

Leader's Guide

Jesus & Lazarus: Not What We Expected

John 11:17-37

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What do you do when God doesn't show up the way you expected? In this powerful look at John 11:17-37, we step into the raw emotion of loss, the tension of waiting, and the surprising response of Jesus, who doesn't just fix the situation but enters into the pain. As Martha wrestles with belief, Mary grieves openly, and Jesus weeps, we're confronted with a question that cuts deeper than surface-level faith: *Do you really believe?* Not just in theory, but in a way that shapes how you trust, live, and respond when life feels uncertain.

Opening

Icebreaker Option:

When you hear the word "*belief*," what comes to mind—confidence, doubt, hope, struggle?

Discussion Questions

1. Observing the Story

In John 11, we see both deep faith and deep grief. What stands out to you most about how Martha, Mary, and Jesus each respond to Lazarus' death?

Follow-Up Prompts:

- Who do you relate to most: Martha, Mary, or someone else in the story?
- What do their responses teach us about how we can approach Jesus?

Supporting Scripture:

- Psalm 34:18 – "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted..."
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2. Understanding Jesus

The shortest verse in the Bible says, “Jesus wept.” What does this reveal about the heart of Jesus, and how does it shape the way you view Him in your own pain or struggles?

Leader Notes:

- Jesus is fully divine AND fully human
- He knew the outcome, yet still grieved
- He enters into our pain, not just fixes it

Follow-Up Prompts:

- Why is it important that Jesus doesn't stay distant from our pain?
- How does this change how you approach Him when you're struggling?

Supporting Scripture:

- Hebrews 4:15 – Jesus sympathizes with our weakness
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3. Wrestling with Belief

Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life... Do you believe this?” Where do you relate most right now: confident belief like Martha, or lingering doubt like the crowd? Why?

Follow-Up Prompts:

- What tends to cause your “belief meter” to drop?
- When has your faith felt strongest?

Supporting Scripture:

- Mark 9:24 – “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”
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4: Personalizing the Tension

The sermon described belief as more than mental agreement. It's embracing and trusting Jesus. What is one area of your life where it's hard for you to fully trust Jesus right now (waiting, grief, uncertainty, etc.)?

Leader Notes:

- This is where the conversation may deepen emotionally
- Be ready to affirm, not fix

- Avoid rushing past this moment

Follow-Up Prompts:

- What makes that situation difficult to trust God with?
- What would it look like to invite Jesus into that space?

Supporting Scripture:

- Proverbs 3:5-6 – Trust in the Lord with all your heart
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5. Living It Out

If you truly lived this week believing that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, how would it change your actions, attitudes, or decisions?

Follow-Up Prompts:

- What is one step of faith you can take this week?
- Who can help keep you accountable?

Supporting Scripture:

- James 1:22 – Be doers of the word, not hearers only
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Closing Challenge

Encourage the group with this summary:

“Belief isn’t just something we say, it’s something we live. Jesus isn’t just asking if we understand who He is. He’s asking if we will trust Him with our lives.”
