

Uncovering the Life of Jesus: Leader's Notes by Becky Pippert

Leading *Uncovering the Life of Jesus* Studies

I remember the first time I heard of running a Bible study that was geared for seekers and skeptics. I was a university student studying in Spain, and attended a Christian international student conference in a castle nestled in the Austrian Alps.

I went to a seminar on evangelism and the speakers, Ada Lum and Ruth Siemens, began by asking: "How do we arouse the interest of our skeptic friends in Jesus?" Most unbelievers are not ready to receive Christ after hearing the gospel only once, nor are they usually ready to come with us to church. Yet even those who are turned off by the church are still curious about the person of Jesus.

So what do you do after you've prayed and asked God to guide you to people he is seeking? First, you have some spiritual conversations, in which you listen to their questions and develop a friendly relationship. *But then what do you do?* Ada and Ruth said that the next step is inviting our friends to take a look at Jesus. Jesus is so different from what skeptics assume he will be like. He is so radical, beautiful, unpredictable and irresistible. The greatest shortcut in evangelism, they said, is allowing our friends to see the real Jesus!

Although I still had questions, I was hooked. It made sense to me—and I have been doing Seeker Bible Studies ever since! In our global evangelism ministry I have seen Seeker Studies started on all six continents with extraordinary fruit.

Perhaps you have some of the same questions that I had back then:

Will they come?

I was surprised to discover that people were interested when they realized the group was a "safe place," where they could come with their questions and wouldn't be made to feel embarrassed by their lack of Bible knowledge. For many it also helped if they realized that other seekers were coming as well. But we can also offer a one-to-one study if that would be more comfortable for the seeker. If it is a small group of unbelievers, then remember not to flood the group with Christians! *Uncovering the Life of Jesus* is a study geared for seekers and skeptics. Not everyone I've invited to a Seeker Bible Study has accepted, but I've learned that "no" doesn't mean "never."

But they don't accept the Bible is God's word, nor do they believe it's true!

We aren't asking them to! We aren't asking them to believe anything—rather, we are inviting them to look at the primary source material of the Christian faith and come to their own conclusions about who Jesus is. The aim, we tell them, is to be informed enough to make an intelligent decision.

How do you invite someone to come?

I often say after I've had a spiritual discussion with someone: "Your questions are so good. But may I ask you something? Have you ever actually read the Bible as an adult? How can you make an intelligent decision about Christianity if you've never looked at what Jesus says? I think it'd be fascinating to look at one story about Jesus so you can see what you think. Think of it like a book club, only the book is the Bible. If you like it, then we can look at other stories too." Depending on the seeker, I may invite other seekers to come too—or do a one-to-one study.

How do I prepare?

Remember always to read and re-read the passage first, carefully and prayerfully, without looking at the *Uncovering the life of Jesus* Study Guide. Write down any questions you have, or questions you think seekers might have, about the passage. Then look at the questions in the Study Guide. Also, be sure to write some secondary questions to use after my questions. Be ready with alternative ways of asking questions in case your seeker friends seem stuck or puzzled.

After doing all of the above, only *then* should you read this Leader's Guide. The Leader's Guide is designed to help you gain deeper insight into and clarity about the passage. Remember that the Leader's Guide is intended to help you understand the passage at a deeper level, but it's not intended for you to teach with. Sometimes there may be something that you need to get clarity on—especially if it isn't immediately obvious from the text. Your primary job is to draw out the answers from the participants, not teach the passage to them. So learn from the Leader's Guide, but don't print it out or read from it to the group. This is an inductive study, meaning it's an approach of self-discovery. We want seekers to grapple with the text (for this reason there is not a leader's note on the very straightforward questions where the answers can be found directly Bible passage). In a Seeker Study we won't be able to dot every 'i' and cross every 't' in terms of theological clarity. Coming to faith is a process, and our prayer is that, through the power of God's word and his Spirit, seekers will be drawn to the beauty, power and truth of who Jesus is. And one day, we trust, some will put their trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Besides leading a lively Bible study, and praying for group members privately, is there anything else I should do?

First, I don't begin my Seeker Studies with prayer because I've told group members to think of it as a book club. However, toward the end of the series I suggest we have a party after the study and for everyone to bring food. Then, before we eat, I pray a simple prayer of thanksgiving, and thank God for each person in the group.

It is very important that you and your co-leader (if you have one) meet with each person in your group alone (for coffee or lunch, etc) sometime during the six-week study—preferably toward the final weeks of the study. Try to make it a private, quiet place of meeting if possible. If you have four seekers in your group,

then you could meet with two and your co-leader with the other two (but alone, not together). As the conversation develops, ask the person something along these lines: "What do you think of the study so far? How does Jesus strike you? What questions do you have?"

Test the waters and see if they might be close to giving their life to Christ. If you sense an openness, you could ask: "Is there anything that would keep you from becoming a Christian right now?" Then be prepared to lead them to Christ if they are ready!

1. Standing room only

Luke 1 v 1-4 & 5 v 17-26

Purpose

To show seekers how Jesus surprised, and often shocked, those of his day by his radical claims, the extraordinary way in which he lived his life, and the fact that he saw himself as a person with a divine nature and a divine mission.

General Note

Jesus' claim to forgive sins is a key element in his self-understanding. This was enormously controversial for, if he thought he could forgive sins, he was claiming for himself an ability God alone could have. For Jesus to forgive the sins of the paralyzed man was shocking to everyone present (including the paralyzed man!) because he was implicitly claiming to be divine or to be acting on behalf of God. No Jew in Jesus' day would ever do that. Remember, Jesus was Jewish and Jews did not believe, as some people do today, that there was a little of the divine in everyone.

Leaders' Notes

1. Luke was the only gospel writer who was a Gentile, and who was not an eyewitness to the events he was recording. He was a well-educated man, a physician by trade. His intent, he writes, is to investigate the facts thoroughly and accurately (v 3). His purpose, he says, is that the reader may know the truth: "I ... decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1 v 3-4).

2. Jesus had a reputation by that time. For so many religious leaders to come all at the same time and from such distances, this may have been a planned event, perhaps a formal investigation to test Jesus' orthodoxy. His popularity and the claims he was making would have alarmed many religious leaders. At the end of this story, while the religious leaders recognize a great miracle has been done, they still haven't arrived at any definitive conclusions about who Jesus is.

4. Houses usually had flat roofs, often with external staircases leading up to them, so it was possible for the men to go onto the roof and lower their paralyzed friend through the tiles. Seeing the crowd outside, the paralyzed man might have said: "Let's not trouble the Master anymore"! One risk might have been that he could have fallen off the mat as he was lowered down!

5. Help the participants see the drama of this event. Clearly, the men carrying the paralyzed man would have known that they would have to reimburse the owners for a new roof! Jesus would have had to stop teaching—yet he must have been pleased to see their determination to get to him.

6. Jesus' reputation preceded him and they clearly believed, at the minimum, that he had healing gifts and was a prophet.

7. Jesus was impressed by "their faith" (plural). It is unlikely that it was only the faith of the bearers (Mark says it was four men) carrying him. All of them, the paralyzed man included, believed that Jesus had the power to heal him.

8. The paralyzed man and the bearers must have wondered at first if Jesus had misunderstood! However, the words would have been comforting. In Jesus' day, the religious leaders falsely believed that disabilities were the result of some unspecified sin in the past, perhaps in that person or in his ancestors—see John 9 v 1-3.

9. Jesus' proclamation that the man's sins were forgiven reveals the heart of what Jesus came to do: to deliver us from our moral and spiritual paralysis. While most contemporary seekers do not believe in sin, it's important to ponder the hidden assumption that Jesus is challenging: "If I got my deepest wish, then everything would be OK." If your group wants to know what Jesus means by "sin," then you might explain that the Bible says that sin is ignoring God by living without any reference to him. It's saying: "I will decide how to run my life—not the One who created me." Sin is trying to build our identity on something other than God.

10. It is understandable that the religious leaders were upset. They correctly recognized that only God can forgive sin, but they incorrectly assumed that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy. That is why verse 24 is so important.

11. Jesus healed in his own name, which was unheard of! Jesus performed the cure so that everyone watching would know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. Perhaps Jesus is saying that on the surface it looks as if healing is the harder thing, when in fact, to truly release a person from guilt and pronounce a word of divine forgiveness is the harder thing. Either way, Jesus accomplished both.

2. Guess who's coming to dinner?

Luke 7 v 36-50

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to show Jesus' tremendous love and compassion for all sinners. No one is a lost cause to God, no matter how seemingly insignificant or sinful. Even Simon's apparent indifference to God's love and grace for others moved Jesus to try and help him understand.

General Note

The more a believer is aware of their forgiveness *from Jesus*, the more love he or she has to offer *to Jesus* (and to others). Jesus reveals two types of sinners: law-keepers and law-breakers. And they all need God's forgiveness!

Historical Context

The story assumes that even before the story begins, the woman had heard Jesus proclaiming his message of grace for sinners. The account makes no sense without this assumption. She was coming to express thanks for forgiveness received. It is important to know that the tense of the verb "are" in 7 v 48 is "perfect". The verse is not saying: "your sins are now (at this moment) forgiven"; but "your sins have been (at some time in the past, however recently) and continue to be forgiven." The woman was attending the dinner to make visible her thanks to Christ and to confirm the forgiveness for her many sins. Jesus and the invited guests would be seated around a table on a broad U-shaped dining couch (or couches), as was the custom at formal dinners. They would recline on their left arm, as the Romans did, with the head toward the table and the body stretched away from it. The sandals were removed before reclining. The woman was thus able to approach Jesus' feet without difficulty. Guests would be greeted with a kiss and light oil would be poured over their heads. Once seated, the water and olive oil would be brought to wash their hands and feet, after which, the grace could be offered and the meal would begin.

Leaders' Notes

1. There would be tremendous tension in the air, as everyone present would know that Simon had clearly insulted Jesus. To omit every common courtesy was clearly calculated and not merely an oversight. Perhaps Simon was in two minds about inviting Jesus. Simon might have been impressed by some aspects of Jesus' teaching and his reported healing ministry (to the point of thinking Jesus might be a prophet), but distressed by the type of people he mixed with and claimed as his converts. Furthermore, Jesus had declared himself a prophet in Luke 4 v 24 and this claim needed to be investigated, so a meal was planned and Jesus invited.

2. We know from verse 45 that the woman was present when Jesus entered. She had witnessed the public humiliation and hostility that Jesus experienced when he arrived, which Jesus also affirms (starting in 7 v 44). Perhaps anger over the rudeness Jesus had endured publicly, combined with her deep gratitude for his message and forgiveness, prompted her tears and motivated her to provide what Simon had refused to do.

3. To bring the costly perfume probably means that she had hoped she might be able to anoint Jesus' hands to express her gratitude. But when the host didn't provide the traditional courtesies, her emotions got the best of her. Since only his feet were available from her vantage point, she, in an act of humility, anointed his unclean feet with her tears and poured out the entire contents of the very expensive perfume jar.

4. Because of her dramatic actions at the dinner, it is clear this woman had heard Jesus' message before: that God loves sinners and forgives them on the basis of repentance and faith. Traditionally, slaves would wash the guest's feet with common olive oil. When she saw Jesus being humiliated, she chose to use the most expensive item she owned to wash his feet. It was an extravagant gesture that expressed her depth of gratitude to Jesus for her new life.

5. In light of the cultural world of his day, everyone would have expected Jesus to condemn the woman's actions, especially since she touched him (when she loosened her hair and when she kissed his feet)—a devout Jewish man would never allow such a woman to touch him (v 39). But Jesus wanted Simon to learn several things from her expression of devotion.

6. Simon, as a strict Pharisee, assumes that a true prophet would never associate with social outcasts, especially women of the street. He assumes that the woman is a sinner and that Jesus is not a true prophet! While Simon looks at her and sees only her sins, Jesus (as we learn from the parable) looks at her and sees her response to God's grace and forgiveness.

7. Jesus says the woman loves him because he has (already) forgiven her sins (v 47). She has now sought Jesus out to express her gratitude. At the end of the dialogue, Jesus reassures her (and the community) of that forgiveness (v 48).

8. Jesus often taught in parables—stories cleverly designed to uncover a truth. In this parable, he is trying to help Simon see that the woman has been forgiven because she recognized her sin and received God's message of grace. But Simon's self-righteousness and spiritual pride make him blind to his own sin—the implication in verse 47 is that Simon doesn't love God much! Simon doesn't grasp that God loves sinners (himself included!), and that forgiveness is offered to all who sincerely repent.

9. Since only those who recognize their sin can be forgiven, it means Simon, for now, is the outcast, while the woman has been welcomed into God's kingdom.

10. First, they would have been shocked that Jesus allowed a disreputable woman to touch him. Now they are doubly shocked when Jesus claims to forgive her sins, which only God can do!

11. Among those who believed or admired Jesus, the woman would now be reinstated into society and be regarded differently. For those who had become even more hostile to Jesus, it wouldn't make a difference.

12. Biblically, true faith is shown in three ways: intellectual assent, walking a life by faith, and obedience. If one aspect is missing, it doesn't ring true of authentic faith. This woman demonstrates all three. Because of her extravagant response to Jesus, we see that she has understood Jesus' message. The fact that she does everything to set right Jesus' humiliation, even at great risk to herself, reveals that she is walking by faith and in obedience.

13. We are all sinners in need of forgiveness. Simon is "more lost" than the woman in the sense that he doesn't recognize his need for forgiveness.

3. You can go home again!

Luke 15 v 1-3; 11-32

Purpose

In all parables there are many theological truths communicated. This famous parable reveals deep insight into the character of God—the longing of God the Father for the lost, his joy at their repentance, his graciousness in forgiving and his lavishness in response to the repentant.

Leaders' Notes

- 1.** Jesus was speaking to a divided audience of self-righteous Pharisees and teachers of the law, and to outcasts and “sinners”— from whom the Pharisees liked to keep separate. The Pharisees regarded the sinners as ceremonially unclean, which meant the sinners could contaminate them. The Pharisees were alarmed by Jesus' frequent association with sinners (for example see Luke 5 v 30-31).
- 2.** Jesus had a message of hope for people who had long been ostracized. His message was that God is eagerly waiting to receive his wayward children; they need only recognize their sin, turn around and come to him in faith.
- 3.** A first-century audience would know exactly what the son was saying—he was tired of waiting for his father to die and wished for his death so that he could get his share of the inheritance! The crowd would have expected a Middle-Eastern father to punish his son severely for making such an outrageous and insulting request. Instead, the father allowed his son to go—intimating that God, with sorrow, grants us freedom when we insist on rejecting his love. Note that it is assumed in the text that this was an adult son, even though he was the younger brother.
- 4.** The “distant country” (v 13) was outside Jewish territory, where people would not follow Jewish dietary laws. The son had been raised to obey God's moral laws, which he clearly abandoned. Even more seriously, he was breaking all ties and relationships with his father, his family and his village—something that was extremely rare in Eastern life and thought.
- 5.** There could be many factors that led the son to return home, the most obvious being that, after foolishly squandering his entire inheritance and experiencing a severe famine, he was clearly starving! It's worth noting that the father hadn't rescued him, but allowed him to experience the consequences of his poor choices.
- 6.** The crowd would probably expect the father to be harsh and to expel the son for such gross sin, whether he was repentant or not.
- 8.** Every aspect of the father's response reveals compassion (v 20): the warm embrace, the kiss and so on. The robe was a ceremonial one such as a guest of honor would have been given. The ring was most likely a signet ring, revealing the son's identity and showing that he was now trusted in the household. The

sandals would be a symbol of his rank as a free man, having been restored to his place as a son.

9. In that culture, a man of the father's age and authority would never run! He would walk in a slow, dignified fashion. To run would be considered shameful and humiliating. One reason he runs might be because he knows the outrage his son will face in the village. He wants to get to him before the villagers do! He wants to restore his son to his home and to the community.

10. No doubt the son was steeling himself for harsh treatment, given the way he had treated his father and the fact that he was now returning empty-handed. It would have been overwhelming to experience his father's dramatic, public and lavish demonstration of love. It might have been hard to receive because it was so freely given—no strategy to earn his way back was needed!

11. The older son's words characterize the self-righteousness of the Pharisees who criticized Jesus. In his self-deception, the son says he has never broken any commandment—yet he has just insulted his father publicly, and refused to honor and love him. He accuses his father of favoritism, instead of recognizing his father's joy over a lost son returned. The father's words indicate all the possibilities and privileges available to the older son, which he had never appreciated or enjoyed.

12. Both brothers saw their relationships to their father as that of hired servants rather than loving sons. Both men rebelled. Both men broke their father's heart. Both men were lost. Yet one repented. At the end of the story, Jesus leaves the fate of the older brother up in the air. There is at least a hope that he will return and repent.

13. Jesus wants the Pharisees to see that, like the older son, they too are sinful and need God's forgiveness. They are meant to live in intimate, loving devotion to God, not to obey him out of a weary joylessness. But the message is for everyone, no matter how well we clean up on the outside or how sinful we have been. *All* of us need God's forgiveness and lavish grace. The portrayal of God in this parable is extraordinary. The crowd expects the father to be furious. Instead we see an outpouring of love. We see the wounded, suffering heart of the father for his wayward children, as well as his utter joy when one returns! Most of all, we see a cry from the heart of the father for an understanding of and response of heartfelt obedience to his amazing grace.

4. Everybody is somebody to Jesus

Luke 18 v 31 – 19 v 10

Purpose

God, through Jesus, demonstrates compassion both for the oppressed (the blind man) and the oppressor (Zacchaeus).

General Note

This is the third time that Jesus has explicitly predicted his death, and the seventh allusion to his future suffering (see 5 v 35; 9 v 22, 43-45; 12 v 50; 13 v 32-33; 17 v 25). From the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus has known what is awaiting him. But as Jesus reveals costly love to Zacchaeus, it becomes a life-changing force in Zacchaeus' life. Zacchaeus responds to the costly grace he receives by extending it to others.

Leaders' Notes

1. Jesus knew that he had come to die for our sin. He told this to his disciples and he discussed his death with Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration (Luke 9 v 28-31).

2. The disciples seemed to think this beggar was unimportant, a nobody, and certainly not worthy enough to interrupt someone as important as Jesus on his way to Jerusalem for Passover.

3. Clearly the beggar had heard about Jesus. Perhaps other blind people who had been healed by Jesus had stopped and told him their stories. In any case, the man's determination was impressive!

4. Jesus did not discriminate against the poor, the oppressed or the disabled. In fact, he was drawn to them. Jesus wanted his disciples to develop a similar compassion and to realize that everyone is someone to God.

5. Jesus always wanted people to exercise their will and ask in faith for the thing they wanted—the beggar's request shows that he believed Jesus had the power to grant it. When asked such an open question from Jesus, perhaps the beggar considered asking him for something other than his sight!

6. The titles the beggar uses to address Jesus progresses from "Jesus, Son of David" (an acknowledgment that he is the Messiah) to "Son of David" to "Lord" (which can be translated as "Sir," but in this context suggests a much deeper reverence). The blind man demonstrates full confidence in Jesus as the Messiah, who has the power of God to heal, and who has compassion for outcasts like himself. His faith in Jesus grows throughout the story.

7. Clearly Zacchaeus' vast wealth had brought no sense of acceptance either from God or people. The way in which he had gained his wealth had isolated him from all society. His only friends would probably be fellow tax-collectors. It is highly probable that Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus through the tax collector grapevine. Many tax collectors had already repented and had been baptized by

John. And Jesus had invited Matthew—a former tax collector—to be one of his disciples (Matthew 9 v 9-13)!

8. In spite of Zacchaeus' desire to remain unseen, he is spotted. No doubt this causes quite a stir! Most probably, Jesus sizes up the perhaps volatile situation and decides to intervene by calling Zacchaeus down.

9. The crowd is clearly disgusted and shocked that Jesus would eat in the home of a sinner—and right before the Jewish feast of Passover!

10. Since Jewish law required compensation of only one and a fifth of the amount stolen (Leviticus 6 v 2-5), Zacchaeus' statement of generosity reveals his level of sincere repentance.

11. Zacchaeus responds to the costly love offered to him by Jesus by pledging to demonstrate costly love to the community. He received grace and now offers grace to others.

12. Zacchaeus must have believed something about Jesus already to have been so determined and eager to see him, no matter how humiliated he might appear before others. But what he lacked was a personal encounter with Jesus! When Jesus said: "Salvation has come," it was because Jesus had entered not only Zacchaeus' home, but his heart! Salvation is encountering a person: Jesus! Jesus did for him what all of his wealth could never do—Jesus gave him a sense of identity and acceptance. But we see that salvation is more than a single decision; it is a process that affects one's entire life.

13. Both men recognize their need of Jesus; both men are determined to receive his help. Just as we have seen in the previous two studies, in order to be "found" by Jesus we must first recognize that we are "lost." And once we realize how amazing what Jesus offers is, we won't let anything get in our way!

5. Game over?

Luke 22 v 66-71; 23 v 13-25 & 32-56

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to show that Jesus understood his death to be the sacrifice for the sins of the world.

General Note

Christianity begins with the assumption that, while human beings have been made in God's image, we have gotten ourselves in trouble and are in need of rescuing. All of human history testifies to the fact that humans are in crisis. God has taken the initiative in sending Jesus Christ to deliver us from our mess. What we read in this passage is the unfolding of God's rescue mission. The gospel message is that God made us to love him first and foremost. But we got lost along the way. Christ came from heaven to win us back—but it took the cross to do it.

Historical Context

It is important to remember that, while Jesus experienced agonizing and horrific trauma, he was not the helpless victim of unexpected events. His enemies had been scheming and plotting to destroy him for some time; Judas betrayed him, while Peter denied that he ever knew him. But Luke tells his story in such a way as to show that, while there were evil human plots against Jesus and a demonic plot to destroy him, Jesus knew from the beginning why he had come. God had the victory because Jesus pursued and accomplished God's plan of salvation.

Leaders' Notes

2. Pilate was impressed by Jesus, and he clearly believed that Jesus was innocent (23 v 14-15, 22). But Pilate was a weak man and there were many pressures on him. He had already done several extremely insensitive things in Judea that outraged the Jews. He couldn't afford to let one more complaint about his rule reach Caesar. So he ultimately relented to the crowd's pressure.

3. Jesus implored his father to forgive the soldiers. Clearly one of the criminals was deeply moved by Jesus' compassion—it's possible the other criminal merely thought it reflected weakness.

4. The second criminal realizes that it is not Jesus' own wrongdoing that has nailed him to the cross—perhaps he grasps at some level that his death is for the sins of others. From the cross we hear Jesus offering forgiveness on the one hand and eternal life on the other—which is the “double-sided coin” of salvation (Verse 34: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing," and verse 43: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.")!

5. This is why Jesus came—to bring men and women into a relationship with God. He does this even in his last hours of earthly life.

6. There is a note following this question in the study guide about the significance of the three-hour-long darkness as Jesus died. Then ask someone in your group if they would read the verses from 2 Corinthians and Romans printed

in your study guide. Let the power of those words speak for themselves.

7. Even the last moment of Jesus' life was a miracle; no ordinary person in Jesus' physical condition could have shouted. In John 10 v 18, Jesus says: "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." In John's Gospel we are told Jesus also said from the cross: "It is finished" (John 19 v 30), which in the Greek is closer to: "It is accomplished." Luke wants us to know that Jesus chose the moment of his death, when the task for which he came—the whole plan of salvation—had been completed.

8. Once a year a high priest would enter into the Most Holy Place in the temple to make atonement for the sins of the people. No one but the high priest had ever seen this sacred place. But with the sacrifice of Christ, the veil that separated people from God was ripped apart, because now a new way into God's presence had been created through the death of Jesus.

9. The centurion had seen many men die by crucifixion. But only Jesus' death caused darkness to come over the earth for three hours at midday! The centurion had also been in Jesus' presence and saw how he responded, plus hearing him forgive the man next to him on the cross, saying: "Today you will be with me in paradise." All the facts came together for the centurion—this was no ordinary man. Jesus was who he claimed to be!

6. The Son also rises!

Luke 24 v 36-49

Purpose

The aim of this study is to consider some of the evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and to encourage participants to see that being a Christian means we are following not a code of ethics or a self-improvement program, but a living Lord!

General Note

This short study is not sufficient to consider all the information the New Testament gives on the resurrection of Jesus. James Sire writes that the evidence for the resurrection is of six types: (1) the empty tomb, (2) the position of the grave clothes, (3) the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, (4) the fulfillment of prophecy prior to his death, (5) the consistency of the resurrection with Jesus' prior statements and (6) the change of the disciples from weak men to strong leaders willing to undergo persecution and death for their belief in Jesus (tradition says most of them died as martyrs). The apostle Paul summarizes Jesus' post-resurrection appearances in 1 Corinthians 15 v 3-7.

Because of time considerations, we have to select which passages on the resurrection account to read. That is why it is important to read aloud the summary of events under Historical Context.

Leaders' Notes

- 1.** The disciples are “startled and frightened” (v 37). Jesus repeatedly told his disciples that he would rise from the dead on the third day; yet judging by their response, none of them expected to see him alive again.
- 2.** It is important for the disciples to realize that Jesus is not a “ghost,” but the same person as the one crucified. His body is no longer in the tomb. Furthermore, the fact that the disciples initially thought they were seeing a ghost eliminates the possibility that they were having a hallucinatory experience! When people hallucinate, they never think they actually are hallucinating; they're quite convinced that what they are seeing is real. When Jesus says: “Peace be with you,” it is the Hebrew word for “peace” (*shalom*) that is used, and it has deep meaning in Hebrew. It encompasses a sense of well-being in its fullest sense. It gathers up all the blessings of the kingdom of God. But more immediately, the disciples also need peace in light of their terror at seeing Jesus!
- 3.** Jesus' hands and feet would reveal his wounds. If this was really the risen Christ, then it would mean everything he said in his lifetime was true. It would confirm, once and for all, that he was God's divine Son.
- 4.** Try to get your group to really connect emotionally with the disciples' experience. To see Jesus standing in front of them must have seemed too good to be true!

- 5.** Jesus asked for something to eat, again proving that he was not a ghost or a spirit, but fully and physically resurrected. The fish bones would remain as evidence that he had truly been with the disciples!
- 6.** Jesus wanted the disciples to be confident that he had been raised to life. Emotions can be easily manipulated, but the senses are less likely to be deceived. This is significant because Christian faith is not based first and foremost on feelings; we only need faith that Jesus is who he says he is, and did what the Bible claims that he did.
- 7.** Jesus wants his disciples to know who he is and that what he has done is a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. This proved that Jesus really was the Messiah—everything had gone according to God’s plan!
- 8.** “The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day” (v 46).
- 9.** The second response required is repentance: saying sorry to God, turning away from our sin and determining to live his way instead. Putting our faith in Christ and confessing our sin (not merely our behavioral sins but, most importantly, our sin of not allowing God to be the center of our lives and our first love) is what enables us to become true followers of Jesus.
- 10.** The first gift is the forgiveness of our sins. Intimacy in any kind of relationship is not possible when one person has done something wrong and has not yet been forgiven for it.
- 11.** The disciples were utterly confident in the reality of their experience with the risen Christ: he met them in the upper room, explained the Scripture and spoke not only of his crucifixion and resurrection, but also of the coming gift of the Spirit and the subsequent ministry of the gospel. But it is the forgiveness of our sins and the presence of the Holy Spirit (which we receive when we choose to follow Christ as Lord) that enables us—and enabled the disciples—to become transformed people.