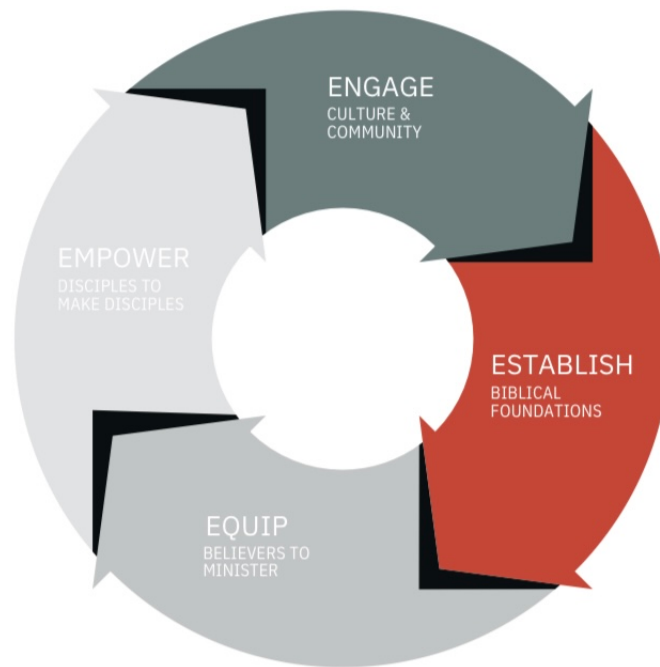


The mission of Rise Up Church is to raise disciples, empower families, and revitalize neighborhoods by the transformational power of the gospel. At Rise Up Church, our discipleship rhythm shapes how we live and expressed in four key movements that we call the 4E's. It is all about following Jesus and helping others do the same.



The purpose of our Koinonia Gatherings is to establish people in biblical foundations by building Christ-centered connections. We believe the Scriptures teaches that life change happens best in community, as we grow together in God's Word and are led by the Holy Spirit.

Below, you'll find a sermon-based guide from the most recent sermon to help lead a Rise Up Church Koinonia Gathering, along with a five day devotional designed to help you apply the sermon throughout the week.

Small Group Guide: Jesus Enters Our Suffering

Based on John 11:28-37

Overview

In this passage, Mary runs to Jesus in her grief over the death of her brother Lazarus. Through her encounter with Jesus, we see that he is not a distant savior who only wants to fix our problems. He is a compassionate savior who enters into our pain with us. This guide will help your group explore what it looks like to run to the feet of Jesus, trust his love, and believe that his love is trustworthy even when life is hard.

Key Takeaways

- We can always run to the feet of Jesus no matter our circumstances, whether we are at our highest or our lowest.
- Jesus does not just want to solve our suffering. He wants to enter into it with us.
- We do not serve a God who is distant or without feeling. We serve a God who fully understands and empathizes with our pain.
- Because Jesus loves us unconditionally, we can trust his love even when we do not understand his ways.
- The proof of God's love is not found in our circumstances. It is found at the cross.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Begin with this question to help the group ease into conversation before diving deeper.

1. Think about a time when someone simply showed up and sat with you in a hard moment without trying to fix anything. What did that mean to you?

Observation Questions

These questions help the group look closely at what the text actually says.

2. Both Mary and Martha said the exact same words to Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Why do you think they both said

the same thing? What does that tell us about what they had been carrying in the days since Lazarus died?

3. Every time Mary appears in Scripture, she is at the feet of Jesus. What do you think that posture represents? What does it say about her relationship with him?
4. The people standing around Jesus all witnessed the same moment, yet they walked away with two very different conclusions. Some said, "See how he loved him," while others questioned why Jesus had not prevented the death. What do you think made the difference in how they interpreted what they saw?

Interpretation Questions

These questions help the group think more deeply about the meaning of the passage.

5. The sermon pointed out that Jesus wept even though he already knew he was going to raise Lazarus. What does it tell us about Jesus that he entered into grief with Mary and Martha rather than simply reassuring them that everything would be fine?
6. The sermon described three moments in Scripture where Jesus weeps or sheds tears. Each one is connected to his love for people and the pain caused by sin. What does this pattern reveal about the heart of God toward humanity?
7. The sermon said, "Scripture never tells us to look at our circumstances to know that Jesus loves us." Instead, it points us to the cross. Why is it dangerous to measure God's love by whether life is going the way we want it to?

Application Questions

These questions help the group move from understanding to action.

8. The sermon asked: Where do you run when life gets hard? Do you run to distractions, to people, to substances, to self-reliance? Be honest with yourself and, if you are comfortable, with the group. What tends to be your first instinct?
9. Is there a situation in your life right now where you have been saying, "Lord, if only you had been here"? What would it look like to bring that specific pain to the feet of Jesus this week?

10. The final question the sermon raised was: Will you trust Jesus' love even when you do not understand his ways? What makes that trust difficult for you personally? What helps you hold onto it?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to practice individually or as a group before your next meeting.

Identify your default. This week, pay attention to where you instinctively run when stress or difficulty arises. Write it down without judgment. Then ask God to help you redirect that impulse toward him.

Bring your "if only" to Jesus. Take time in prayer this week to name the specific thing you have been grieving or questioning. Speak it honestly to God the way Mary did, without filtering it. Practice the posture of coming to his feet.

Sit with someone in their pain. Think of someone in your life who is going through a hard season. Rather than offering advice or trying to fix their situation, reach out simply to be present. A phone call, a visit, or even a text that says "I am with you" can reflect the way Jesus entered into Mary's grief.

Anchor yourself to the cross. When doubt about God's love creeps in this week, redirect your focus from your circumstances to the cross. Meditate on the truth found in Romans 8 that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

Closing Prayer Prompts

Close your time together in prayer. Consider praying through one or more of the following:

- Thank God that he is not a distant savior but one who enters into our suffering with us.
- Ask God to help each person in the group identify where they have been running instead of running to him.
- Pray for anyone in the group who is currently in a season of grief, confusion, or unanswered prayer.
- Ask for the faith to trust God's love even in the moments that do not make sense.

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Running to the Feet of Jesus: Faith, Suffering, and the Love That Never Fails

Day 1: When We Cry Out "If Only"

Reading: John 11:28-32

Devotional: Mary and Martha both uttered the same words to Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." These words were not born in a moment of impulse. They had been rehearsed in the silence of grief, repeated through four days of waiting, confusion, and loss. Perhaps you have your own "if only" words stored up. If only he had healed her. If only the door had opened. If only things had gone differently. Bring those words to Jesus. He is not offended by your honest grief. He welcomes it. The first step toward healing is simply showing up at his feet.

Day 2: Always at His Feet

Reading: Luke 10:38-42

Devotional: Every time Mary appears in the Gospels, she is at the feet of Jesus. In learning, in grief, in gratitude, her posture never changes. This is not coincidence. It is a spiritual discipline forged through relationship. Where do you run when life becomes unbearable? Many things offer the appearance of comfort: distraction, numbing, self-reliance, other people. But none of them carry the weight of what you are bringing. Mary shows us that the feet of Jesus are not reserved for our best moments. They are the place for every moment. Make the feet of Jesus your first destination, not your last resort.

Day 3: Jesus Wept

Reading: John 11:33-36; Hebrews 4:14-16

Devotional: Two words in John 11:35 carry the full weight of God's compassion: Jesus wept. He did not arrive at the tomb with detached authority. He entered the grief of those he loved. Hebrews reminds us that we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tested and tried in every way. Jesus is not a distant God managing your suffering from afar. He is a present Savior

who weeps with you in it. Your pain does not make him uncomfortable. It moves him. You are not alone in what you are carrying today.

Day 4: Two Crowds, One Moment

Reading: John 11:36-37; Romans 8:35-39

Devotional: Everyone at the tomb saw the same tears fall from Jesus' eyes. Yet they arrived at two completely different conclusions. Some said, "See how he loved him." Others said, "Could he not have prevented this?" The difference was not in what Jesus did. The difference was in how each person chose to interpret it. Romans 8 declares that nothing, not trouble, not calamity, not death itself, can separate us from the love of God revealed in Christ. When suffering clouds your vision, do not look to your circumstances to measure his love. Look to the cross. That is the clearest picture of how much he loves you.

Day 5: Trusting a Love You Cannot Always Explain

Reading: Romans 5:8; John 11:40; Lamentations 3:22-23

Devotional: Trusting God's love does not mean understanding every decision he makes. It means anchoring your confidence in what he has already proven. Romans 5:8 tells us that God demonstrated his love for us while we were still sinners, through the death of his Son. That love was not earned and it cannot be lost. Lamentations reminds us that his mercies are new every morning, even in the middle of devastation. Like Mary, you may not understand why things unfolded the way they did. But you can still fall at his feet. You can still trust that his love is unconditional, everlasting, and working even in what you cannot yet see.