

## Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

### I Am the Resurrection and the Life—John 11:1-44

Resurrection presupposes/implies that there was first death. Even though it's no one's favorite topic, let's talk about death, shall we.

- Q. What has been your exposure/experience with death? Has someone close to you ever died? How did you deal with that?**
- Q. How often, or how much, do you think about death? How do you think about it? What sorts of thoughts/feelings accompany that?**

Part of the reason people dread death so much is a combination of the accompanying pain, suffering, loss, and the unknown. Left to our own devices, it's a pretty natural response to fear death...be it our own or that of a loved one.

In this week's passage we look at the story of the raising of Lazarus. To be clear, Lazarus was not resurrected...he would eventually die again. But he was raised from the dead...resuscitated we might say. But nevertheless, this is an important passage for us to get an understanding of life, death, resurrection, and God's response/feelings to it all.

We do not know what Lazarus died from. We're only told that he was sick. We don't know how long he had been sick, or really any details to speak of. We do know that Lazarus, as well as his sisters Mary and Martha, were good friends of Jesus, probably supporters (financially speaking) and also disciples of his. We also know that Bethany, the village that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived in, was in the region of Judea, which had become very hostile toward Jesus. It was not a safe place for Jesus to be.

As we look at this story we notice that Jesus delayed going to Bethany upon hearing that Lazarus was sick. But we have no reason to think that His delay had anything to do with fear of the Jewish leaders. Jesus never did anything out of fear. Jesus was always strategic, secure, and timely. We also have no reason to think that Jesus was cold and insensitive toward this family that He loved and that loved Him.

- Q. Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus when Lazarus was sick...with the obvious hope/expectation that Jesus would come and heal him. We could liken this to prayer. We pray with a hope/expectation/result in mind. How is Jesus' response to their request (i.e. waiting) informative/instructive to us in our own prayer lives?**

This is also not the first time Jesus raised someone from the dead. In Luke 7 we see Jesus raise a widow's son. In Luke 8 we see Jesus raise Jairus' daughter. But the raising of Lazarus is the most notable and well-known raising. Part of the reason for that is that the other 2 raisings were in Galilee. Lazarus was in Judea. Perhaps a parallel would be the difference between something happening in New York or California vs. Nebraska or Kansas. Additionally, the first two raisings

were earlier in Jesus' ministry when people (namely the religious leaders) were still trying to figure Him out. By the time Lazarus was raised, Jesus was already a marked man, a perceived threat to the religious establishment.

Jesus was operating on a well-orchestrated time frame. He knew what He was doing. He was planning on dying in Jerusalem on Passover. Nothing was going to derail that plan...even an unplanned trip to Bethany. BUT, that doesn't mean that He didn't care about Lazarus, Mary and Martha. In fact, He would use this to propel His plan...but, again, timing was everything, which explains why He wasn't going to drop everything and rush off to Bethany to spare Lazarus from dying. So beyond Jesus' greater understanding of timing, Jesus also had a greater understanding of death. Jesus didn't operate from the standpoint that death (be it His own or others) needed to be avoided at all cost. Rather, Jesus operated on a higher principle (or the Highest Principle)...that being that God's glory takes precedence over everything.

One of the interesting and important points we pick up as we analyze Jesus in the gospel accounts is that nothing ever seems to be urgent; He never seems to be in a rush about anything. For example—interestingly enough, during one of the earlier raisings—when Jairus' daughter was on her death bed, Jesus allowed Himself to be interrupted by someone else in need—the women with the hemorrhage. Jesus took His time with her, fully restoring her...but in the meantime, the young girl died. No worries. No problem. Jesus eventually got to her and raised her. It is interesting that when death is taken out of the equation, our whole understanding of time changes.

- Q. How often, and for what reasons, are you in a hurry? What is so pressing, and why is it so pressing?**
- Q. Think deeply on this: how is our understanding of time dictated (in usually unconscious ways) by the reality of death? Follow the rabbit trail a little further now: how is our understanding of life affected by our (flawed/warped) understanding of time?**
- Q. Describe a time when God's timetable didn't match your timetable. How did you deal with that?**
- Q. How are you living for God's glory?**

Well-known pastor and author John Ortberg, prior to taking a new ministry position, asked his mentor Dallas Willard for advice. Willard, in his usual thoughtful way, simply said, "Don't be in a hurry." Willard, who himself was a life-long apprentice of Jesus learned from Jesus that the abundant life is an unhurried life. Rushing, and hurrying, is a sign of not resting in God, of thinking too highly of ourselves, of not trusting God. I suspect that these two accounts...the raising of Jairus' daughter and the raising of Lazarus were likely highly formative on this matter for Willard.

A common mistake people make when thinking of Jesus is to have an ethereal view of Him, like He's some sort of unaffected, stoic, spiritual guru. The story of the raising of Lazarus proves how inaccurate that view is. (And remember, if we want to know what God is like, we look to Jesus.) It appears that John went out of his way to demonstrate just how emotionally affected Jesus was by this whole incident (even with His own well-orchestrated timing and strategy in place). Take note of verses 33-38—Jesus was “...*deeply moved in spirit and troubled*.”, He “*wept*”, and was “...*once more deeply moved*...” The English translations lose a little of the description here. According to the Greek, Jesus was stirred, distressed, agitated, even angry and indignant. (The word picture is of a horse snorting.) This is hardly an emotionally flatlined person. Which means God is not emotionally flatlined, passive, or indifferent. And while it's typically not difficult for people to imagine God being mad/angry, there is a lot more depth and texture to these emotions. In fact, all throughout Scripture we see God as distressed, troubled, and grieved (and, yes, angry as well) over the sin of man. Death is a reminder of the consequence of sin. Weeping is usually a complex combination of emotions...and something we are endowed with from our Creator in whose image we were made.

Scholars have speculated over the centuries as to why Jesus had such a strong reaction. I suspect there is no one single answer, but like all emotions, a deep mixture of complicated factors.

**Q. When was the last time you cried/wept? What was it over?**

Something we see out of both Martha and Mary is that they both had expectations of Jesus...and seemed to be experiencing disappointment in Jesus...for had He been there, they thought, He would have kept Lazarus from dying. The reality is that you and I also have expectations of Jesus—some of which we are aware of, but much of which we probably are not. It usually takes some level of discomfort, disappointment, pain, or downright suffering for those to surface. “Why am I experiencing this?”, we ask. “God, why are you allowing this?”, we wonder. “Lord, please fix/change this!” we cry.

**Q. Describe a time when God didn't do as you hoped or expected, a time when you've been disappointed by God. (It is incredibly important to be honest about such matters...denying them will not help us. God can handle our disappointment. Perhaps another question might be, Do you allow yourself to be brutally honest with God about how you're feeling about Him...as Mary and Martha both essentially stated, “Jesus, you let me down here.”)**

While God certainly doesn't enjoy seeing us experience pain and sorrow, He also has a much bigger picture in mind; He sees far more factors at play than we could possibly fathom. Again, Jesus' larger concern was God's glory. This is a consistent pattern we see in Scripture. In John 9 when Jesus was asked what caused a man's blindness—his sin or the sin of his parents—Jesus retorted that neither his sin nor the sin of his parents were the reason, but that “*the works of God might be displayed in his life*.” That doesn't mean that He's flippant about our condition. It's just that He has a different plan for overcoming our condition than what we have...one that

doesn't necessarily include us not having to experience the unpleasant situation/circumstances, pain or suffering. But let's face it, we can hardly complain about that being "unfair" seeing as He willingly went to the Cross. Jesus went through painful torture and suffering...and then overcame it through resurrection. Without trying to minimize pain and suffering, this nevertheless informs us that there is something greater awaiting us on the other end. Likewise, in John 16:21, when Jesus was alluding to His impending death and subsequent resurrection, He stated, *"A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world."* Isn't it interesting that when Jesus was describing the pain of death and loss, He chooses the most basic and foundational image of life...that of birth. All this to say, that Jesus'/God's view of death is substantially different than ours. Out of death, new life comes. This is a pattern God hints at in His creation...*"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."* (John 12:24) We see the important theme, pattern, rhythm...death to life. *"I am the resurrection and the life."* Jesus tells us.

The dialogue between Jesus and Martha is interesting. Jesus told Martha that Lazarus would rise again. Martha replied that, yes, she understood that he would rise again at the last day (11:23-24). Martha's doctrine was sound. But faith in Christ, life in Christ, is much greater than sound doctrine. Consider the disciples: they experienced Jesus...then it took them decades of reflection upon their experience to develop "doctrine". Doctrine is important...but it is secondary. We don't love and worship doctrine (that would actually be a form of idolatry), rather we love and worship Jesus. To "believe in" Jesus means to know Him, to follow Him, to obey Him, as opposed to holding to certain doctrinal points or propositional truths.

**Q. How, or in what ways, have you settled for knowing doctrine (or knowing ABOUT Jesus) as opposed to knowing Jesus? Why do you think that is? (Hint, it usually has to do something with trust and control.)**

Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection and the life."* Later in chapter 17 He stated, *"Now this is eternal life; that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent."* And Paul stated, *"When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."* (Colossians 3:4). Jesus is life. Knowing Jesus (not just knowing ABOUT Jesus) is our greatest aspiration. He is what makes life fulfilling. If we have Jesus, we have everything. Without Jesus, we have nothing...no matter what else we have. It reminds me of the psalmist's words, *"Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."* (Psalm 73:25-26)

**Q. What is the difference (experientially, practically) between Jesus being a part of our life, and Jesus being our life?**