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Responding to the Resurrection

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WHAT'S IN YOUR TEACHING GUIDE

This Teaching Guide has three purposes:

- to give the teacher tools for focusing on the content of the session in the Study Guide.
- to give the teacher additional Bible background information.
- to give the teacher variety and choice in preparation.

The Teaching Guide includes two major components: Teacher Helps and Teacher Options.

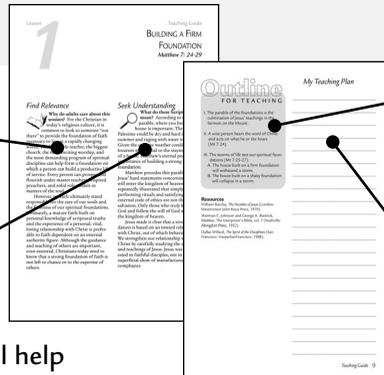
Teacher Helps

Find Relevance

helps you zero in on why each session is important for the adults you teach.

Seek Understanding

presents helpful Bible Background informations and insights that will help you better understand the Scripture.



Teaching Outline

provides you with an outline of the main themes in the Study Guide.

My Teaching Plan is a convenient place for you to make notes for teaching the session.

Teacher Options

Offer Illustrations presents material that will help you paint a picture of the session. This section often presents items from church history, current events, or interesting anecdotes that help introduce the session.

Discussion provides teaching activities that will help learners discuss the Scripture text.

Questions presents multiple collections of questions for various kinds of adults.

Involve Learners helps learners become actively involved with the Scripture text for a particular session.

Closure gives you a means for wrapping up the session.

You Can Choose!

There is more material in each session than you can use, so choose the options from each section to tailor the session to the needs of your group.

Prepare Before the Session

Read the session for today in the Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. After you have decided which options to use, gather the appropriate materials.

THE RESURRECTION

John 20:1-23

Find Relevance



Why do/should adults care about this session? A few days after Jesus' resurrection, controversy was beginning to stir among the people of the first-century world. Even among his disciples, the idea of resurrection seemed ridiculous. When the women ran from the tomb that Easter morning to tell the men that Jesus' body was not there, they were accused of spreading rumors (Lk 24:11) and were not believed. The chief priests, who didn't believe it either, offered money to those willing to discredit the report that Jesus had risen (Mt 28:11-15). It is an unbelievable story. People had mixed reactions to the news. Jesus' followers were confused, and many did not believe until they saw Jesus. Mary doesn't recognize Jesus—or can't believe it is him—until he speaks her name. It is not surprising that we too struggle with belief.

The story as it is recorded in all four Gospels is even more difficult to explain as a fictional story. Why would the disciples create a story and have only the women meet the angel at the tomb? Women's status in the first-century world would have made their report unbelievable to anyone apart from Jesus' followers, and even they didn't believe the women at first. The disciples could have strengthened their argument, if it *were* fictional, by having at least two men at the tomb. Why

would the disciples have created a story in which he was seen only by his own followers? Surely the story would be more believable if more people had seen him. But perhaps the absence of solid evidence is precisely the point of the story, especially for us. This story is a story of faith, and it calls us to be a people of faith. On this side of eternity, we will never see any of Jesus' first followers to confirm the authentic character of the elements of the story handed down. Belief in the Resurrection requires faith. This session focuses on this account as a story of faith—the faith of Jesus' first followers and the faith of his present followers.

Seek Understanding



What do these Scriptures mean? Throughout history, God has surprised us. Paul argues that God's ways often appear foolish to those who have no faith. Jesus' death on the cross may have seemed foolish, yet it became a victory revealing to us that absolutely nothing, including death, can separate us from the love of God.

The central element to all four Gospels is the story of the cross. John's account initially focuses on Mary and her faith. In loyalty, Mary goes to the tomb to care for Jesus' body. She alone proclaims the "good news" to the rest of Jesus' followers (20:18).

Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ Resurrection?

Several years ago in Dallas, Texas, Lorene Hawks died 152 times and was resurrected 153 times. Mrs. Hawks suffered a heart attack that created an erratic heartbeat. Her heart would beat properly for about an hour and then the erratic beat would start. Each time, Lorene's doctors would have to give her an electric shock. After the 152nd time, her heart failed to respond to the electric shock and doctors had to open her chest and massage her heart. This time her heart responded and stabilized, and she lived again (*Courier-Journal*, Louisville, KY, 24 March 1966, A-25).

Questions

- Why do you think this article describes Mrs. Hawk's resuscitation as resurrection?
- How does your understanding of Jesus' resurrection differ from the description in this story?

○ The Name of Jesus

During World War II, a young school teacher in Eastern Germany was imprisoned because she was not loyal to Hitler's regime. After months of hard labor, she rebelled against God and decided to hang herself with a rope made from her blankets. As she was fixing the rope, the rays of the early morning sun streamed through her cell window, seeming to rest on the side of her bunk. To her surprise, she saw for the first time two words carved into the wooden bunk: *Jesus Christ*. The name triggered a fresh sense of Jesus' presence in her life. She dropped to her knees, asked God to forgive her for her planned actions, and committed herself anew to God. Shortly, her name and number were called. She was asked to play the organ for a special meeting. The end of the war came, and she

was liberated from prison. She testified, "Jesus lives; I shall live; I shall not fear; I shall not be silent" (*Home Life*, July 1966, 58).

Questions

- When has some small detail changed your whole perspective on a difficult issue?
- Why does the name of Christ inspire such hope?
- How does the experience of Christ's presence in your life affect you?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

Involve learners in discussion by asking some of the following questions.

The recent discussion over the Shroud of Turin has captured international attention. What role do you think the shroud plays in proving the resurrection of Jesus?

When men "see" or "hear" angels, it is rather to be supposed that an intense interior awareness of a divine message leads to the projection of an image which is then experienced as an occasion of something seen and heard (Temple, 380).

Do angels still appear today and, if so, are believers and unbelievers able to see them? What role do the angels play in John's account?

Mary, who had been looking into the burial chamber up to this point, looks around and thus into the open and sees Jesus standing there, whom she does not recognize. This motif—the risen Jesus is unrecognizable (cf. Luke 24:16, John 21:4)—is designed to show that the risen Jesus is not accessible like he once was (Haenchen, II, 209).

How does Jesus appear to believers today? Does Jesus' "appearance" make him more accessible to us or less?

The weakness to which such love as Mary's is liable is that it clings too closely to the physical form, of which the whole purpose is to express and serve the spiritual self. To her therefore this warning is appropriately given, but its meaning is for all. She must learn to love and trust and serve, even though she can no longer caress His feet or hear His voice pronounce her name. Not to the Lord as He tabernacled in the flesh, subject to all limitations of the body, is she to cling; but to the Lord in His perfect union with the Father (Temple, 382).

To what physical objects do people cling today for spiritual strength? Is anything wrong in having some physical object to revere?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus in a new tomb. What was the significance of a new tomb?
- Why do you think Mary was unable to recognize Jesus?
- The women were the first ones to Jesus' tomb. During the Passion week of Christ, where else were the women first to arrive? Why do you think the women were first?

Questions for All Adults

- Jesus had told his disciples of his resurrection. Why do you think they had difficulty believing Jesus had risen?
- How does Jesus' resurrection affect your daily living?
- The stone from Jesus' tomb was moved. What stones would you like to have moved or removed in your life?

Questions for Mature Adults

- How do you understand death, in light of Jesus' resurrection?
- When you bury a loved one or friend, how does knowledge of Jesus' resurrection help you?
- How has Jesus surprised you by appearing when you did not expect him?

Questions for Younger Adults

- How do you explain the Resurrection to someone who has never heard about it? When has someone challenged the believability of the story?
- Is belief in Jesus' resurrection, belief that Jesus rose from the dead, essential to having faith in God? Why or why not?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How do you relate secular concepts such as the Easter Bunny to Jesus' resurrection?
- How do you explain to your children the difference between Jesus' resurrection appearances, the Holy Spirit, and the popular understanding of ghosts?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

Ask a volunteer to read John 20:1-23. Write the words "So What?" on a chalkboard. Give each class member a copy of the Resource Kit page (p. 23) "Important Facts about the Resurrection." Read the first statement from the sheet and point to the "So What?" statement. Ask: What difference does this fact make in your life today? (Some possible answers: The stone had been removed not to let Jesus out but to let his followers in; God had control over the grave; human attempts to seal the stone were useless; God still moves stones in our lives when we think a situation is impossible.) After completing this first statement together, read each of the

other “Important Facts” aloud. Ask class members to write one or two statements about how each of the facts makes a difference in their lives today. After several minutes, ask for volunteers to share their responses with the group.

Important Facts about the Resurrection

(1) The stone used for the door had been thrown out of its groove and was lying on the ground.

(2) Jesus’ body was not in the tomb.

(3) No one knew the location of Jesus’ body.

(4) Mary thought Jesus’ body had been stolen.

(5) The guards were no longer to be found.

(6) The grave clothes were undisturbed.

(7) Some women were the first at the tomb.

(8) Peter and John authenticated Mary’s discovery that Jesus’ body was missing.

(9) Mary saw two angels but was not afraid.

(10) Mary did not recognize Jesus until he called her name.

(11) Jesus told Mary not to hold on to him.

(12) Jesus appeared to the eleven that evening in the upper room.

○ **Relevant or Not?**

Ask half the class (Group 1) to take the position that Jesus’ resurrection is irrelevant to such things as the stock market and the Internet. Ask the other half (Group 2) to take the position that his resurrection is relevant. Allow four to five minutes for study and then call for Group 1 to report, followed by Group 2.

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

Ask the class to form two small groups. Give each group one of the life situations from the Resource Kit Page (p. 24) for this session. Ask members to discuss how our knowledge of Jesus’ resurrection could make a difference in these situations.

○ **Bill and Dorothy**

For years, Bill and Dorothy had felt God calling them to a special missions project. Every time they tried to go, it seemed they met a stone wall. They could not come up with the financing, someone got sick, or a child needed something. They were beginning to think that they had misunderstood God’s call.

○ **Ruth**

After a long illness, Ruth found herself facing seemingly insurmountable problems. She had been let go from her job because of her illness. Without a job, she did not have health insurance. Her former spouse refused to pay child support and had moved out of state. Her preschool son could not return to daycare until she paid the back payments. One day everything came crashing in on her. All she could do was to sit and cry. In the midst of her crying, the phone rang. The voice at the other end of the line said, “Ruth, you don’t know me, but I understand you need a job. I would like to talk to you tomorrow.”

In closing, ask your group members to complete this sentence: *Because of Jesus’ resurrection...*

Pray that others will know the power of the Resurrection.

2

FEAR AND DISBELIEF

Mark 16:1-14

Find Relevance



Why do/should adults care about this session? Most of us express a variety of fears every day. We fear the day ahead, the doctor's report, the test in the next class, ending the relationship, maintaining the relationship, the death of a spouse or parent or child. In a world full of fear, we need the hope that only the love of Jesus offers. Everything else we experience in life is temporal, but the love of God through Jesus is eternal.

Many of us have experienced the care and dedication of a friend or spouse who has stayed with us through our most difficult days. Such a relationship is a tremendous gift and a tremendous loss when it's gone. So imagine the feelings of the disciples who believed, trusted, and depended on Jesus. The One from whom they gained their strength was dead.

But that is not the end of the story. This world belongs to God. Death can bring victory and offer hope in God's world.

Seek Understanding



What do these Scriptures mean? Mark's account of Jesus' resurrection is unique. Our oldest and best manuscripts of Mark's Gospel end the story at verse 8 with the women running from the tomb. The rest of the story was added later, presumably because people began to have access to other Gospels which contained more of the story after Jesus' resurrection.

In Mark's account, the women who run from the tomb initially say nothing to anyone because of their fear. When was the last time you were paralyzed with fear? Imagine their predicament. Their Lord had been crucified. Now his body, their last connection to him, was stolen. Or was it? What happened? Panic sets in. Fear rises. They run.

In the midst of life's crises, we must remember that with God, there is always a "rest of the story." God has already overcome the fears we experience in this world. This victory gives us hope that, no matter how dark the shadows in the valley of death, this world belongs to God and God loves us.

Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ Defeated

On the day that Wellington of England met Napoleon at Waterloo, arrangements were made to relay the news of the outcome of the battle from one ship to another, by semaphore, across the English Channel. A group of men stood anxiously waiting on the shores of England. Suddenly, the ship closest to the shore began to signal the message. Letter by letter, the anxious men on the mainland read the words: "Wellington defeated..." Then a bank of fog cut off all view of the ship. Was that all? If it was, that could mean the end of England. After some moments, moments that seemed like hours to the waiting Englishmen, the fog cleared away and the signaler began his message over again: "Wellington defeated Napoleon!" (Peterson, 133).

Questions

- What clouds our understanding of Jesus' resurrection?
- If a message was sent on Friday, it would have signaled "Jesus is Dead." When have you anticipated the hope of Sunday, even amidst the fog?

○ A Tree Shall Grow

In Twein churchyard, a short distance from King's Cross station, in England, stands a great four-trunked tree growing out of a grave. Apparently, the tree has grown right out of the body in the grave. The grave is that of Lady Anne Grimston. Here is the story that lies behind the strange growth of a tree out of a grave. Lady Anne Grimston did not believe in life after death. When she lay dying in her palatial home she said to a friend, "I shall not live again. It is unlikely that I shall live again as that a tree shall grow from my body." She was buried in a marble tomb. The grave was marked by a large marble slab, and surrounded by an iron railing. Years later the marble slab was found to be moved a little. Then it cracked, and through the crack a small tree grew. The tree continued

to grow, tilting the stone and breaking the marble masonry until today it has surrounded the tomb with its roots, and has torn the railing out of the ground with its massive trunks (Calvary Baptist Church Bulletin, Covington, Kentucky, 4 September 1966, citing Christian Victory).

Question

- How much evidence do we need to believe in the resurrection?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

Use the following readings to promote dialogue among your class members.

Lord, your power is beyond description. You turn the world upside down and stand all our expectancies on their heads. Save me, I pray, from needing special signs of this power to know that you are alive and with me. Give me instead, the gift of quiet reflection, of meditation in your presence, that I may truly see and understand where you are at work in the world where I live. May yours be the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

- Why do we often ask for special signs of Jesus' power to be assured of his presence with us?

Jesus has risen. There is no doubt of that. Like the young man in 14:51-52, he has left the Romans holding only his grave clothes (Killinger, 148).

- How are our attempts to control Jesus different from those of the Jews and Romans who sought to keep Jesus in a stone tomb?

What Jesus wants the women and disciples to do—including Peter, who has been such a failure—is to go back to the scene of his work with the multitudes, where they will see him again. They have learned that his messiahship lies through obedience, suffering, and death. Now they must practice the same manner in their discipleship by returning to Galilee, where

the Kingdom comes through laboring among the people (Killinger, 148-49).

- What must we do to receive Jesus' forgiveness after we have failed him?

It is true that these women should have paid more attention to the Lord's repeated prediction that he would rise the third day. On the other hand, while we may criticize their lack of sufficient faith—a lack which they shared with the male disciples—let us not overlook their exceptional love and loyalty. They were at Calvary when Jesus died, in Joseph's garden when their Master was buried, and now very early in the morning, here they are once more, in order to anoint the body. Meanwhile, where were the eleven? (Hendriksen, 678).

- Why do you think the women discovered Jesus' resurrection first?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- What cultural reasons made it difficult for the disciples to believe the women's story about Jesus' resurrection?
- Why did the disciples have difficulty recognizing Jesus?
- How were the disciples' fears overcome?

Questions for All Adults

- How does the presence of the Holy Spirit help us overcome our fears and disbeliefs?
- What fears or doubts threaten your faith in God?
- What fears or doubts have served to strengthen your faith in God?

Questions for Mature Adults

- Does the presence of fear indicate that we do not have faith in Christ?
- How do you explain the hope of the Resurrection to someone who has never believed?
- The women came to the tomb to honor their friend. How do you honor Jesus?

Questions for Younger Adults

- When have you placed your faith in something or someone and were disappointed?
- Why do adults often doubt miraculous events such as Jesus' resurrection?
- How do we experience the presence of God today?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How do you explain the differences in Jesus' seemingly superhuman qualities with those of popular cartoon characters?
- Many children today are afraid to walk down the hallways of their schools. Can the knowledge of a loving God help them place their fears in perspective?
- How do you encourage a child's seemingly unanswerable questions about faith and belief?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ How Might You Have Felt?

Ask your class to form two smaller groups, one group men and the other women. Ask the women to:

- (1) Read Mark 16:1-14;
- (2) Identify feelings they think the women in these verses might have had;
- (3) Identify feelings about the Resurrection today's women share with first-century women.

Ask the men to:

- (1) Read Mark 16:1-14;
- (2) Identify feelings they think the men in these verses might have had;
- (3) Identify feelings about the Resurrection today's men share with first-century men.

After several minutes, ask each group to share their responses. Then ask the large group to answer the question: How can our fears and disbelief be used positively?

○ Who Are You?

Read the focal passage Mark 16:1-14 aloud. Ask the group to imagine themselves in the story. Say something like, "As you listen to the reading of this passage, with which person do you most closely identify?" Ask group members to list all their reasons for identifying with this person. Then ask volunteers to share their responses.

○ Then and Now

On a chalkboard, write the words "Then" and "Now." Ask members to list the disciples' fears as they tried to follow Jesus. Then ask them to list modern-day fears. Ask: How did Jesus ease the disciples' fears? How does he ease ours?

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

Read or sing the first two stanzas of "God of Grace and God of Glory." After the first stanza, read the following: God of grace! How much we need You and Your power. In our own strength, we are so weak. But in your strength, we find power to spread Your story in the face of hostility and opposition. The powers of darkness are strong. Grant us wisdom and courage that we may not be afraid.

Read or sing the second stanza of the hymn. Then read the following prayer:

God, it is a fearful time in which we live. Our fears and doubts have held us captive too long. As we face seemingly overwhelming odds, work again your miracle and free us from these fears and doubts. Teach us to serve and praise you. It is your courage and wisdom we need, O graceful God. Grant that we may live faithfully all our days. Amen.

3

THE ATTEMPTED
COVER-UP*Matthew 28:11-15**Find Relevance*

Why do/should adults care about this session? Is

there a difference between a “little white lie” and an outright bold-faced lie? Certainly. There are degrees of deceit and deception. Lies are told for a variety of reasons and, at times, some of the reasons are valid. Most of us have told a fib to keep from hurting someone. Most of us have probably slightly distorted facts or concealed details in order to enhance our own image. Though certainly not completely true and accurate, these lies are vastly different from lies directed at hurting another person or at raising our status at the cost of another’s. Or are they?

Seeking Understanding

What do these Scriptures mean?

Immediately after Jesus’ resurrection, the lies began. According to Matthew, the lies originated with the chief priests. By means of their obvious cover-up attempt, they intended to invalidate any story being told by the disciples that Jesus had indeed risen from the grave as he said he would.

The lie offered by the chief priests had its intended effect. Scholars call this story an “etiology,” which is a story that explains the beginning of something. Matthew’s explanation of the chief priests’ lies tells us the beginning of the belief that Jesus’ disciples stole his body and then claimed he had risen again. The story becomes etiological because Matthew tells us, “This story is still told among the Jews today” (Mt 28:15). In other words, Matthew is explaining how this rumor got started.

The chief priests’ fabricated explanation, however, contains a real irony. If the disciples concocted their story of the Resurrection, they certainly made it extremely difficult to believe. As noted in one of the previous sessions, the women were the first to find the empty tomb, see the angel, and encounter Jesus (except for the “lying guards”). Then Jesus appeared only to his followers (in Matthew). In their first-century world, only the testimony of men was considered reliable, and even then at least two male witnesses were required. If Jesus’ followers were trying to make up a story, surely they would have made it more convincing for first-century persons. Yet despite the religious and political power of the chief priests, Christianity lives on through Christ!

Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ How to Live a Life of Truth

“Take up, therefore, your cross, and follow Jesus, and you shall go into life everlasting. He is gone before you carrying His cross, and He died for you upon the cross, that you also may bear your cross, and love to die on the cross. Because if you die with Him, you shall also live with Him; and if you are His companion in suffering, you shall be His companion also in glory” (à Kempis, 68). Why are we so afraid to suffer for Christ, especially since we have been promised companionship with him in glory?

○ Be Sure Your Lies Will Find You Out

One Saturday night as Bill was closing his butcher shop, Mrs. Jones came in and asked for a nice fresh roasting hen. Bill went back into the cooler and came out with his last chicken. He weighed it and said: “It’s 2 pounds, 5 ounces—that will be \$1.35.” “That’s too small,” Mrs. Jones said. “Do you have a larger one?” Bill went back into the cooler and brought out the same chicken. He weighed it and announced: “Just 3 pounds.” That will be \$1.80.” Mrs. Jones thought for a while and then said, “That’s still too small. I’ll just take both of them.”

Questions

- Why do we risk being caught in our lies and cover-ups?
- Why do we sometimes think about getting caught as the only negative aspect of lying?
- When does it seem easier to lie than to tell the truth?
- When do you expect for people to lie?

○ Lies or Death

Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, was arrested in AD 155. He was 86 years old and well respected by everyone. No one wanted to see the venerable old man put to death. All he had to do was to say “Lord Caesar” and he would be set free. “What harm is there in saying ‘Lord Caesar,’ and in offering incense...and thus saving thyself?” He at first made no reply, but since they persisted he said, “I do not intend to do what you advise.” Polycarp was led into the arena where he was asked again to worship Caesar and deny Christ. And Polycarp said, “Eighty and six years have I served him, and he hath done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?” When he persisted in his refusal to worship Caesar, he was burned at the stake (Bettenson, 13-14).

Questions

- When have you had to choose between worshiping Christ and “Caesar”?
- In a situation where you would be forced to choose between Christ and “Caesar,” what might persuade you to choose Caesar?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

Admitting that they had slept on their watch could have proved fatal. But the priests recognize this danger and promise, euphemistically, to persuade Pilate to keep them out of trouble, presumably again with a big enough payoff. Practices that set in motion Jesus' execution—paying Judas with thirty pieces of silver—are simply continuing and escalating (Blomberg, 429).

- What are some ways we use our money to try to control the church and God?

It is exceedingly doubtful that disciples would deliberately steal the body yet later prove prepared to die for the claim that they had seen Jesus alive from the dead! (Keener, 397).

- Are you willing to face public opposition for your faith? Explain why or why not.

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- Compare and contrast the women's and the guards' reports.
- Why was it significant that the guards were Roman soldiers?
- Why is the body snatching theory implausible?

Questions for All Adults

- What situations today might tempt Christians to take a "bribe"?
- After people participate in a cover-up or lie, they sometimes offer the excuse "I was only doing my job." Why is this excuse unacceptable for a follower of Christ?
- Do we have a Christian responsibility to expose the lies of others?

Questions for Mature Adults

- In what situations is it easier to "go along to get along"?
- When you overhear someone lie, but it doesn't concern you, is it your responsibility to confront the falsehood?
- When have you stood for truth and experienced difficult consequences as a result? Would you do anything differently now?

Questions for Younger Adults

- What do you do when you are asked to cover up for a friend?
- When you are confronted with falsehood, do you fight or flee? Confront or ignore? Why?
- Shading the truth is almost expected in the business world. When you carefully examine your business practices, can you uncover shades of the truth?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How do you help children understand that telling the truth doesn't mean they can avoid negative consequences?
- What have you found helpful in teaching your children to tell the truth?
- What do you tell your children about covering up for a friend who has done wrong?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ Case Studies

Ask the class to organize two groups. Give each group one of the following scenarios found in the Resource Kit (p.25).

Group 1

Ross was walking down the hall after play practice. As he walked past the computer lab, he met two students in his computer class running out of the lab. They each had some computer software in their hands. As they passed Ross, one of them hissed: "If you squeal on us, you'll be sorry." Ross...

Ask members to discuss: (1) How should Ross respond in this situation? (2) What action, if any, is safe? (3) How might Ross's parents guide his decision?

Group 2

A person moved into a community that was dominated by a particular religion. She opened a store and all the townspeople began doing business with her. Some ran up large charge accounts. One day, some religious authorities came to talk to her. They asked her to join their church. When the woman explained that she was an active member in her church and did not want to change, she was told that she had two choices: either convert to their religion or face bankruptcy because they would instruct their members who owed her money not to pay their bills. The woman told them... (Taulman, 119).

Ask members to discuss: (1) What are the woman's options? (2) In what situations have class members been tempted to cover up their faith? After two or three minutes, ask them to share their comments with the larger group.

○ How to Deal with Falsehoods

Ask your class to form three small groups. Ask each group to identify an example of falsehood or cover-up. Have them discuss possible outcomes, positive or negative, if the lie goes unchallenged. Then ask them to think of ways that truth telling can be encouraged.

Questions

- Are some lies best left alone?
- Some people want to uncover the truth so that they can use it to hurt people. What's the difference between exposing the truth and meddling?
- Honesty is a virtue. How do you practice truthfulness?

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

Read the following from "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" (Isaac Watts, 1674-1748).

And tho' this world with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph thro' us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly pow'rs
No thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Thro' Him who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

Close in prayer that we have courage to proclaim God's truth in world full of lies.

BEYOND SEEING AND BELIEVING

John 20: 24-31

Find Relevance



Why do/should adults care about this session? Many adults say they believe only what they can see and prove. Yet few of us understand the inner workings of atomic power, computers, and radio. No one fully understands why we fall in love with one person but not another. (Just ask any parent of a teenager who has begun to date!)

There are many things about life that we cannot prove in a laboratory. Because we cannot prove them does not mean they are not true. It means only that our system of measurement has not yet advanced to the level of our belief.

As a people of faith, we believe some things because God, through the Holy Spirit, has revealed them to us. As a later generation of Christ's followers, we do not have the advantages of having seen him on earth or of speaking with those who did. The act of choosing to believe is a statement of faith in and of itself.

Seek Understanding



What do these Scriptures mean? Thomas has long been dubbed "the doubter" because of his need to see for himself. Too many sermons put Thomas in a bad light, as if his need to see was a lack of real faith or that his faith was somehow deficient. Yet it is important to remember that not one of Jesus' followers believed until they too had seen their Lord. Thomas wanted to see Jesus just as the other disciples had.

Jesus uses Thomas' words to teach his disciples about a coming reality, that is, that people will soon rely solely on their testimony and actions. Jesus also speaks to us, we are blessed because we daily take that leap of faith, saying, "I believe even though my eyes have not seen."

Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ Too Good to Be True

Recently, a woman stood on a street corner in a large city. At one time she had lived on the street, but now she had made a little money—not a lot—and she wanted to give something to those who needed it. She had a large board with dollar bills taped to it. She was offering them free to anyone who needed one. Many people stared in disbelief. Surely there was a catch. Some approached her hesitantly, afraid the offer was too good to be true. But it was true. Interviewed by a television reporter, she explained that she only wanted to help.

Questions

- Why are we often suspicious of people who want to do good?
- Why do we assume they have an ulterior motive?

○ A Rabbi's Testimony

An Orthodox Jewish rabbi, Pinchas Lapide, shocked the religious world by saying that he, a rabbi, believed in the literal resurrection of Christ, even though he rejected Christ as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. Among other things, he said, “Without the resurrection of Jesus, after Golgotha, there would not have been any Christianity” (*Broadman Comments*, 254).

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

So doubting Thomas receives the “sign” which was refused to enquiring Pharisees—e.g. St. Mark viii, 11, 12. Why are they differently treated? Of course it is because the Pharisees did not want to believe, and if they had been convinced by a “sign from heaven” they would have been unwilling adherents, not truly disciples at all. To give them the sign would be to yield to the temptation typified by the throwing of Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple. Their demand proceeded from ill-will; it was necessary first to cure that ill-will. Nothing can be more remote from discipleship than a man who should suppose the Gospel to be true while wishing that it were not (Temple, 389-90).

- Do you think it would have been easier to follow Jesus in the first century than today? If you had been present in the room when Jesus appeared, which disciple would you have been?

Thomas is willing to believe...that is, on certain conditions! And he himself will lay down those conditions....Hearing about him, (even from those who have both seen and heard him) is not enough. Thomas has heard too much already. Thomas wants to see. He also wants to feel! (Hendriksen, 464).

- What conditions must be met—a job acquired, a child healed, a marriage saved—before you can believe?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- What is the difference between Thomas’s disbelief and the disbelief of the rest of the disciples?
- Do you think Thomas actually touched Jesus’ hands and side? Why or why not?
- What kind of faith did this experience call forth from Thomas? Does this seem out of character with the Thomas pictured in the rest of the New Testament? Why or why not?

Questions for All Adults

- Why is worshiping a tangible object dangerous?
- Who or what do you worship?
- What kind of faith does Thomas inspire?

Questions for Mature Adults

- Is empirical evidence necessary for you to believe in something you do not understand? Why or why not?
- With what doubts have you been able to come to terms?
- How can you offer support to a younger generation during their struggles with doubts about their faith? How can you point them to God?

Questions for Younger Adults

- Does your faith need physical reinforcement?
- What circumstances have you experienced that helped you realize the value of your faith?
- How can you use your doubts constructively?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How do you help your children form their faith?
- How do you model faith for your child when you have so many doubts yourself?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ **Doubting Thomas's One and All**

Thomas's experience revealed the true nature of his faith in Christ. On a chalkboard, write "Similar" and "Different." Ask: How was Thomas's experience similar to the other disciples and followers of Jesus? How was it different? Write responses on the chalkboard. Ask, How would you compare and contrast your faith to Thomas's in the following areas: (1) believing without seeing, (2) worshipping something that you can see and touch, (3) asking for a fleece so you can be certain of God's will?

○ **Doubt and Confession**

Read the following statements:

"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." (Jn 20:25).

"My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28).

Explain that the same person made both statements a week apart.

Questions

- What made the difference in Thomas's attitude between these two statements?
- When have you been able to identify with the sentiment expressed in the first statement?
- The second? What prompted you to change your

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

Close your group meeting by asking the class to reflect quietly on the things they have doubted about Christ or Christianity and how God led or is leading them to resolve their doubt and to rely fully on God. After a few moments, lead in a prayer that all our doubts will find resolution in God.

CASE STUDIES

Group 1

Ross was walking down the hall after play practice. As he walked past the computer lab, he met two students in his computer class running out of the lab. They each had some computer software in their hands. As they passed Ross, one of them hissed: "If you squeal on us, you'll be sorry." Ross. . .

Ask members to discuss:

- (1) How should Ross respond in this situation?
- (2) What is safe?
- (3) How might Ross' parents guide his decision?

Group 2

A woman moved into a community that was dominated by a particular religion. She opened a store and all of the townspeople began doing business with her. Some ran up large charge accounts. One day some religious authorities came to talk to her. They asked her to join their church. When the woman explained that she already was an active member in her church and did not want to change, she was told that she had two choices: either convert to their religion or face bankruptcy because they would instruct their members who owed her money not to pay their bills. The woman told them. . . (Taulman, 119).

Ask members to discuss:

- (1) What options does the woman have?
- (2) What situations have they encountered when they have been tempted to cover up their faith. After two or three minutes, ask members to share their comments.