

Session 8: John 20:1–31

SESSION GOALS

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

Main Idea

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, whose death and resurrection grant eternal life to all who believe in him.

Head Change

To know that all those who believe in Jesus are freed from the penalty of sin and have an eternal future with God.

Heart Change

To feel joy and gratitude for Christ's victory over death.

Life Change

To share the good news of Christ's resurrection freely and frequently.

OPEN

What is a piece of good news you have shared recently?

We are, in many ways, natural evangelists. When we watch a good movie, we tell others to see it. When we eat a good meal, we eagerly share the name of the restaurant with our friends. When we find something good, we can't help but share it.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the culmination of his mission on earth and the most powerful event in history. The shock and awe of his appearance to the disciples brought them unimaginable joy. As his disciples today, we too experience the joy of knowing Christ lives. And like Mary Magdalene, we know that such wonderful news begs to be shared.

READ

Read John 20:1–31. If you are short on time, read John 20:1–7, 15–18, 24–29.

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.

How do we know that God accepted Christ's death on the cross as a sufficient payment for the sins of the world?

What should believers be doing with their knowledge of the resurrection?

Show Session 8: *John 20:1–31* (12 minutes).

DISCUSS

After three days, Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John went to Jesus's tomb, but what they found was not what they expected. Read John 20:1–10.

Peter and John, saw the expensive burial cloths on the ground of Jesus's tomb, but his body was nowhere to be found. The carefully rolled facecloth seemed to confirm that Jesus himself had risen. John records that when he entered the tomb, he believed Jesus had been resurrected. **If you have trusted in Jesus, what evidence convinced you to believe in his resurrection?**

Note: *To learn more about the importance of Jesus's bodily resurrection, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

Read John 20:11–18. Mary did not recognize Jesus until he spoke to her. But after hearing his voice, she recognized him at once. **How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? What could you do to know him more deeply, to recognize his voice speaking to you in the midst of all other voices vying for your attention?**

Jesus gave Mary the task of telling his followers that he was alive. Though the culture didn't value women's word, Jesus did. Dr. Evans noted that Jesus's directive validates the call for women to proclaim the gospel. **In what ways does your church encourage women to develop and use their spiritual gifts? If women have played a role in your own spiritual journey, who were they, and what did they do that impacted you?**

The call to share the truth of the resurrection belongs to all of us, women and men alike. Telling others about Jesus's victory over death can take many forms, whether in person, to large groups, through writing, or creating art. **What method do you most often use to share the gospel?**

Mary's message to the disciples was simple: she had met the risen Lord and then shared his message. Our communication of the gospel should be just as clear as that (see Matthew 28:18–20). **How do you usually explain the good news of Jesus to someone who has never heard it before? In what ways do you change your approach with someone who has been raised in church?**

Read John 20:19–23. The disciples were hiding behind locked doors, afraid the authorities might find and crucify them as they had Jesus. While we may never be under the same violent threats the disciples endured, we can let fear control our faith. **In what ways can you sympathize with the disciples' fear? What is your typical reaction when you feel afraid to talk about your faith?**

Jesus commissioned his disciples to go and share the news of his resurrection with others. Dr. Evans said that if we are not sharing Christ with others, we aren't taking the resurrection as seriously as we should. **Who in your life needs to hear the good news that their sins have been forgiven? What do you think it means to have a "lifestyle of evangelism"?**

Read John 20:24–31. In many ways, Thomas's skepticism seems reasonable, doesn't it? Could a man really raise from the dead? We often treat doubts like a flaw, but they are a normal part of living by faith. **In what ways can we view doubt as a condemnable part of our faith?**

Jesus didn't scold Thomas for having doubts. Rather, he invited Thomas to touch his wounds, a moment of grace for the disciple with whom many of us can relate. Instead of silently wrestling with our doubt, we should take them to Jesus. **What doubts did you overcome after first hearing the gospel? What sorts of doubts are you wrestling with now?**

What does it look like to show grace to each other when they share doubt, just as Jesus showed grace to Thomas?

***Note:** To learn more about God's reaction to our doubt, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

Much of Jesus's life and words were not recorded, but John included all the information that would help his readers believe that Jesus is the Messiah. **What does John say is the purpose of his Gospel?**

As you have studied the Gospel of John, what is your conclusion about Jesus?

As Dr. Evans mentioned, those who have believed in Jesus have a responsibility to share the good news of his death and resurrection with others. **How can you live,**

speak, write, or otherwise communicate in ways that invite people to know Jesus better?

LAST WORD

Jesus is alive! John 20 is one of the most significant passages in all of Scripture, for in it we see the risen Christ and hear his voice offering peace and urging his disciples to believe in his works. Their belief, though mingled with fear and doubt, changed the world.

Some believe, some wonder, and some doubt, but Jesus loves us all through our questions and fears. God works through imperfect people to build his kingdom and is inviting us to join that work. Consider this: the gospel has come all the way through history to us. It's our turn to share it.

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 and deepen your study of the Gospel of John.

1. The Significance of Jesus's Bodily Resurrection

Each of the Gospels includes an account of Jesus's death and resurrection. But how do we know that his sacrifice satisfied the Father's wrath, that it was sufficient to forgive all sin once and for all? The answer is Jesus's bodily resurrection.

The biblical writers took care to show that Jesus rose with a physical body. His friends and family recognized him, touched him, and ate with him. Mary clung to him briefly, while Thomas was invited to poke his wounds (John 20:27). He specifically reassured them that he was not a ghost:

“Why are you troubled,” he asked them, “And why do doubts rise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself! Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

Having said this, he showed them his hands and feet. But while they were still amazed and in disbelief because of their joy, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” So they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. (Luke 24:38–43)

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul emphasized the historical nature of Jesus's resurrection—he truly is alive. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3–8.

What proofs does Paul give for Jesus's physical resurrection?

The resurrection proved that Jesus had conquered death, the penalty of sin. As a result, we can live in freedom from

our sin and with the hope that we will be with Jesus in eternity. If Jesus were still dead, decayed in a tomb, he would have no power to make good on his promises to raise up his followers to new life.

To those who denied any resurrection, Paul emphasized the importance of Jesus's resurrection. Read 1 Corinthians 15:16–20.

As Jesus goes, so go those who believe in him. If he is still dead, our lives end at our own deaths with no hope for eternity. **How have you understood the significance of Jesus's physical resurrection?**

Only a savior who is alive can save us. Jesus cannot forgive and offer us a future if he is still in the grave. But he does live, and he does forgive, and we do have hope. Take a moment to praise and thank God for his incredible plan to bring you into an eternity with him.

2. Doubting God

People tend to feel safe with certainty. Faith, by nature, has some sense of mystery, questions that don't seem to have answers. For some, these questions can feel like proofs against their faith and lead them to reject Christ. But our doubts are not flaws. Rather, they are opportunities to investigate our faith more deeply and to trust God with the mysteries of life.

Jesus encountered many people who struggled with doubt. Nathanael doubted Jesus because he had bought into his cultural assumptions about Jesus's hometown: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Nicodemus couldn't logically understand Jesus's teaching that a person must be born again (John 3:4), though he continued to pursue greater understanding. Jesus's own brothers, Mary's other sons, suffered from being too familiar with Jesus—how could their brother be the Messiah? And let's not forget Thomas, labeled for centuries by his doubt in the risen savior.

Read Mark 9:17–27.

Many of us can identify with the father of the possessed boy, caught between belief and unbelief. The man, desperate to get his suffering son help, had brought the boy to Jesus. "But if you can do anything, have

compassion on us and help us,” he told Jesus in verse 22. Jesus responded, “If you can? Everything is possible for the one who believes.” **When have you felt like the father in this story? How does Jesus’s response to him impact your own faith struggle?**

What did it mean for you to trust God for help when you did not know how he would respond?

How often have you quoted the boy’s father as you prayed, “I do believe; help my unbelief!” The struggle to trust God is a common, very human condition. Willing ourselves to believe does little to fix our problem. So how do we endure our times of doubting God?

Consider these three ideas:

Keep turning to God even when it feels futile. Our problem is not the struggle to believe but when we stop wrestling with God. We may lose sight of him but we cannot stop looking. Like the boy’s father, run to Jesus even if you aren’t sure what he will do for you. You display faith in the very act of continuing to turn to God. **When have you wrestled with God? What did that experience teach you about yourself and about God?**

Wrestle with your doubts in community. We find encouragement and support with others who share our faith, and in our times of weakness they help hold us up and keep us pointing in God’s direction. Stick close to your faith community. It is very likely that people in your church or small group may have wrestled with the same doubts you are struggling with. **Who could you talk to about your doubts? In what ways could your church community support you as you wrestle with your questions?**

Finally, remember God’s mercy for doubters. Jesus did not condemn the boy’s father for his doubt. Rather he answered the man’s prayer and healed the boy. Our Lord is eager to draw you near to him. Remember his goodness, his love for you, and his finished work of redeeming you. Take a moment to bring your doubts to God. **What questions do you have for him? How might you trust him to help you with these questions?**

