



THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

**LIFE GROUPS
LEADER GUIDE
OCTOBER 2021**

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.

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 worshiping. 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.

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>Study of John</i>
	OCTOBER 17	21

JESUS REINSTATED PETER

JOHN 21:1-25

OCTOBER 17, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying John 21:1-25. 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 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

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

Notes:

- 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

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

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER 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?

Notes:

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.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER 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?

Notes:

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?

Notes:

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

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

Notes:

- 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.

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:
 - Is there someone in your life who you need to reconcile with as a means of growing in Christ?

 - What are some of the difficulties of doing so?

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

- > The challenge to memorize John 21:17.

JOHN 21:1-25

21:1-3. Seven of the disciples participated in this event: Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two unnamed disciples. If we consider geography and occupation, on the basis of chapter 1 we might plug Andrew and Philip into those vacant slots. 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.

Notes:

Only John used the name “Sea of Tiberias” for the Sea of Galilee, and he even corrected himself on the title in 6:1. This body of water was also called the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1). We should not hurry over the word “appeared” in verse 1. John used it and similar words to identify the self-revelation of Christ (John 1:31; 2:11; 9:3). He also used these words in his first epistle to describe the incarnate Christ (1 John 1:2; 3:5, 8; 4:9) and the Lord’s return (1 John 2:28; 3:2). Already in the first three verses of this chapter, Peter has emerged as the dominant personality among the post-resurrection disciples. John’s central emphasis in this futile fishing foray was to set up the miracle he described in verse 6. Nevertheless, the metaphor had been established by both Matthew and Mark: “Follow me ... and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19; Mark 1:17). In the symbolic spiritual reality, we recognize the reappearance of John 15:5—futility without the presence and power of Christ.

21:4-6. Here we find a scene similar to what we saw in chapter 20 with Mary. These disciples, having seen the risen Lord twice, did not recognize Him on shore. Let us not read anything mystical into the text. It could have been dark, or at least dusk. Perhaps there was some mist on the water. The text says they saw someone on the shore but could not tell who it was.

John would never forget the suggestion by this stranger to throw your net on the right side of the boat. How many times that night they had dropped the net on the right side of the boat, then the left, then the right, then the left

again—all to no avail. With nothing to lose, they dropped the net and hauled in what some interpreters have suggested would have been over three hundred pounds of fish. Presumably that figure represents what first-century fishing nets might hold.

Notes:

21:7-9. Notice the disciples put the net down without knowing who had suggested the right side. As soon as they saw the results, they responded in character—John with a word to Peter and Peter jumping into the water. The Greek word for “outer garment” is used only here in the New Testament. We should not presume that Peter was naked before this moment, though some have surmised that.

21:10-14. The eight friends enjoyed breakfast together that day. The menu required some of the freshly caught fish in addition to what Jesus had already prepared. John, a professional fisherman, seemed amazed that they could pull in 153 large fish without the net breaking (another distinction from Luke 5). What a wonderful morning that must have been. These disciples (Thomas among them) experienced a new level of rest and comfort with the Lord’s resurrection and presence.

21:15. Embarrassing as it must have been at the time, this tender exchange restored Peter to leadership—a role he exercised early in Acts. Throughout the history of the church, thousands have been scattered on the roadside of good intentions for ministry; they traded God’s call for something else—like fishing. Even though this night of fishing may have been just a casual outing with the guys, as a professional fisherman Peter could have entertained thoughts of going back to his former work.

For the next nine verses, John brought his Gospel to a close with the clear enunciation of Peter’s call to ministry. Jesus asked Peter almost the same question three times. This could reflect the three denials, but whether it did or not, the command was similar each time: “Feed my lambs ... Take care of my sheep ... Feed my sheep.” A quick

glance at 1 Peter lets us know the disciple never forgot this moment.

21:16. The shepherding call continued a second time as Jesus used Peter's old name (Simon), reverting to "pebble" rather than "rock." The flow of the text emphasizes humility and service rather than primacy over the other apostles.

Notes:

21:17. At this point in the text there is a change of verb in Jesus' question while the verb in Peter's answer stays the same. We also learn Peter was hurt by the third question. In Jesus' first two questions He used the word "aqapao"; hence the NIV translation "truly love." In the third we find the word "phileo" and the NIV drops "truly." Most interpreters find no significant difference in the words, particularly since the conversation took place in Aramaic. Nevertheless, John's record in Greek did, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, adopt a different word. It seems difficult from the grammar of the text to argue that Peter's hurt was brought about only by the connection of a third question with his three denials. We might conclude Peter was hurt because the question had been asked three times. But one should not dismiss the possibility that his discomfort lay in Jesus' use of a lesser word.

21:18-19. Having established the motivation for service, Jesus went on to describe the turns Peter's life would take. This brash, independent, vocal fisherman would one day be dependent, presumably a prisoner, and, many believe, a martyr. Only the Son of God could tell someone that following Him would lead to death and then immediately say, "Follow Me!"

21:20-21. We must not forget that Jesus spoke to a pre-Pentecost Peter. When he learned about his own death, Peter apparently glanced at John and asked a question about which he may have felt embarrassment for the rest of his life: "Lord, what about him?" He might have meant, "I'm more concerned about my brother John." More likely, however, the Peter we know and love would

have responded to the prophecy by saying, “If I have to die, so does John.”

21:22-23. Jesus’ response took the form of a mild rebuke and the command to follow. He allowed no comparison with how God leads others or what He gives them while we feel we may have endured great sacrifice. John would live longer than Peter, though there is no reason Peter would infer this from the text. The key is not how long John would live nor that he would live until the Lord’s return (the if looms large here). The main thing is that each Christian should follow Christ in whatever manner he or she is called.

Nevertheless, rumors spread among the brothers—a malady that has worsened in the church over two thousand years. John felt the need to correct it, so he stated the exact words of Jesus. John lived into his nineties, history tells us, but he certainly did not have an exemption from death. The argument had nothing to do with longevity or death; it focused exclusively on Peter’s attitude regarding God’s will for his life.

21:24. Without naming himself, John indicated he was the one referred to in that conversation. Now he wrote down what he saw and heard—an eyewitness record, hand-written and accurate. The words “we know that his testimony is true” may represent a possible affirmation by the early church. The “we” could actually refer to the Ephesian elders, or it might be the editorial pronoun we still use today to avoid choosing the first person.

21:25. The last verse of the Gospel of John represents what we call “hyperbole,” a deliberate exaggeration for dramatic effect. John wanted his readers to know he had just begun to tell the story. The words and works of Jesus were much greater than the record contained in his Gospel, the other Gospels, or the entire Bible. Nevertheless, on the basis of what he had written, John reminded us Jesus expects His people to believe and to make Him Lord of their lives, their service, and their futures.

Notes: