

Week One

When you hear the term “resurrection” what comes to mind? The idea of resurrection brings up a variety of different responses in different people. Reactions range from complete skepticism, to thoughts of science fiction, or fables, or hard-to-believe anecdotes from far-off lands; all the way to a firm and certain anticipation borne from confidence in our God and in scripture—and reactions that lie everywhere in between.

But what is resurrection? What does this powerful idea really imply? What gives resurrection its power? In this series we want to explore what this idea of resurrection is all about.

The format for this series will be a bit different from our normal sermon study guides. We really want this to be a devotional experience as we dive into this idea of how our God is a God who brings life from death. So, rather than the normal series of weekly questions, this time we will provide daily devotional questions for you to pray/meditate through as you go throughout your week. Take a few moments each morning to think and pray through the thought for the day. Perhaps use this study guide as a journal and jot down some reflections and pray that God would fill your heart with thoughts of Him each day.

For those who are using this in a small group setting, you can discuss together what God impressed upon your heart from this week’s meditations. We will also provide a couple of additional study questions for your group time as well.

We pray that this will be a time for God to really do some work on our hearts. But for that to happen, we need to be open, willing, and eager for that change. What things might God resurrect in your heart and your life? What will you be praying for God to bring to life?

Day One: Take a minute to read through the crucifixion story (Luke 23:26-47). What thoughts and feelings do you imagine were going through Jesus’ mind? If you were there watching this happen, and you understood why Jesus had to die, what do you think you would have been feeling? What strikes you most when thinking about the pain and suffering Jesus endured on your behalf? Take a few moments to pray about where you would like God to soften your heart regarding what He did for you, as well as what you would like Him to bring to mind daily when confessing your sin.

Day Two: Before you turn to Luke 24:1-8, picture yourself walking to the tomb with the women. What would you have been feeling? You had just watched Jesus die a horrible death just a few days ago. All your hopes and dreams of a Messiah were dashed. You're walking in a cloud of tears wondering what you might find. What did they do to the body of Jesus? What would be left for you to anoint and bury? All the experiences of walking with Jesus down the road, feeding the poor, healing the sick, laughing, crying, hoping, all come to your mind. And above all, what's next? If He is not the Messiah, now what? Now read the passage. What are you feeling? Write down what thoughts you would pray to your Father in this confusing time. How has God met you in a difficult and confusing time?

Day Three: Read John 20:10-18. Mary came to say her goodbyes. What changed for Mary in the space of just a few moments? How did hearing the voice of Jesus change everything? How have you heard the voice of God in a time of grief? How did it affect you? How did your outlook change, understanding that your Heavenly Father was still in control and was working on your behalf? What does it mean to you personally that Jesus rose from the dead?

Day Four: Read 1 Pet 1:3-4. What truths do you see promised here? What is our hope? What enables us to have that hope? What has God reserved in Heaven for us? All of these powerful truths can actually color the way we live our lives. What worries, temptations, and frustrations in our lives might be avoided if we were to focus our hearts on these truths each morning? Pray that God would bring to mind the power of hope in your mind and heart today. Pray that you might have an opportunity today to let the love and peace of God spill over from your heart onto someone else.

Day Five: Because of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ you have all the power you will ever need. How might you pray today for strength to follow His leading? How might you pray that you will have the wisdom to serve Him with all your heart today? How might you pray to allow the power of His resurrection motivate you to pursue Him, pursue holiness, and pursue others today? How will today be different because God brings dead things to life?

Additional Discussion Questions:

1. Read John 14:19; 1 Cor 15:23. Because Christ was risen, our own resurrection is guaranteed. What does it make you feel to realize that the grave could not hold Jesus? And it can no longer hold us! How does this empower and embolden us to live different kinds of lives? How can these truths help us to live in light of eternity, rather than for the here and now?

2. What does it mean to truly no longer fear death? Understanding the power that Jesus holds over death can provide for us an inexplicable peace. Where in your life right now can you use the peace that Jesus brings? What has died that you would like God to bring back to life?

Week Two

So we ask again, what is resurrection? Why is this such an important theme in scripture? And why does it carry so much power in our hearts?

Basically, resurrection is a response. Resurrection is an answer, really the only answer, to the stark and inevitable reality, pain, and dread of death. It is God's answer to the predicament mankind caused in our rebellion against our creator. That predicament is death—which means most simply “separation.” To illustrate this, we know that when mankind sinned we were now separated from God; no longer able to commune with Him. So, too, when our loved ones die, we are temporarily separated from them.

So, if death is separation, what is resurrection? Well, it must be a connection, or rather, re-connection. It is a re-establishing of a relationship we feared was lost. It is an adjoining back together that which was broken, fragmented, and ruined. In a sense, resurrection is the primary tool God uses to make all things right again. He alone possesses life within Himself, and so He alone can create life, re-create life and undo the damage done by death.

Resurrection peeks out from the shadows all throughout scripture. It lurks amidst the writings of the prophets. It comes to full-flower in the gospels. And the best part is, it foils Satan's plans. It appears on the scene when all seems lost. It points our eyes back to God in ways that nothing else really can. There are few ideas in scripture that mean so much, and carry as much weight for God worshippers than the subject of resurrection.

If resurrection is such a potent idea for worshippers of God, it would make sense to explore the idea a bit. What lies beneath and gives power to the idea of resurrection?

Sometimes in theology our task is to look at things from a big-picture perspective—asking the big picture kinds of questions, examining what seems to be going on behind the scenes. What is God up to in this event or that—especially as it relates to the unfolding of His plan? What is the meta-narrative that makes sense of what is happening around us?

Over these 8 weeks we invite you to join us as we take a step back—in fact, let's try to take a few steps back and look at the plan of God in the biggest-picture kind of way—and examine it through this weighty and momentous lens of resurrection.

Day One: As we read the stories of Abraham’s life, it becomes apparent that God reveals more to Abraham, and provides for Abraham in response to Abraham’s faith. Every time Abraham obeys and trusts God, God shows up in a new way. We see this also in the story of the widow that God sent Elijah to minister to in 1 Kings 17. The first thing Elijah asks from this woman is for some water and bread. This may not seem like much for us, but this woman had literally nothing to share. She actually told Elijah she was preparing the last scraps of what she had as her last meal, so she and her son could die. Elijah asked her to give it to him instead. What kind of faith would that have taken to comply with that request? When has God asked something significant of you, for you to trust Him in a major way? How did you respond? What was the result? How did God show up for you? Talk with God about this and praise Him for working in your life—through good times and through challenges. Remember and celebrate what God has done and is doing in your life, and spend a few moments praising Him for it.

Day Two: Read 1 Kings 17:17-18. After the miracle of God providing food for this woman and her family, things must have seemed wonderful. God had provided and they no longer would starve to death. But then tragedy strikes. Why do you think it is so easy for us to blame God when things go wrong? Do you think it’s wrong to get frustrated with God? How have you dealt with this in the past? What did you learn about yourself and about God through these trials? Pray that God would reveal ways you are trusting Him right now, as well ways you still need to learn to trust Him more.

Day Three: On what could this widow in 1 Kings 17 rest her hope? What could she look to as evidence that God would not abandon her? Had God not already worked miraculously in her life? It seems apparent to us that since God was faithful for her already, she should be able to trust Him with her dying son as well. But then again, has God not worked miracle after miracle in your own life? Has God not provided for you time and time again? What events can you look back upon to see God's faithfulness? What can you praise Him for right now? As we remember and rehearse the amazing work of God in our lives, it brings the power of those experiences back into our present awareness. Take some time to praise God for how He has provided; for how He has never abandoned you; for how He has brought dead things to life for you as well.

Day Four: What are all the miracles you see in chapter 17? How are all of these miracles additional examples of God bringing life to dead/dying things? Why do we so easily focus just on the resurrection of the boy? We need to see that God is in the business of bringing dead things to life. What are some dead things in your life that you can turn over to God? How can identifying these things help us grow in our faith?

Day Five: Read Daniel 3:16-18. Does God need to come through with a miracle for us to trust Him? What if He decides not to? What can we learn about God and about our own faith when the miracle does not come? Praise God for His provision, and if you can, praise Him right now for when the answer to prayer did not come in the way you had hoped.

Additional Discussion Questions:

1. Read Rom 8:11. What is the connection between Christ's resurrection and our own? What is the power of death in our lives? How did that change with the resurrection of Christ? How can that one truth change literally everything in our lives (our fears, our perspective, our priorities, our pursuits)? Finish this statement: "Because Jesus rose from the dead..." How many different ways can you answer this?

2. Read through Psalm 72. Describe how hope pervades every verse. How can this inform how we pray?

Week Three

As we explore the import of and meaning behind the concept of resurrection, the big-picture question I would like to probe is—what is the central force driving forward the story of redemption in the Bible? What is the through-line that connects God’s entire redemptive narrative together? Is it love? Many would say so. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...” (John 3:16). “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). “...faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love...” (1 Cor 13:13). There seems to be scriptural and theological support for this. Love is definitely the central theme in the Bible and one which seems to have inspired the divine rescue plan that God put into place all the way back in the garden. Love may rightly be seen as the theme, the over-arching banner under which salvation history rests.

But what I want to ask is; what is the **engine** that drives the story of redemption forward? What is it that keeps us going when everything around us is screaming for us to stop, to quit? What is the one force in the universe that God has designed into life and into our psyches that enables us to persevere, to persist, to endure, to take that next step when there seems to be no reasonable evidence that we should? I would argue that it is hope. Hope is what keeps us looking to the future. Hope is what we cling to when everything else has fallen by the wayside. Hope is literally the engine, the motivator that drives mankind forward amidst oftentimes horrific injustices and suffering that can make it seem impossible to take that next breath—to take that next step—and wait expectantly, and sometimes desperately, for good to come. I would argue that hope is the most basic instinct of the human heart without which we would not nor could not exist or press on.

I would like to propose that what gives resurrection its power is hope.

Day One: Read 2 Kings 4:8-17. This beginning of the story sets the scene for us. A few thoughts to consider. What did this woman do for Elisha? What did she ask in return? Why do you think God bestowed this blessing on her? And the key question, why do you think she responded the way she did (v. 16)? What does this response have to do with hope? When you receive good news, how does it affect you? What are you hoping for right now? How is God working on your heart regarding this hope? Pray that God will reveal the lessons He has for you through this hope.

Day Two: Read 2 Kings 4:18-23. Not from what you imagine, but from what you read in the passage, what was this woman’s reaction to the tragedy that befell her? What kind of faith does this reaction reveal? How have you dealt with tragedy in your life? What did you learn about yourself and your faith? What did you learn about God? And here’s the difficult one—read James 1:2-3. How is it possible to actually consider it joy when we encounter various trials? Sit with this for a few minutes and wrestle through this with God. What is the lesson for you today in this James passage?

Day Three: Read 2 Kings 4:24-28. In this next section of the story, we see a little different side to this woman and her struggle. What are the different reactions she has in v.26, then v.27, and in v.28? What do each of these reactions say about her faith? What does v.28 say about the role and purpose of hope? When have you experienced a hope that was disappointed? How did it affect your faith? What did you learn about God through this experience?

Day Four: Read 2 Kings 4:29-37. Why do you think the woman responded in the way she did in v. 30 (read also 2 Kings 2:2-4)? What does this say about her faith? What role does diligence and vigilance have when it comes to entreating the Lord for a heartfelt, passionate request? How do our motivations influence both our prayers and the vigilance we have in prayer? Spend some time praying that God might teach you how to approach Him empty-handed, with no other motivations than to be changed.

Day Five: Read Luke 18:1-8. What is the point of the parable (v.1)? What do long-unanswered prayers accomplish in our hearts? Why is this an important element of growing our faith (in other words, how could our faith grow if we always received immediate answers to prayer)? What role does longing play in our hearts? What does the idea of longing (itself) reveal? What are you longing for? Spend some time with the Lord and ask Him what He would like you to long for.

Additional Discussion Questions:

1. When we rely on ourselves, rather than God, it neuters our prayer life. An acknowledgement of our dependence is the core of prayer. Helplessness and dependence is such a hard place for most of us to dwell in. Why do you think this is so? How does God use this reality to grow our faith? Why is this an essential element of a life that is characterized by prayer?

2. When we don't pray, what are we, in essence, saying to God? What does this say about our own self-sufficiency? Pray that God would help nudge you into a pattern of life that enables you to regularly connect with Him.

Week Four

So what is it about hope that carries so much weight; so much power; so much force?

Hope gives meaning to seemingly meaningless events. Hope enables us to look beyond our present circumstances to a brighter future that God promises. Without hope all that's left is despair. If we think about it, we must recognize that hope is the energizing principle that allows us to get out of bed every morning; hope that we will get that raise at work...hope that we have not screwed up our kids too badly... hope that things will get better in our marriages...hope against hope that the cancer will go into remission.

Hope is the promise that God is working; the promise that God has a plan and will one day bring an end to sorrow; the promise that all things will be made right. It is our hope in God; the confidence that is inspired by a God who is sovereign that is the content of this promise. Since God is in control, we can have hope.

In fact, you can define a Christian as “one who hopes”—one who is dissatisfied with the state of the world and who works to make things better. A Christian is one who has wagered his/her eternity on the hope, the confidence, the assurance that God is...and that God is working...and that God is wise and loving and purposeful in how history is unfolding. A Christian is one who has seen the hand of God working in their own lives and throughout history and throughout the Bible and trusts, (and this really is the essence of hope)—trusts that God is unfolding and revealing to us throughout this history how things will be ultimately made right. History itself causes us to hope.

Faith and hope work hand in hand. Hope is a forward gaze, anticipating something coming that is better. And faith is the rested assurance that God is willing and able to make it so.

Day One: In one of the resurrection stories par excellence in scripture, we see the story of Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha, fall sick and eventually die. We have to ponder why this happened to one of Jesus' closest friends. What message does this communicate that even those closest to Jesus are not immune from the evils of this world? Read John 11:1-16. What did Jesus mean that this sickness was not unto death (v. 4)? What do you think His disciples thought? What do you think the disciples were thinking when they heard what Jesus said in v.15? The disciples are clearly confused by much of what Jesus did, both here and in other stories. When we watch God weave His story into the patterns of our life, we can also often be left confused. "What is God doing?" "Why is He doing it this way?" "Wouldn't it make so much more sense if He did it this way?" When something puzzling, challenging, or painful happens to us, rather than letting worry, anxiety, or stress overwhelm our thoughts, what reaction might we have instead? What reaction do you think God is trying to teach us to have? How can we begin to reorient our thinking along these lines? Pray that God would open your eyes to what truly trusting Him might look like in your everyday life.

Day Two: Read John 11:17-29. When things don't go the way we think they ought to go, what is typically our first reaction? What was Martha's first reaction? Carefully read through the earth-shattering statements in vv.25-27. What all is Jesus saying in these verses and what are the implications? What powerful truth is Martha proclaiming? How would those listening react to such statements (v.19)? What do these truths mean in your life and in your heart? This is nothing less than the core, foundational, bedrock truth that our hope lies upon. Is this truth something you have wagered your eternity on being true? How ought this confession guide how we live each day, moment by moment?

Day Three: Read through John 11:30-37. Compare the immediate reaction of Mary (v.32) with Martha's (v.21), and the reaction of the Jews (v.37). How would this compare with our own typical reactions to trials we face? What does this reaction mean or imply? What are we saying about our own judgment of the situation—as opposed to God's judgment? Pray about how God might soften and even humble your heart when it comes to trusting His sovereignty and timing in events in your own life. Ask God to reveal blind spots you might have with regard to trusting Him.

Day Four: Read John 11:38-44. Sometimes when we re-read familiar passages we can miss the impact of such powerful stories. Try, if you can, to read the ending of this story with fresh eyes. Try to imagine the reaction of the crowd, of Mary and Martha, and what your reaction might have been if you witnessed this. To where does Jesus direct our attention and focus in vv.41-42? What is the purpose of Jesus performing this miracle (end of v.42)? As you think about these things, meditate for a few minutes on the heart of Jesus as this all happened to Him. What do we see of Jesus' heart in this story? Do you think He was weeping for more than just the physical loss of His friend? What do you think Jesus longs to happen in your heart?

Day Five: Read through the passage that follows this amazing miracle. What is the reaction of some of the witnesses (v. 45)? What is the reaction of others (v.53)? Why do you think there is such a significant difference in how people react when confronted with miraculous power? Why do you think we ourselves react so differently from one time to the next when we are confronted with our own sinfulness? Sometimes we repent in sackcloth and ashes, and other times we rebel and dive even deeper into our sin. What does this say about our own hearts? Jot down some thoughts and pray about how God might be working in your own heart when it comes to how you respond to conviction in your heart. What is God speaking to you?

Additional Discussion Questions:

1. When we read the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, many of us think of the powerful testimony this has to be to a watching world. How much more credible can it get than someone rising from the dead? What more evidence can there be than someone who has the power of life and death? But then read Luke 16:19-31. Many of your Bibles label this section “Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.” But parables do not typically have the persons named. Why do you think this story names its subjects? Look carefully at what Jesus says in v.30-31. What does this imply about the cause of repentance? Do you think it’s a coincidence that the subject in this story is also named Lazarus? Not that this was the same Lazarus, but it certainly grabs our attention. Someone named Lazarus did actually come back from the dead, and did they believe? What all can we learn from this story?

2. Let's pause on one of the thoughts in this week's notes. "Since God is in control, we can have hope." Where have you seen this at work in your own life? When do you really believe this is true? When do you (by your actions) reveal that you might not fully or consistently believe it?

Week Five

In the beginning the world was perfect and mankind was in perfect union with God (Genesis 1—2). In the end, the world will again be free from the ravages of sin and the influence of evil (Revelation 21—22). The journey between these two points is God’s Grand Redemptive Narrative—which centers upon the hope that God will fulfill His promise to send the world a savior. It is literally and specifically *hope* that pervades the story of the Old Testament as God’s people wait for the Messiah to come. Without that hope, none of the suffering they endured would make sense.

Then after centuries and centuries of hope, in a climax of anticipation and overwhelming joy the Messiah does finally come—and that all-consuming hope is actually fulfilled. Then, in one of the most brilliant, most awe-inspiring, epic plot twists ever imagined, after hope is fully, powerfully, and finally consummated in the coming of Messiah, God’s Grand Redemptive Narrative, and really, all of human life, somehow then continues to center upon hope—hope that Jesus will return to make all things right. Somehow, miraculously, even though the hope of mankind was fulfilled in the coming of the promised savior, God designed a way to continue to utilize this most basic drive within us, by orchestrating the unfolding of His plan to require a second coming of Messiah.

So, we continue to hope! We continue to trust that God will provide. We continue to hope that He will return and establish that kingdom He has so wonderfully described in His Word. Hope continues to be the currency of the soul. God had to do it this way—because a life without hope is no life at all.

Day One: Read Luke 8:41-49. What stands out to you about this story so far? What is the difference between this Jewish synagogue official and the Gentile centurion in Luke 7:1 (and Matt 8:5-13)? What do you think Jairus was feeling after v.49—when Jesus had tarried before coming to see his daughter? When has God not answered your prayers—according to your timetable? What was your initial reaction when this happened? Looking back, do you see it differently now? What is the benefit for us in God allowing us to wait to see Him work? Take some time to pray about how God is faithful; how waiting on God works faith in your heart; and what lessons God might have for you today.

Day Two: Read Luke 8:49-50. What does Jesus say is the opposite of fear? Think about a time in your life when you feared something. What would have been the antidote to that fear? How does faith combat fear? In a few words, why do you think faith works, or is effective? Read Phil 4:6-7. What is the result of our truly trusting God? Where in your life does God want you to lay down a fear at His feet right now?

Day Three: Read Luke 8:51-53. Take a look at this scenario from our perspective, looking back, knowing who it was they were laughing at. How absurd is this scene? This passage gives us a perfect vantage point to view the difference between a temporal perspective and an eternal perspective. What was happening from a temporal perspective? Describe what the feelings might have been of those experiencing this pain of death, who did not truly understand what was going on. Now describe what was actually going on, from an eternal perspective. How often might we find ourselves in the same situation—fretting and worrying and stressing over situations that, if we were simply able to look at from a different vantage point, would make perfect sense? Where is God working in your heart to trust that He is God; that He is in control; and that from an eternal perspective, it all makes sense?

Day Four: A few questions to think about as you read Luke 8:49-56. How did hope sustain these parents when all seemed lost? How does hope actually work? In other words, in whom, or in what do we hope? How is this the key that unlocks the secret to hope? Hope is only as good as the object in which it is placed. Think about the things you are hoping for. Are these things temporal? Are they eternal? In whom is your hope invested? How much does submission to and dependence upon God factor into that hope? God does not want to be number one on a list of 10. He wants to be number one on a list of one. Pray that God would focus your eyes and your desires upon Him above everything else.

Day Five: What common themes or ideas have you seen in all the stories of resurrection we have explored? What do you see as the connection between hope and resurrection? Focusing on resurrection can help shift our perspective off the normal set of priorities we live our lives with—and begin to see what is really important. If you made a list of the 10 things you desire most right now, what would be at the top of the list? Is that item at the top something eternal or something temporal? How might we begin to shift our focus from the temporal to the eternal? Pray that God would prompt you and remind you of this on a daily basis. What do you think the benefits of this will be?

Additional Discussion Questions:

1. Sometimes we can lose hope when we focus on the wind and waves rather than on the face of Jesus. Sometimes we can lose our way when we focus on ourselves and our own inadequacies rather than on what we have been given in Christ. Read Eph 3:14-21. From where do we get the strength and the power and the comprehension of the love of Christ (vv.16-19)? What is God able to do in and through us (v.20)? How can this understanding fuel our hope? When you lose hope, how often is it connected to having your eyes on the wind and waves? What can you do to change where you are focused? Pray that God would reveal to you a next step for refocusing your heart.

2. Read 1 Peter 1:3. What does it mean to have a “living hope?” And how is this connected to the resurrection of Jesus? As long as we have breath, there is hope. Our failures are not final. Did God simply accept the failures of Israel? Did Jesus simply accept the failure of Peter? Does God simply accept our own failures? Or, does He use them to strengthen, embolden, and refine us? How has God used your failings to grow you in His image?

Week Six

Hope truly is that through-line that connects all of history together. It is the driving force in the heart of mankind which keeps us moving forward. Without hope, we become despondent; in essence, not really living any longer. With hope, we press on with optimism and even joy. Hope is the energizing principle which gives us life. Knowing that this is the way the heart of man operates (in fact, designing us in this way), God placed at the climax of history the fulfillment of that great initial hope. So what was that initial hope?

The first promise God made to his creation was that He would send a redeemer, a savior (Gen 3:15). This promise was the foundation of the hope that drove mankind to live, love, work, serve, and persevere through a thorn-filled life. Creation was broken because of sin, and the hope God gave mankind was that He had a solution. So, we pressed on.

Hope is what drove Adam and Eve to persevere, even after the Fall and after their family was destroyed by murder. It was the promise of the seed of the woman that gave them hope. Then all throughout subsequent history God continually reaffirmed that initial promise.

God chose Abraham to be the fountainhead of a people through whom the Messiah would come. It was hope and trust that God is one who keeps His promises and could raise the dead (Heb. 11:19) that enabled Abraham to offer up his only son. It was hope that Israel clung to through 400 years of slavery; that God would indeed send a deliverer. It was hope that sustained the Israelites in the desert for 40 years, when the promises of God seemed to be in question. It was hope that God would send a righteous king that heartened generation after generation in Israel who watched godless kings lead them into idolatry. It was hope that inspired God's people to trust for 70 years in Babylon, after the most disheartening events in their nation's history. The temple and city were destroyed and their God had ostensibly been defeated by the gods of Nebuchadnezzar. The encouragement of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the godly witness of Daniel drove them on to hope. Hope in the promise of the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15); in the ultimate Passover lamb (Ex 12:2-13); in the prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15); in the child of the virgin who would be called Immanuel (Is 7:14); and the righteous branch in Jeremiah (Jeremiah 23)—all of these reminders from God fueled this hope.

And then it happened. The Messiah finally came. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to offer us life by dying on the cross for our sins. Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise. He is the promised savior. He is the fulfillment of all the hopes and dreams that carried God's people on through the worst of times. This is the heart of the meaning of Advent. This is the heart of hope itself. This is the coming of Messiah—the fulfillment of the hope that fueled and sustained and buoyed and encouraged and emboldened and inspired weary hearts ever since Adam's Fall.

Day One: Read Acts 9:32-35. Sometimes when reading Scripture, we don't necessarily see how one story lays the foundation for the next. This small mention in this passage of Peter healing Aeneas in Lydda sets the stage for, and really enables a great movement of the Gospel to the Gentiles over the next few chapters in Acts. In Acts 10 we begin a section of early church history where the gospel goes out to the Gentiles in a new and powerful way (which lays the foundation for your salvation and mine). In Acts 10 Peter is called to Cornelius in Caesarea, because he "happened" to be nearby in Joppa (Acts 10:5-8). Why was he in Joppa? Because (in the previous chapter) he was called there to minister to Tabitha, because he "happened" to be nearby in Lydda (Acts 9:38). So, in a sense, God changes the entire trajectory of the early church through the fact that Peter made a stop in Lydda to heal a man. What seemingly insignificant events in your life has God used to make significant changes to your path and your trajectory? How have you seen God sovereignly direct your path and draw you closer to Him?

Day Two: Read Acts 9:36. The second half of this verse gives a summary of the life of this woman Tabitha. What was her life characterized by? What was she known for (see also v.39)? Take a few minutes to think through these questions: If there was one line of text that summarized your life, what would it say? What would you like it to say? Is it too late to change what it would say? What is one step you can take today to move toward changing the narrative in that summary of your life?

Day Three: Read Acts 9:36-39. One of the thorniest questions Christians face in the world today is known as “the problem of evil.” If God is good, and is all-powerful, then why does He allow evil things to happen? Could He not just overrule wickedness and injustice and let goodness reign? This is a question that believers need to think through and be prepared with a reasoned answer for—because the question will eventually come. One version of this question is, “why do bad things happen to good people.” This is a question that arises from the story of the death of Tabitha. If she was so amazing in serving and helping others, then why would God allow her to die? In reading through this story how would you answer this question? How also do you reconcile all the challenges and trials you have faced in your own life? What role have these trials played in your spiritual growth? And how have you seen God more clearly because of them?

Day Four: What was the result of the healing of Aeneas (9:35)? What was the result of the raising of Tabitha from the dead (9:42)? We have already seen how this trip to Lydda and Joppa set the scene for God working through Peter at Caesarea in the next chapter. But what specifically does Peter do while in Caesarea—he preaches a message to the Gentiles (10:27-44). Although so much attention is given to the miraculous works of God, God very specifically uses the spectacular and the miraculous in scripture to grab people’s attention, so that His word can be spread. What is the result of the message of Peter in Acts 10 (vv.44-48)? How often do we seek out the experience itself rather than the One who gives the experience? How often do we seek after the healing rather than the Healer? Take a few minutes to listen to and read the lyrics of the Natalie Grant song, “More Than Anything” (you can find it on YouTube). How is God speaking to your heart today about your pursuit of Him?

Day Five: Read Acts 9:32-43. How is this resurrection story like the others we have seen? How is it different? After looking at several examples of resurrection in Scripture, we can easily fall into the danger of allowing this kind of event to seem commonplace. But take a moment to try to grasp how monumental this was. Someone is being raised from the dead! Death is the one inescapable reality we all face in this life. Peter and Paul and the prophets, and Jesus are being used by God to demonstrate that this unassailable reality of death, this immovable rock, is not beyond the power and control of God. This beautiful facet of who God is, that He is a life-giver, helps us experience and marvel and wonder at the majesty and glory of God all the more. What is it about God the life-giver that strikes you the most? Take some time to just worship God for who He is.

Additional Discussion Questions:

1. The resurrection carries with it so many ramifications. One which is seen in Romans 8:33-34. What benefit accrues to us believers as seen in these verses? What confidence should this give us? Read through the entire section (8:31-39) for a more elaborate description of this beautiful truth. Meditate on the beauty of God's forgiveness and the security we have being in His grasp.

2. Another ramification is seen in the vindication of Christ as the perfect sin sacrifice. The payment for sin was made and the resurrection is proof that it was acceptable. Christ experienced the ultimate amount of suffering so that God could forgive us. What does that then mean for us as we follow His example in forgiving others? Think of your friends, your spouse, your boss, your neighbor, and perhaps even your enemies. How does the resurrection compel us to forgive as we have been forgiven? When have you had a difficult time forgiving someone else? How did you work through it? Have you worked through it? What is God calling you to do in the realm of forgiveness today?

Week Seven

So now that Christ has come—now that Advent is fulfilled, in what specifically do we hope? We have already mentioned the return of Christ as the pinnacle of our hope. But just to complete the picture a bit...

We live precisely in the hope of the resurrection of the dead. That this life ends in death is the dread of all mankind. But resurrection hope cancels out this dread. We looked earlier at Abraham's confidence in God's power over death. Joseph, Moses and David all held to a resurrection hope (Hebrews 11, 2 Sam 12). Job articulates this hope most eloquently:

And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh, I shall see God (Job 19:25-26).

Ezekiel and Daniel are rich with resurrection pictures. Needless to say, this is one of the most prevalent themes throughout scripture. The New Testament is brimming to the full with such resurrection hope references.

But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you (Romans 8:11).

If we possess the Spirit then just as surely as Christ was raised incorruptible, so we will be also. We need not fear death. Is that not the essence of hope? Is that not the power of resurrection truth? That we no longer need to fear the great unknown: "the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns," as Shakespeare put it. The confidence that death is actually a promotion, a gateway that finally brings us home—this is the connection between hope and resurrection.

Day One: Paul is at the tail-end of his last missionary journey. He is on his way back to Jerusalem and eventually on to Rome to face charges that would be levelled against him. He certainly would have fond memories of Troas. In his second journey, it was here he had a vision of a man from Macedonia calling them into Europe for the first time. On this return journey Paul planned on spending a week in Troas before continuing on. On the last night of his visit, in what must have been an emotional farewell message, Paul speaks well into the night. Here is where we pick up the story. Read Acts 20:6-12. What stands out about this resurrection account? What details do you notice? Among other things, it seems to be a very normal situation in life. The local church gathers together on the first day of the week to break bread together and hear God’s word. And a young man falls asleep in church. Sounds familiar. Where do you experience God meeting you in the everyday, in the familiar, in the un-extraordinary? Do you typically look for God meeting you there? Pray that God will open your eyes and call attention to the countless ways He is there every moment of every day. Pray that you can begin to look for His hand in not only the big things, in the momentous occasions, but in the tiny things; in taking your next breath, in the falling of a leaf, in a cloudless sky, in the cooing of a dove. Where can you see God today?

Day Two: Read Acts 20:7. What does this say about the people in Troas that they are willing to listen to God’s word being proclaimed well into the night? And actually, what happened after Paul raised Eutychus from the dead (v.11)? How long did Paul actually preach? What is your appetite for God’s word? From where do you get fed? From Bible studies, from church services, from radio or podcasts, from personal Bible study? Are you satisfied with the amount of hunger you currently have? Read 1 Pet. 2:2. What does “longing for the word” look like? How can you stoke those fires of desire for God and His word? Pray that God would create in you a greater desire for the things of Him, and for learning and growing in Him.

Day Three: Amazingly, the name Eutychus means “fortunate.” Whether that was ironic in the fact of his fall, or valid in the miracle that followed, Eutychus is memorialized in scripture as being a part of one of the great miracles demonstrating the power of God, and validating the apostolic authority of the apostle Paul. All joking aside about how long preachers preach, what effect do you think this miracle has on Eutychus, his family, and his community? What effect do you think this had on the heart of the apostle Paul—as he was nearing the end of his ministry; as the weariness of life might be setting in; as the attacks from without became stronger and stronger? How have you seen God work in unmistakable ways in your life? What effect did it have on your faith? What effect did it have on those around you?

Day Four: The Spirit of God is called a “life-giving Spirit” but what does that mean? Re-read Rom 8:11. What are the implications of this passage? What does the indwelling Spirit guarantee us? Whose bodies are raised (in other words, are we given a new and different body, or are our current bodies transformed into eternal bodies)? Why is this important? Continue reading the rest of this section (Rom 8:12-17). Spend some time praising God for giving you the gift of His Spirit to dwell within you. Focus in on 8:16 and praise God that we are actually His children.

Day Five: What do you think about the way this event is described in scripture? It almost seems like it is mentioned in passing. Like, “oh, by the way, God used Paul to raise someone from the dead, who fell out of a window.” No big fanfare is described. No lengthy treatment is given to the details. What we are left with from this approach is that, by now in the story of scripture, we understand that God is a God who heals. He gives life and He restores. That is who He is. So when this kind of thing happens, we should not be surprised. It is what God does. What kinds of things do we take for granted about God? Where has God brought healing to your life? Where do you need God’s healing hand right now? Spend some time praying that not only will God heal you, but that even if that healing does not come when we might like, that we would grow to trust Him more because of it.

Additional Discussion Questions:

1. Read Eph 1:13-14. What truths grab you from this passage? What does it mean that we are sealed with a guarantee, a down-payment? What is our inheritance? What does it mean that we are God’s own possession? Pray that God would open your eyes to understand more fully what we are promised and the glories that await us in the resurrection.

2. Read Phil 3:10-16. List out some of the powerful truths you see mentioned here. What does it mean to share in the fellowship of His sufferings? What is the connection between suffering and glory? Why are the two so connected? And how does the promise of resurrection sustain us through those trials?

Week Eight

As we have seen, the power of resurrection is, in its most basic essence, hope. Another verse that illustrates this:

I want to know Christ--yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead (Phil 3:10-11).

This verse ties our resurrection to Christ's; but with an added dimension. Just as Christ suffered, so shall we. It is part of the package. Hope in our coming resurrection is a foundation of our faith but is inseparably tied to suffering. But, again, what is it that sustains us through suffering and trials? It is hope. One last verse:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5).

In addition to the hope of resurrection we live in the hope of Heaven. Our reward, our inheritance, our dwelling with God is all wrapped up in the single word, Heaven. We live with an expectancy of receiving what He has promised us in glory.

So, why do we hope? Because things are not as they should be. We hope because we suffer. In fact, hope is inextricably tied to suffering. Sharing in Christ's suffering is the guarantee of sharing in His glory.

From where does hope come? According to Rom 5:3-5, hope comes in an unbreakable chain; through character and perseverance, as brought on by tribulation. It is through the enduring of tribulation that the seeds are planted from which hope eventually grows. Without death we would not appreciate life. Without suffering we could not understand glory. Without the trials of this life, we would not truly understand Heaven. And hope is what carries us through it all.

Hope is not just a vague "wishing for" or desiring of something better. In other words, hope is hope in *something*. It is a belief, a trust, a confidence in the promise-keeping nature of God. This hope; that links the 'sharing in suffering' with the 'sharing in glory,' is the hope that God will do what He has promised. He will make all wrongs right. He will raise up those who have been down-trodden for His name's sake. He will bring to glory those who have shared in the sufferings of His Son. And He will turn death into life.

As we have seen, even post-Advent, hope is what drives us on still throughout this pain-filled life. It is the hope, really the confidence, that death, in the end, has no power and is not actually the end. It is the hope that God will again keep His promises and Jesus will return to dwell with us forever—when hope will be no more. In a sense, if you think about it, Heaven will be the absence

of hope—not in the sense of hopelessness, but in the sense of completion and fulfillment. There will no longer be a need for hope. Hope is what drives us to look to heaven as our actual home. When we arrive home, we will be complete. We will have peace. We will be with God—which is the ache of every human heart. But until then God has given us this incredible gift called hope.

Day One: In the three short weeks that Paul was with the church in Thessalonica, he thought it was important to describe for them the details of the end times and the Day of the Lord. In the intervening time since he had been there, some of their people had died, and they were fearful that these folks would miss out on the blessings of the return of Christ. So Paul writes this letter to help assuage some of that confusion. He explains that death is not a barrier or an obstacle for us anymore. Read 1 Thess 4:13-14. Why do you think Paul describes those who have died, as “asleep?” How does this emphasize the temporary and harmless nature of this condition? Do we grieve when someone is asleep? What does Paul say about hope, both in v.13 and v.14? How does this hope make you feel?

Day Two: Read I Thess 4:15. Do you get the sense that Paul thought the return of the Lord was imminent (could happen at any time)? Why is the imminent return of Christ an important doctrine in scripture? What motivation does it give us in how we live our lives and set our priorities? How does this idea inform how you yourself live your life? Is this something you think about? How might this nudge us to change our thinking on radically living for Him, and how passionate we are in sharing our faith?

Day Three: Read 1 Thess 4:15-17. This is the fullest description we have in scripture of what is known as “the rapture.” “Rapturo” in Latin is the translation of the Greek “harpazo”—which is found in this passage, translated into English as “caught up.” What do we learn about the return of Christ from this passage? Who are the dead in Christ? What happens to them on “the way up”? What happens to those of us who are alive on the way up? What do you think it will be like to have immortal, eternal bodies? Why is this passage a source of such great comfort?

Day Four: Read 1 Thess 4:18. What is the purpose of the study of the end times? Why was comfort such a powerful need for Paul’s audience? Why is it such a strong need today? How is the study of the end times a source of comfort? And how is this related to our question of hope—and its relation to the phenomenon of resurrection?

Day Five: In summary, what exactly is hope? How is it tied to the resurrection? What do you see the role of hope playing in the life of the believer? How has hope worked in your life? Spend some time thinking about the gift of hope and what it says about God. Pray that God would use this study and this idea of hope and resurrection to spur in you a passion for His kingdom and His glory, and a passion for sharing His love with others.

Additional Discussion Questions:

1. Read 1 Thess 5:2, 4, 9. What is Paul saying to his readers? Why will the day of the Lord not be a surprise to us? Why is v.9 such an encouragement? How again is this idea of hope intertwined with this discussion of the end times? Why does death no longer carry any fear for us?

2. What is the inheritance 1 Peter 1:3-5 talks about? What does it include in eternity? What does it include in the here and now? How does this reward motivate you? How should it motivate us?
