



THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

**LIFE GROUPS
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STUDY GUIDE
OCTOBER 2021**

LIFE GROUPS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

FW

Study of John

OCTOBER 3

21

THE EMPTY TOMB

STUDY GUIDE

JOHN 20:1-18

OCTOBER 3, 2021

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

- 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

> 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?
- 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?
- 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.

> 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?

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

- 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.

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PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

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Study of John

OCTOBER 10

21

JESUS APPEARED TO THE DISCIPLES

STUDY GUIDE

JOHN 20:19-30

OCTOBER 10, 2021

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

- 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

> 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.

- 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.

> READ JOHN 20:24-29.

- What is the tone of Thomas' statement? How do you think Thomas was feeling?
- Has there ever been a time where you could identify with him?
- How do you imagine Thomas' friends responded to his refusal to believe?

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?

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.

> 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?
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- 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.

APPLICATION

- 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.

LIFE GROUPS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

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Study of John

OCTOBER 17

21

JESUS REINSTATED PETER

STUDY GUIDE

JOHN 21:1-25

OCTOBER 17, 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: AFTER JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD, HE RESTORED PETER TO HIMSELF. JESUS EXPLAINED TO PETER WHAT FOLLOWING HIM WOULD MEAN FOR PETER'S LIFE, BUT PETER COMPARED HIMSELF TO JOHN INSTEAD OF SEEING THE UNIQUE WAY JESUS WOULD USE HIM.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: WHEN WE FAIL, JESUS OFFERS THE SAME RESTORATION TO US AS HE DID TO PETER.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: THE GOSPEL IS NOT THAT WE HAVE PURSUED GOD TO BE MADE RIGHT WITH HIM BUT THAT HE HAS PURSUED US. THIS ACCOUNT BETWEEN JESUS AND PETER IS A PICTURE OF THAT PURSUIT.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Have you ever hurt or disappointed a good friend? How did that make you feel?
- 2 Were you able to repair that relationship? If so, what relief did you experience at that moment?
- 3 In the time between the incident and the renewal of that friendship, what did you experience?

Despite his bold claims that he would rather die than turn away from Jesus, Peter denied His Lord three times on the night of Jesus's betrayal. However, Peter's failure did not stop Jesus from loving, pursuing, redeeming, and reconciling Peter. Though Peter's betrayal hurt Jesus as Lord and as a friend, He was able to look past Peter's failure and restore Him to ministry.

UNDERSTANDING

> READ JOHN 21:1-14.

- Read Matthew 4:19. What were Jesus' disciples supposed to be doing? What are the spiritual implications of their failure to catch fish this night?
- To what tasks has God called His church today?
- In what ways do we sin against God when we fail to follow through on the tasks He has given us?

Seven of the disciples participated in this event: Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two unnamed disciples. This was no important event. They were just “hanging out,” and for them, that meant fishing. But it was not a good night for the nets. In fact, they caught nothing. When Jesus showed up on the shoreline, they were in a helpless state. Jesus had called them to be fishers of men (Matthew 4:19), but they abandoned that task after Jesus’s death, and now they weren’t even successful at fishing for fish.

- Have someone read John 18:15-18, 25-27. How were things left between Jesus and Peter prior to Jesus’s crucifixion?
- When people questioned Peter about Jesus during Jesus’s trial, Peter denied any connection to Him. What does Peter’s rush to join Jesus say about him and his relationship with Jesus, in spite of what happened at the crucifixion?
- Has shame over a past failure ever prevented you from running to Jesus? Why?

Peter’s lie at Jesus’s trial couldn’t have been further from the truth. He wouldn’t have been in the courtyard outside Jesus’s trial if he didn’t love Jesus, but fear and self-preservation kicked in, and he allowed those emotions to control him. Although our love is supposed to be modeled after Jesus’s, the reality of our fallen world is that our love will never be perfect. Only Jesus perfectly demonstrates the fruit of love.

> READ JOHN 21:15-25.

- Given Peter’s bold proclamation that he would die before denying Christ (Matthew 26:35; John 13:37-38), how would you expect Jesus to confront him?

- How did Jesus interact with Peter in these verses? What does this tell us about Jesus?
- What impact did Jesus's love and forgiveness have in Peter's life going forward?

Three times Peter had denied Jesus, and at this meeting on the shoreline, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him, each canceling out a previous denial. Their dialogue makes it clear that in God's eyes, love far outweighs failure, and no one is beyond His reconciliation. That kind of love would propel Peter to spend the rest of his life spreading the good news of the gospel. But as we will see, Peter still had much to learn. When we struggle in our walk with Christ, we are in good company.

- What task did Jesus charge Peter with? Given Peter's moral and spiritual failure, does Peter seem like a likely candidate for this charge? Why or why not?
- The ultimate goal of our life and death is to give God glory, no matter who we are. What does Peter's example teach us about living in this way?
- The Lord's questions to Peter showed He wanted Peter to humbly follow Him out of love. Though comparison might seem to be the height of humility, what does it really reveal about our souls?

Though Peter denied Jesus, Jesus was not finished with him. He again issued His call to Peter to follow Him and humbly serve Him out of love. Peter's love for Jesus was to express itself in caring for Jesus's people. Jesus's conversation with Peter shows He viewed love as the

key to faithful discipleship and service. Likewise, if we really love Jesus, we will want to get involved in serving Him by caring for His people.

In the past, Peter had boasted in pride of his faithfulness and courage to follow Jesus. Jesus restored Peter and called Peter to follow Him and serve Him in humility. Though comparison appears to be a measure of humility because we see others as more valuable than ourselves, it is actually born out of discontentment and dissatisfaction with what God has done for us and wants to give us. But Peter still had another hurdle to jump over—his comparison to his friend John.

- Why does personal failure in one relationship also lead to other kinds of feelings, like jealousy? Why do you think Peter asked about John's future? Why is comparing ourselves to others so tempting?
- What do we lose about our own sense of calling and mission when we compare ourselves to others?
- What was the crucial issue revealed in Jesus's response to Peter (v. 22)? How is this linked with verses 15-17? Why should this type of obedience be seen as the standard in the Christian life?

Peter denied the Lord out of fear of arrest and suffering. Yet Jesus revealed to Peter that following and serving Him required sacrifice. All Christian service requires us to sacrifice our own prerogatives and ideas. In this denial, we find the freedom to serve and follow Christ in the way He has called us.

Jesus's invitation to Peter is reminiscent of when Jesus first asked Peter to drop everything and follow Him. Jesus issued the same invitation here, reminding Peter that there was no going back to the way life was before. Comparing himself to John would only keep Peter from living the specific mission God had on Peter's life, which was different from John's. Both proclaimed God's glory, led the church, and suffered for doing so. God was good to both in different ways.

APPLICATION

- What mission has God called you to? What are some fears or failures that keep you from pursuing God's mission for your life?
- As a church body, what are practical ways we can follow Jesus together and encourage those who have messed up to return to the fold?
- Have you ever known someone who thought they were too sinful for Jesus to save and reach?

PRAY

Thank God for His humble offer to return to Him. Praise Him that His love is always there for us even when we fail. Pray that when we return we would not bring any guilt and shame, but humbly accept forgiveness and move forward.