

Session 12: John 11:1–57

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

Trusting deeply in Jesus is never in vain, even when we can't clearly see what he's doing.

Head Change

To know God does not always work in expected ways.

Heart Change

To feel Jesus's care for you, even when it seems like he is far away.

Life Change

To trust and obey Jesus, even when his commands seem unusual.

OPEN

**What is the most outlandish promise you ever made?
Were you able to keep that promise?**

Jesus makes some big promises to us. His promises—especially of our future resurrection—can seem outlandish or even impossible. There may be circumstances in our lives where we are sure he isn't trustworthy. But even when doubt dominates our hearts and we can see no way for God to deliver us, we can rest assured that Jesus's promises to us—even the ones that seem impossible—are assured.

READ

John 11:1–57 (If you are pressed for time, you can shorten your reading to John 11:1–5, 17–22, 38–57.)

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

In what ways does Jesus give us hope?

What does it mean for Jesus to be “the resurrection and the life”?

What does real faith look like?

Show Session 12: *John 11:1–57* (10 minutes).

DISCUSS

Read John 11:1–16.

At the beginning of this chapter, we meet some of Jesus's friends: three siblings from a family he loved. But Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, is gravely ill, and the sisters reach out to Jesus for help. We often do the same thing. When we are in desperate need, we cry out to Jesus. **What situations cause you to turn to Jesus for help?**

What situations are you tempted to think are too small or aren't worth praying about?

Jesus responds to Martha and Mary's message saying that Lazarus's sickness would not end in death. Dr. Evans pointed out that Martha and Mary must have had their anxiety put at ease: their brother would be okay. But Jesus does not immediately leave to heal Lazarus. Instead, he stays put for two whole days. Put yourself in Martha and Mary's shoes. **What would you have expected Jesus to do?**

When in your life has it seemed like God was staying put when you needed him most?

Note: To learn more about Jesus's relationship with Mary and Martha, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

When Martha and Mary would have wanted Jesus to move quickly, his disciples didn't want him to leave at all. They saw danger around every corner, knowing that there were people actively looking to hurt or kill Jesus. Instead of moving to help their friends, they wanted to stay safe and hidden. **When Jesus calls you to move, to act, or to obey, what fears tempt you to stay put?**

Mary and Martha prayed in faith, but their prayers were not immediately answered in the way they expected. The disciples were called to walk with Jesus, but they were afraid to act. Both groups were experiencing a crisis of faith, and Jesus offers both groups the same remedy. Look at verses 4 and 15. **What does Jesus want to show his disciples and the people he loves? What response does Jesus want to elicit from them?**

It may seem confusing that Jesus says in verse 15 that he's "glad" he was not with Lazarus before he died. It seems contrary to his character. But his mission, as we have seen throughout this book, is to reveal his glory to the world so that people might believe in him. When he looked at Mary, Martha, and his disciples, he saw that they needed to believe and trust more deeply in him, and he was glad to give them that opportunity. **Where in your life is it difficult to trust Jesus? Where in your life have you felt forgotten or abandoned by God?**

How might these situations be an opportunity for you to trust Jesus more deeply? How might you trust Jesus to reveal his glory in unexpected ways?

Read John 10:17–37.

Look at verses 21 and 32. **How do both Mary and Martha greet Jesus? What do you think their greetings reveal about their faith?**

Mary and Martha see their brother's death as an unnecessary loss. In their minds, Jesus could have done something, but he just wasn't around to do it. He was late. **In what situations in your own life are you tempted think God won't be around to help? When has God been "late" in answering your prayers?**

Jesus has described himself as Living Water, the Bread of Life, and the Light of the World. But a person must be alive to enjoy water, bread, and light. In verse 25, Jesus declares his authority over death, declaring himself as "the resurrection and the life." **According to verse 26 and Dr. Evans's teaching, what does it mean that Jesus is the resurrection and the life for us? What difference does his power over life and death make in your everyday life?**

Jesus not only has the power to satisfy and guide us, but he also has the power to save us. All he asks is that we believe. Read verse 27. Even though her brother has died and it seems like Jesus has failed to deliver on his promise, Martha makes one of the clearest professions of faith of any person in this Gospel. Even in her pain, her grief, and her confusion, she trusts Jesus. **What does Martha's faith teach you about the nature of faith, even in dark places?**

It might be tempting to think of Jesus as detached in this passage, more focused on teaching a lesson than caring for the people he loves. But in verse 35, the shortest verse in your Bible, we see very clearly that Jesus was overwhelmed with grief. Even though he knew what was about to happen, he wept for his friend. **What does his display of deep emotion teach you about Jesus?**

In verses 36–37, how do people respond to Jesus’s weeping? Which of these groups do you relate to?

Note: To learn more about walking with Jesus in grief, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Read John 10:38–44.

Jesus moves towards the tomb to fulfill his promise to Mary and Martha, telling the people to open the tomb. But Martha, who just made a profession of faith in Jesus, has doubts about Jesus’s plan. She immediately tells Jesus why they should not do what he has commanded. While it might be easy to look down on Martha for her doubts, we should see ourselves in her. **In what ways can you sympathize with Martha’s doubts? When have you thought God’s plan for your life was unreasonable, illogical, or poorly planned?**

There are times when God commands us to act in faith or, as Dr. Evans put it, “move a stone.” We can sometimes rush to find reasons why it would be better to keep the “stone” in place, like Martha, instead of trusting God in faith. We imagine the side effects, the negative results, and the faults in God’s command. But we don’t always know what God is up to and, as Dr. Evans said, no situation is beyond redemption in the hands of the savior. **What could you do to counteract the doubts that rush into your mind when God tells you to “move a stone”?**

How might you turn the fears behind your doubts into expectant and hopeful thoughts?

Note: To think more deeply about your doubts, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

Look at Jesus’s response to Martha in verse 40. He does not pull away from her, scold her, or change his mind about raising Lazarus from the dead. **What is Jesus**

offering Martha? How would you characterize his response to her doubt?

In the video, Dr. Evans taught that faith is believing God enough to do what he says. If you don't see God moving in your life, it may be that you do not trust God enough to act on his commands. **What may be holding you back from trusting God's commands, especially the ones that seem illogical?**

Note: To learn more about faith in action, go to **Go Deeper Section 4** at the end of this study.

When Jesus calls Lazarus from the tomb, Lazarus walks out, still wrapped in burial garments. Look back at Jesus's initial promise to Mary and Martha in verse 4. While Jesus does not fulfill his promise in an obvious or expected way, he does it in a way that causes many, including Martha and his disciples, to believe in him. **How did Jesus's unexpected method create a greater good than if he had fulfilled his promise in a simple or expected manner?**

Note: To learn more about the resurrection and new life in Jesus, go to **Go Deeper Section 5** at the end of this study.

Now think about your own life. Jesus may not provide for you in an expected way. But his way is meant to help you and the people around you believe more deeply in him. **In what ways have the difficult circumstances of your own life led you to trust Jesus more?**

How might his past deliverance help you trust him in future difficulty?

Read John 11:45–57.

The Jewish authorities are afraid that Jesus's following will make them lose their status, their temple, and their nation. But that is a small loss compared to what Jesus offered everyone who followed him. In this session, we have looked at what we are afraid to lose when Jesus calls us to follow him. **What are you afraid Jesus will take away from you?**

Instead of protecting our small kingdoms and seeing Jesus as a threat, how might you and your community use what God has given you to make Jesus more well-known?

What areas of your life—areas that may seem hopeless—can you entrust to God’s plan and timing?

Which of God’s scriptural commands or promises could you trust with a renewed faith this week?

LAST WORD

The stage is set. You can feel the tension at the end of this chapter. Jesus has declared and shown himself to be living water, the bread of life, the light of the world, our resurrection, and our life. He has built a following in Israel, and the Jewish leaders are prepared to do whatever it takes to get rid of him.

But where does that leave us? Over the past weeks, you have studied his words and seen his miracles. Do you believe he is who he claims to be?

Jesus is not looking to trick or deceive us. While he may not work in the ways we expect, he will always keep his promises so that we might believe in him. Do you believe enough to follow him?

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Mary and Martha

John spends very little time introducing us to Mary and Martha. But the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) each tell stories about how Jesus came to know, befriend, and grow close to these sisters.

Read Luke 10:38–42.

Martha welcomed Jesus into her home at a time when following and spending time with Jesus was increasingly controversial. She also planned and hosted an elaborate meal for Jesus and his disciples. **What can you learn from Martha's openness and hospitality towards Jesus?**

Mary also admired Jesus, but instead of hosting him like her sister, she sat at his feet as a disciple. At this time, it was not proper for a woman to be a disciple. What's more, Martha needed Mary's help making preparations for the meal. **What was most important to Mary?**

Do you relate more to Mary or Martha? What would you be doing if you were hosting Jesus in your home?

Though this story is brief, we learn a lot about these two sisters. Martha is an organized leader in her community but tends to get distracted by tasks. Mary has very little concern for social norms but clearly understood the need to be near Jesus. Both honored and trusted Jesus. They are each likable and admirable in their own way. **How would you characterize these two sisters?**

Reread John 11:17–37. **What are they doing when Jesus arrives? What stands out to you about their actions?**

Martha, like before, comes out to greet Jesus and welcomes him to the town of Bethany. She implicitly trusts Jesus but, like before, feels like there are things that Jesus should have done differently. **In what ways can you sympathize with Martha?**

Read Mark 14:3–9 or Matthew 26:6–12 (both Gospels tell the same story).

After Lazarus is raised from the dead, Mary again bucks social norms and anoints Jesus's head with perfume and wipes his feet with her hair. Like Martha at the dinner, the disciples felt that Mary could have used her time and resources more wisely. **What did Mary understand that the disciples didn't? In what ways is this story similar to the story from Luke 10:38–42?**

Both sisters trusted in and followed Jesus. Jesus loved both of the sisters deeply, even though they were very different. **What do the examples of Mary and Martha teach you about following Jesus? In what ways can you emulate their faith and trust in Jesus?**

2. Walking with Jesus in Grief

Jesus knew Lazarus had died and intended to raise him from the dead, as we see in John 11:11–15. But his understanding of the future did not nullify his grief when he came to Lazarus's tomb. Instead of being emotionally detached, he walked alongside his friends in grief. He was overcome and wept in the face of loss.

In the same way, we know that we will spend eternity with Jesus. We know that we will see loved ones who trust Jesus again. But our future hope does not keep us from grief today. Nor should it.

Read Hebrews 4:15–16.

Jesus is not detached from our grief. He has experienced loss and sympathizes, or “suffers alongside,” us. **What does it mean to you that your savior and high priest sympathizes with your pain?**

Take some time to pray through your griefs right now. If you are going through this study with a group, share your griefs with one another and pray for each other. In your suffering, know that Jesus is neither detached nor unaffected. He sympathizes with your weakness and is

ready to help whomever approaches his throne of grace and mercy.

3. Doubt

In this session, we see multiple people around Jesus wrestle with doubt, an experience very relatable to many of us. It is tempting for us to think of doubt as a bad thing. For some of us, the mere presence of doubt makes us feel ashamed or concerned that our faith is not genuine.

But doubt is not an unusual part of faith and often a sign that we are thinking deeply about our relationship with Jesus. The people who wrestle with doubt in John 11 are the people who knew Jesus's promises and believed them but could not see how they could possibly be fulfilled after Lazarus died. Many other people in the Bible had doubts: prominent people like Sarah (Genesis 18:9–15), Gideon (Judges 6:36–40), even disciples like Peter (Luke 22:54–62) and Thomas (John 20:24–29).

What doubts do you have about Jesus?

Whom could you lean on and talk to as you wrestle with your doubts?

What could it look like to pray through your doubts?

Read Mark 9:14–27.

What stands out to you about the father seeking help for his son?

The father says to Jesus, “I believe, help my unbelief.” In other words, “I trust you, but I also have doubts. Can you help me?”

What would it look like for you to pray, “I believe, help my unbelief”?

Even when his dear friends Mary and Martha doubted, they still trusted Jesus. While he did not save Lazarus in the way they expected, they still received their brother back from the dead. It could be that you do not have an answer to your doubt now but will in the future. Take some time to pray for the Holy Spirit's help in your doubt and for the peace and patience to wait for God's answer.

Dr. Evans helped us think through our active faith. Faith in Jesus is not stagnant. It is not merely emotional or cognitive. Faith in Jesus should rightly cause us to change the way we live and behave on a daily, even hourly, basis.

Think about your own faith: in what ways does your faith change the way you behave?

Read Ephesians 2:8–10 and look at how faith and action work in our salvation.

This passage makes clear that we are not saved by our own effort. God saves us by his grace through the work of Jesus. But we often still live as if God will accept or reject us based on our actions. **What do you think God sees in you when you sin? When you follow his commands?**

We are saved solely by faith through grace, not by anything we have or will do. We are not saved by our actions, but once we are saved God calls us to action. **According to verse 10, why have we been created in Christ?**

God has saved us to do good works, specific opportunities and actions he laid out before time began. **What actions and opportunities to serve Jesus do you have today?**

Read James 2:20–26.

James, Jesus's brother, says that faith without works is like a body without breath. In other words, an inactive Christian has the form of faith but does not appear to be alive. **In what ways does your life represent the new life you have found in Christ? Where do you see room for growth?**

Is there anything that keeps you from doing God's good works?

What is one area of your life where you have resisted full obedience to God? What could it look like for you to be obedient in that area of your life this week?

5. The Resurrection and the Life

The titles Jesus has given himself in the Gospel of John are abstract but describe things we have experienced. We

all know what it is like to be thirsty and the satisfaction of a cool drink of water. We know what it is like to be hungry and how food can cure a “hangry” attitude. But none of us has physically experienced resurrection. So what does it mean that Jesus is the resurrection and the life?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–8.

These verses are a testimony of Jesus’s physical resurrection. **What stands out to you about Paul’s description? Why do you think he included Jesus’s appearances to others in his testimony?**

Jesus was physically resurrected. In that sense, he is the literal resurrection and life, which is more than a neat fact about Jesus. Our entire faith rests on the reality of resurrection.

Read John 11:25 and 1 Corinthians 15:20–23.

What does it mean for Jesus to be the “firstfruit” of resurrection?

In what ways does your view of the future change knowing that you, like Jesus, will be resurrected?

Jesus made a promise to everyone who trusts him: even though they will experience death, they will live. He then showed us what he meant by dying on the cross and defeating death. We will all die, but those of us who trust Christ will follow his example and, like Lazarus, be called up and out of the grave.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:51–57.

When we are resurrected, we will be raised “imperishable” to eternal life. In Christ, we overcome death, the effects of our sin, and are raised to physically live with Christ in eternity.

Because of the promised resurrection, we can say death is not the end. We can have hope, even in death, knowing that our resurrection and eternal life are assured promises made by our savior. If you trust Jesus, he is your resurrection and life.

In what ways does the promised resurrection change the way you view your life today? Your death?

In what ways does the hope of new and eternal life change the way you view your difficulties today?