

SMALL GROUP • GOSPEL OF JOHN

Week 8 Preparation Guide

The Resurrection and the Life

John 11:17–44 | Christian Standard Bible | For Thursday

BIG IDEA

Jesus has power over death, fear, and hopelessness.

Study overview

This is the last week of our study, and the last and greatest sign before Jesus goes to the cross. A family Jesus loves has lost a brother. Jesus arrives four days late. He listens to two grieving sisters, weeps at a tomb, and then calls a dead man out by name.

Come ready to be honest about grief and waiting, to hear one of the boldest things Jesus ever said about himself, and to look back over eight weeks at who Jesus has shown himself to be.

The three scheduled key points

Jesus enters our grief. He does not hurry past Martha's questions or Mary's tears; he weeps with them (11:33–35).

He calls dead things back to life. A man four days in the tomb hears Jesus' voice and comes out (11:43–44).

Faith often grows while we're waiting. Martha's faith speaks before the miracle, not after it (11:21–27).

Prayer before study

PRAY

Lord Jesus, you are the resurrection and the life. Meet me in the places where I am grieving or waiting. Let me see your tears and your power in this passage. Strengthen my faith where it is thin, and give me hope that does not depend on how things look today. Amen.

Use this guide in several short sittings. Keep John 11 open beside you, and leave room for questions as well as answers. If you are carrying a fresh loss, go gently. This passage was written for grieving people.

1. Love, delay, and a grave four days old

John 11:1–16 • What happened before Jesus arrived

Read the opening verses before you begin. Martha and Mary send Jesus a simple message: “Lord, the one you love is sick” (11:3). Then John tells us two things side by side that we might not expect together.

LOVE FIRST

Now Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus.

John 11:5 (CSB)

THEN A DELAY

So when he heard that he was sick, he stayed two more days in the place where he was.

John 11:6 (CSB)

John does not explain away the tension, and neither should we. Jesus’ delay was not a lack of love. Jesus had already said this sickness would end in the glory of God (11:4). But that does not mean every delay we experience has a reason we will understand right away, or that every sick loved one will be raised in this life. What it does mean is that his love and his timing are not enemies.

John 11:17–22 • Martha’s honest faith

By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has been in the tomb four days (11:17). There is no doubt he is dead. Friends have come to comfort the family. Martha goes out to meet Jesus while Mary stays home.

GRIEF AND FAITH IN THE SAME BREATH

Then Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died.”

John 11:21 (CSB)

Martha says what many of us have said: “Lord, if you had been here.” Jesus does not scold her for it. Then, in the very next sentence, she adds, “Yet even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you” (11:22). Honest grief and real faith are not opposites. Martha holds them both.

Reflect: Is there an “If you had been here” in my own life that I have never said honestly to Jesus?

2. “I am the resurrection and the life”

John 11:23–27 • From a doctrine to a person

Jesus tells Martha her brother will rise again. She agrees, thinking of the final resurrection “at the last day” (11:24). That was solid belief. Jesus moves her from a future event to a present person.

THE FIFTH “I AM” SAYING IN JOHN

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live.

John 11:25 (CSB)

Jesus does not only promise resurrection; he is resurrection. Life is not a thing he hands out from a distance, but something that is found in him. Earlier he said, “I am the bread of life” (6:35), and “I am the good shepherd” (10:11). Now he speaks into the one enemy no one has beaten: death.

Read verses 25–26 slowly. “Even if he dies, will live” speaks of resurrection beyond death. “Will never die” speaks of a life with God that death cannot cut off. Christians still die, and still grieve. But death does not have the last word for anyone who belongs to Jesus.

Martha’s confession

MARTHA ANSWERS JESUS’ QUESTION

“Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world.”

John 11:27 (CSB)

Martha’s words almost exactly match the reason John gives for writing his whole Gospel: “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). Standing next to her brother’s grave, before any miracle, Martha says the thing the whole book is aiming for.

DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?

Jesus asked Martha directly (11:26). It is worth letting him ask you too, not as a quiz, but as an invitation.

Reflect: What is the difference between believing in the resurrection and believing in Jesus, who is the resurrection?

3. Jesus wept

John 11:28–35 • Jesus enters our grief

Mary comes and falls at Jesus' feet and says the same words Martha said (11:32). This time Jesus does not answer with teaching. He sees her weeping and the mourners weeping.

DEEPLY MOVED

When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, he was deeply moved in his spirit and troubled.

John 11:33 (CSB)

Where interpreters differ: The word translated “deeply moved” can carry a sense of strong indignation. Many interpreters think Jesus is angered at death itself, the enemy that has torn this family apart. Others hear mostly deep grief and compassion, and some see distress at the unbelief around him. These readings can sit together. None of them suggests Jesus was cold.

THE SHORTEST VERSE, AND ONE OF THE DEEPEST

Jesus wept.

John 11:35 (CSB)

Jesus knew he was about to raise Lazarus. He wept anyway. His tears were not a lack of faith or a loss of control. They show that grief is not unbelief, and that God is not distant from our pain. Hebrews says we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). Here we see it with our own eyes.

This also gives us permission. If Jesus can weep at a grave he is about to empty, we do not need to rush ourselves or others past sorrow. Paul says to “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15), and that believers grieve, but not “like the rest, who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

John 11:36–40 • Waiting at the stone

Some in the crowd see his love. Others ask why he did not prevent the death (11:36–37). Jesus comes to the tomb and tells them to remove the stone. Practical Martha objects: it has been four days, and there will be a smell (11:39).

A PROMISE TO HOLD ON TO

Jesus said to her, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”

John 11:40 (CSB)

Reflect: Where have I been told, or told myself, that sadness means weak faith? What does Jesus’ weeping say to that?

4. “Lazarus, come out!”

John 11:41–44 • The voice that wakes the dead

Jesus prays aloud, thanking the Father for hearing him, so the people standing there will believe (11:41–42). Then he shouts.

HE CALLS HIM BY NAME

After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”

John 11:43 (CSB)

A few verses after our Week 5 passage, Jesus said, “the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). And in Week 7, the Good Shepherd “calls his own sheep by name” (10:3). At Lazarus’s tomb, both of those promises happen in front of a crowd.

UNWRAP HIM

The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth.

Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him go.”

John 11:44 (CSB)

Notice the last instruction. Jesus gives the life; the community helps remove the grave clothes. That is still how it works. Jesus brings new life, and his people help one another walk free.

Lazarus would die again someday. This sign points past itself to Jesus’ own resurrection, where death is defeated for good (1 Corinthians 15:20, 26). And it costs Jesus: from this day on, the leaders plot to kill him (11:53). He gives life to his friend, knowing it will cost his own.

Question 1 • Where do you need hope today?

Think about what feels dead, stuck, or past fixing: a relationship, a habit, a dream, a body, a loss that still aches. You do not need to know how God will answer. Martha did not know either. Bring it honestly.

BEGIN YOUR ANSWER

“I need hope in _____. It has felt like _____. In this passage, what gives me hope is _____.”

My answer to question 1

Question 2 • Why do you think Jesus wept before raising Lazarus?

Consider what his tears say about his love for this family, about how God feels toward death, and about how he sees our grief. Then consider what his tears give you permission to do.

BEGIN YOUR ANSWER

“I think Jesus wept because _____. That tells me God is _____. It changes how I see my own sadness because _____.”

My answer to question 2

5. Looking back over eight weeks

Question 3 • Looking back over the last eight weeks, what has changed in your understanding of Jesus?

Take a few minutes to walk back through the study. Which week stayed with you? What did you understand about Jesus that you did not before?

Week 1 • The Light Has Come: the Word became flesh. Week 2 • Empty Jars, New Wine: he brings abundance. Week 3 • Born Again: following Jesus means becoming new. Week 4 • Living Water: he satisfies the deepest thirst. Week 5 • Do You Want to Get Well?: he sees the overlooked. Week 6 • The Bread of Life: only he truly satisfies. Week 7 • The Good Shepherd: he knows us by name. Week 8 • The Resurrection and the Life: he has power over death.

BEGIN YOUR ANSWER

“Eight weeks ago I mostly thought of Jesus as _____. Now I see him more as _____. The week that stayed with me most was _____ because _____.”

My answer to question 3

An additional deeper group question

DISCUSS TOGETHER

Jesus told the people to unwrap Lazarus. Who in your life, or in this group, might need help taking off their “grave clothes”: old shame, old habits, or old grief? How could we help each other walk in new life?

Answer with care. This is not about fixing people. It is about being the kind of community where people can be honest and be helped.

Practical application for this week

Grieve with hope. If you are carrying a loss, give yourself permission to be sad in Jesus’ presence. Read John 11:35 and pray honestly. If grief is heavy or lasting, reach out to a pastor, a trusted friend, or a counselor; that is wisdom, not weak faith.

Be a Martha. Practice saying both sentences this week: “Lord, if you had been here” and “Yet even now I know.” Bring Jesus your honest disappointment and your real trust at the same time.

6. Between now and Thursday

Use these four short readings in order, about 10–15 minutes each. If Thursday is close, combine the first two sittings and finish with the final reading before your group meets.

First sitting • See the setting

Read John 11:1–16 in the CSB. Notice what the sisters ask for, what Jesus says, and what the disciples fear. Write one observation about Jesus and one about the disciples.

Second sitting • Walk to the tomb

Read John 11:17–44 without stopping. Then reread verses 17–27. Mark everything Martha says. Prepare your answer to “Where do you need hope today?”

Third sitting • Read the background

Read Ezekiel 37:1–14 and 1 Corinthians 15:20–26. Notice what God promises about death and life. Then reread John 11:28–44 and prepare your answers to the second and third questions. Optional: read John 11:45–53 and Revelation 21:1–4.

Before Thursday’s group • Come ready

Reread John 11:17–44 and pray Lamentations 3:25–26, asking for patience and hope while you wait. Bring one insight about Jesus, one question, and one honest answer you are comfortable sharing.

FINAL CHALLENGE

Write down one area of your life where you need to trust Jesus more—and commit it to Him in prayer this week.

The area where I need to trust Jesus more: _____

My prayer committing it to him: _____

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus, you are the resurrection and the life. Thank you for weeping with us and for not leaving us in our graves. I bring you the places in my life that feel dead and the hopes I have stopped praying about. Give me Martha’s honest faith and Lazarus’s answer to your voice. Thank you for these eight weeks in your word and for the people I have walked them with. Keep us close to you until the day you wipe away every tear. Amen.

One insight or question to bring on Thursday

Sources: Small Group Schedule.txt, Week 8; CSB text of John 11 and cross-references (John 5:25; John 6:35; John 10:3, 11; John 20:31; Ezekiel 37:1–14; Lamentations 3:25–26; Romans 12:15; 1 Corinthians 15:20–26; 1 Thessalonians 4:13; Hebrews 4:15; Revelation 21:1–4). Schedule wording is preserved; explanations and prompts are study commentary.

Scripture quotations marked CSB are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.