



Groups

Thanks for checking out our sermon-based Study Guides!

If you've never used our Study Guides before, you'll find some basic instructions towards the end of the document.

- These study guides will be written by thoughtful and experienced Life Group Leaders.
- Use these guides as a head-start in your own preparation as the needs and culture is different from each group.

NEW THIS YEAR:

As we enter this new season at Grace Chapel in search for the next Senior Pastor, we invite you to consider the significance of this moment and to incorporate a time of prayer for the search.

Outline

- I. Introduction and Main Scripture Readings
- II. Group Discussion Questions
- III. Prayer for Senior Pastor Search
- IV. The Journey Resources
- V. Support for the Leader

How to Use These Study Guides:

1. **Before the meeting:** Consider sending out the Scripture passage to your group members ahead of time.
2. **Check In:** Begin each meeting with a short time checking in with one another.
3. **Read Scripture:** You may want to begin the discussion by reading the Scripture passage together out loud, or by summarizing the passage if everyone has read it ahead of time.
4. **Ask Questions:** Don't feel like you need to discuss every question included in the Study Guide. Pick one or two to start with and see how the conversation flows.
5. **End with Prayer:** Be sure to set aside time for sharing prayer requests and praying together.

If your group meets over Zoom:

- Expect to do more overt facilitating over Zoom than you would in person. Feel free to call on people to invite them to share.
- Be sensitive to attention spans over zoom. Keep meetings shorter than they would be in person.

Group Leader Support:

- Please reach out to your Campus Pastor if you have any questions about leading your group or concerns about your group dynamic.
- If you have questions about or feedback on the Study Guides, please reach out to Pastor [Tim Ghali](#) or [Grace Lee](#) from the Group Life team.

LIFE GROUP STUDY GUIDE

for Sermon given on April 7, 2024

by Pastor Rachel Keeler

STUMBLING BLOCKS – John 20



I. Introduction

All winter we've been reading the gospel of Mark. The first half of the series, *Kingdom Come*, focused on the new thing God was and is doing through Jesus. The second half of the series, *Thy Will Be Done*, has been about surrendering – our certainty and need for control; our future; our power, privileges, and preferences – to a God who loves us and has good plans for us. Then last week, on Easter Sunday, Pastor Bryan's message, *The Best Bad Ending*, we learned that if Christ has conquered sin and evil and death, then any bad ending can be turned to a new beginning.

Today I am going to focus on questions and doubts surrounding the resurrection of Jesus. If we want to step forward in faith, what do we do with questions and doubts? To do that we will leave Mark's gospel and go to the gospel of John.

Questions: How much do we need to know? How much certainty do we need to have before we move forward in faith?

Bottom Line: Our questions and doubts don't have to be stumbling blocks, they can be stepping stones on the way to an encounter with Jesus.

Let's begin in prayer before we begin reading and discussing our text.

Main Scripture Readings:

John 20:

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷ Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Jesus Appears to Thomas

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus^[a]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; *blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*”

The Purpose of John’s Gospel

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe^[b] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

II. Group Discussion Questions:

1. Pastor Rachel started the message by asking us to think about some of the big decisions we've all made in life. Things like what career to pursue, whether to accept a job offer, what city to live in, when to retire, who to spend your life with, whether to have a child.
 - Tell us about one of those decisions
 - How much did you really know? How much information did you have when you made that decision?

2. What if you were one of the disciples in John 20? For each of the following passages.

- What would be your first thought?
- How would you reply?
- What action would you take?

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3. Have you ever been in a situation when you felt like everyone else in the room understood something and you were the only one left in the dark?

- How did you feel?
- What did you do?
- What steps did you take to gain that understanding?

4. Pastor Rachel points out that although Thomas was not the only disciple to doubt Jesus' resurrection, he is the only one who had the courage to express his doubt openly. And for this he was rewarded with a transformational encounter with Jesus that might never have happened otherwise.

No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, whether new seeker or mature believer, faith and doubt coexist. Although this sermon focused on the resurrection of Jesus, perhaps there some other aspect of the Christian faith that you are struggling with. Please discuss with your small group what is it, specifically, that you are getting stuck with.

5. Pastor Rachel points out the parallels between Jesus first and second appearances in the inner room (the second time with Thomas), concluding that Jesus came back

specifically for the purpose of recreating the scene for Thomas. Ask members of your small group about their personal experiences of how they have grown in their faith.

6. Pastor Rachel said that just because you can't fully understand something, doesn't mean that you can't fully believe it. Give some examples of something that you fully believe, but don't completely understand.

Take Home Message:

For many big decisions that we have made in life, there was more that we didn't know than we did know. *We knew just enough to know that we wanted to know more, even understanding that there was risk involved.*

Becoming a believer doesn't mean we have worked out all our doubts. *It means that we believe enough – maybe just enough – to believe that we can someday believe more. It means trusting enough to trust that we can learn to trust more. It means knowing enough to know that we want to know more.*

Let's Pray

Read John 20:29 together:

"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Take a few moments and express your doubts, ask the Lord your questions. As Thomas had openly questioned Jesus' resurrection, so you, in your desire to know more, have created a space for Jesus to meet you exactly where you are.

III. The Journey



We're all on a journey. Where is yours taking you?

The beauty of the way of Jesus is that it's not just good for us, it is good for the world around us. But that kind of beautiful life doesn't come from just hearing the words of Jesus. It comes from putting them into practice.

Three kinds of practice, actually:

- The **with-God life** of our personal habits and routines;
- The **with-others life** of our genuine and life-changing relationships; and
- The **for-the-world life** that makes an impact beyond our immediate homes and families, into our communities and beyond.

Growing as disciples of Jesus will make a Kingdom difference in our world and a transformative difference in our lives as believers and as a group. And these resources are helpful in identifying the next steps for our journeys.

Launching by the end of September: The newly, revised Discipleship Planning Tool

We invite your group to [take the assessment](#) and to spend a session to share about the practice and perspective you chose to focus on for the next three months.

IV. Support for the Leader

These Teaching Points are provided to help the group leader make connections from the message to their group with both insights from the Biblical text and opportunities in the life of our church.

Teaching Points:

- Although Thomas is mentioned in all four gospels, his name is merely listed in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, whereas he plays a prominent role in John's gospel.
- Lessons learned from Thomas:
 1. It's okay to give voice to our questions and doubts, and we're not alone when we have them
 2. With Jesus, there's always a second chance, uniquely tailored to each person's needs. Jesus comes back to meet each of us where we are
 3. Our questions and doubts don't have to be stumbling blocks; they can be stepping stones on our way to an encounter with Jesus, opportunities for us to grow in our faith