else's word for it; rather he wanted to experience the truth for himself.

- How did Jesus respond to Thomas? What does Jesus's response teach us about Him?

- How did Thomas respond to Jesus?

- Notice that a week had passed and the disciples were in another locked room. Why did Jesus appear again to the disciples?

Thomas is often labeled as "Doubting Thomas," though it is likely he would have believed had he been there the first time. But since he was not, Thomas was brazen in his words to the other disciples. Like the previous story, Jesus appeared to Thomas and ministered to his exact needs. Jesus encouraged Thomas to place his hands on Jesus's scars and to believe. Instead of doubting and inspecting, Thomas responded to the sudden appearance of Jesus by worshipping. At Jesus's Words, he set aside his demands and spoke with newfound faith.

- Do you ever feel as though you are at a disadvantage from the early disciples because you cannot physically see Jesus? What does this reveal about your own faith?

Notes:

Jesus made it clear that those who have not seen Him and yet still believe in Him are blessed. Followers of Jesus today are not at any deficit to the first believers because faith is possible without first hand experience. The biblical account can be trusted in all that it affirms.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-10.

Paul was the last witness to the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 9). Paul's letter to the Corinthians makes it clear that Thomas was not the last person to doubt the resurrection. Many in Paul's day doubted, too. In these verses, Paul gave a brief summary of the gospel message and defended the resurrection as a matter of historical fact.

- Had the Corinthians seen Jesus like Thomas, Paul, and the other disciples had? Did Paul see this as an excuse to not believe?
- What evidence did Paul present to argue his case for the resurrection?
- What is the most convincing evidence of Jesus's resurrection: eyewitness testimony or the Scriptures?
- Read 1 Corinthians 15:19. How should the world feel about Christians if Jesus is not alive today?

Using the weight of Scripture and eyewitness testimony, Paul stressed that when someone places their faith in Jesus, they are placing their faith in a real Savior who is alive today. Paul made it clear his physical encounter wasn't what had the most significant impact on him, but rather the grace of God at work in his life (v. 10). The gospel is not only the best news in the world, but it is also the most reliable.

Notes:

APPLICATION

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

- Are you experiencing doubt in your heart right now? If so, concerning what? How can you make time to hear from God this week?
- Is there something in your life you are afraid of right now? How can you rely on Jesus's promises in your doubt?
- Do you know anyone who is skeptical like Thomas? What keeps them from believing and how might you help them deal with that skepticism?
- Who do you know that needs to hear the Easter story? Pray that the Lord would provide an opportunity to share with them this week.

PRAY

As you close in prayer, thank God for His mercy and grace shown to you on the cross. Pray that He would comfort those who doubt and lead them back to Himself. Ask that He would bless our Easter services and that many people would have a chance to hear and respond to the gospel.

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:
 - How have you made time to hear from Jesus this week?
 - Where is doubt or fear most likely to creep into your life? How can you guard against it?
 - Who do you know that needs to hear the resurrection story? How can you make time to share it with them this week? Pray that the Lord would allow you to have a conversation with them.

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

- > The challenge to memorize John 20:29.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: John 21:1-25.

JOHN 20:19-29

20:19–20. The scene now moves from predawn hours to the evening of the same day. The disciples were locked in and riddled with fear in spite of what Peter and John had seen and what Mary had reported. Miraculously, instantly, the Lord appeared to offer them a warm “Shalom.” Before they could respond, he showed them the nail prints in his hands and the spear scar in his side. Why such a display? These fearful believers had to grasp that the same Jesus who died now lived again and stood before them.

Notes:

In the disciples’ minds the locked doors protected them to some extent against Jewish authorities who might want to do to them what they had done to their Lord. But in John’s view, the locked doors served as a symbolic reminder that nothing can stop or hinder the resurrection body of Jesus.

There is some discussion regarding the number in the group to which Jesus appeared in this chapter. John had used the term the disciples throughout his book to identify the Twelve when it appears with the definite article. In this situation there would have been ten. Judas was dead and Thomas was absent.

20:21–23. Again the Father became the center of Jesus’ words. He had been a servant on a mission, and now he sent his people out to witness. Most evangelical scholars believe this reception of the Holy Spirit was temporary—an illumination of their hearts for the next fifty days before Pentecost.

Of greater difficulty in this context is verse 23. On what basis could human beings forgive the sins of others? Obviously, much has been made of this in some segments of the Christian faith. Perhaps the best interpretation emphasizes the difference between absolution and proclamation. The duty of the disciples was to proclaim the forgiveness of sins; the actual forgiving would take place in heaven by the Lord who paid for those sins. Nevertheless, the claims of the gospel are clear—forgiveness only on the basis of Jesus’ death on the cross.

20:24–25. Are Christians gullible? Some may be, but John wanted to tell us about one who was not. Thomas the Twin was the original “show me” man from Missouri, long before that state existed. If Judas depicted betrayal and Peter denial, Thomas demonstrated skepticism.

Notes:

In the Greek language, tense is very important. The word translated told in verse 25 appears in the imperfect tense. The disciples kept on telling Thomas they had seen the Lord. Thomas, fed up with such nonsense, grew weary of holding on to a faith that had crumbled. He took the old motto “seeing is believing” to frightening dimensions. He removed himself from the disciple band, telling them he wanted to hear no more about this ridiculous notion of a resurrection. Thomas used strong language with his friends, indicating the frustration to which the events of the past week had driven him.

20:26–27. But John moved on to show us doubting alleviated. In spite of what he had said, Thomas at least joined the Sunday evening service a week later. Again, in spite of locked doors, Jesus appeared and greeted them exactly as he had a week earlier. But rather than showing his hands and side to the entire group, he turned to Thomas and invited empirical investigation. Sincere Christianity has always welcomed sincere research. Jesus did not scold Thomas or condemn his hesitation. He provided the evidence. Only then did he say to him, Stop doubting and believe.

20:28–29. In the flow of this wonderful story, John next offered us a record of doubting abandoned. Thomas moved quickly from rough-talking skeptic to willing worshiper. In the New Testament, no one had yet said to Jesus, My Lord and my God. Here again the theme of our study looms large—believing is seeing. Thomas saw and believed—and that was fine. But happy are the millions who since that day have not had the opportunity of Thomas and the other ten and yet have believed. More than 375 times in the Old Testament and 100 times in the New Testament, the Bible talks about blessing. This one is related to faith and especially faith in the resurrection.