

Doubts, Plans, and Pains

Small Group Guide

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part altogether, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. Generally speaking, do you like surprises?
2. What is one of your favorite foods?

Read the following passage: John 20:11-29.

Jesus' post-resurrection appearances had a profound impact on the men and women who experienced them. John describes Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Jesus. We don't know much about Mary's past, but we do know that Mary was familiar with darkness. Luke tells us that Jesus had freed her from seven demons (Luke 8:1-3). When Jesus was crucified, it surely felt like darkness had won again. But, in the middle of Mary's sadness and despair, Jesus was already present. Her story reminds us that God is present with us when we are in our own seasons of sadness or despair.

Thomas didn't believe the others when they told him that they had seen Jesus. This response was not completely rational. At least ten different people, whom Thomas knew well, gave him the same story about an event for which it would be almost impossible for them to be mistaken. Sometimes, like Thomas, our doubts are not really about evidence. Sometimes our doubts are about our pain. Perhaps we struggle to believe because God seemed absent when we were in great need. But Jesus' scars tell a very different story. Jesus' sacrifice is the ultimate demonstration of his love for us.

Peter and James were also profoundly impacted by Jesus' resurrection. Peter learned to accept a future that was very different from the one he envisioned (see John 21:18-22), and James came to an understanding that his own brother was the risen Lord. The resurrection of Jesus can become a profound source of hope and personal transformation for every person who puts their faith in Jesus.

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. How can this passage help us make a historical case for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead?
2. Why is the resurrection of Jesus such a central element of the Christian faith?
3. Can you relate to Mary Magdalene, Thomas, Peter, or James? Explain.
4. What should we do if we find ourselves feeling overwhelmed by darkness, anxiety, or despair?
5. What are some reasons we might wrestle with doubts concerning God's existence, his presence in our lives, the hope of eternal life, or other key spiritual realities?

What should we do to address our doubts?

6. Are there any parts of your life in which you really want things to work out a certain way? Explain. How can we hold on to good desires without being devastated if they go unfulfilled?
7. Are you excited about life after death? Explain.

Pray