



Anchored in God's Word

BY STACI GEIGER

I remember diagnosis day vividly.

In my nightmares, it is a place of gothic horror — eerie, narrow hallways leading to an ominous waiting room, at the end of which is a doorway leading to darkness. In reality, however, it was a nondescript hospital waiting room with two excited parents, eager to confirm the gender of our surprise baby. Good Friday, March 30, 2018.

After an hour of agonizing silence, the doctor finally came in the room to confirm what we had suspected only moments before — our unborn baby had a severe congenital heart defect. He would be born with half a heart, and he might not live.

For months, I was devastated, angry, and scared — all at the same time. When we take all our fears and doubts to God in prayer and Bible study, the Holy Spirit gives us the incredible *peace of God, which surpasses all understanding* (Philippians 4:7). As we get to know God through His Word, we begin to understand He is in control and that everything happens according to His good purpose. We see a God Who cares deeply for us and feels our pain.

As our God assures us of His plans and comforts us in our distress, we encounter, first-hand, the radical and transformational power of the Gospel.

Opening: Pray together **Psalm 23**, adding “Amen.”

When receiving difficult news, often we pray that God will completely heal us, our loved ones, and our friends. We pray God will take away bad news and replace it with a miracle. Asking for those things is wonderful, and we know that God wants us to take everything to Him in prayer (Philippians 4:6). However, sometimes God doesn't answer the way we want.

Two sisters who knew this first-hand were Mary and Martha, Jesus' close friends and the sisters of Lazarus. Read **Luke 10:38-42** and **John 11:1-3**. How did Jesus know Mary and Martha? _____

These two ladies loved Jesus and trusted Him. When their brother Lazarus became ill, what did they do first? _____

Read **John 11:4-6**. Mary and Martha had entertained Jesus in their home and had sat at His feet, listening to His words. By this time in His ministry, Jesus had already healed many people and performed many miracles. Instead of coming immediately and healing their brother, as they perhaps expected, what does Jesus do? _____

Notice in verse 4, Jesus explains to His disciples His plan for Lazarus, but Mary and Martha aren't there to hear. Instead of their close friend and Messiah rushing to their brother's rescue, the sisters are left waiting with no explanation.

In the previous chapter of John, Jesus had just told the Jews in the Temple what it means to be one of His sheep. Read **John 10:27-30**. How do Jesus' words here help us understand His words in **John 11:4**? _____

Jesus hadn't forgotten Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. His plan for Lazarus was greater than Mary and Martha's hope for their brother. Not only would Jesus bring healing to Lazarus, but His identity as the Messiah would be proclaimed to countless others at the perfect time.

Read **John 11:7-16**. Why are the disciples surprised that Jesus plans to go back to Judea? _____

Despite the danger of returning to Judea, Jesus explains that His purposes are worth it. Why does Jesus say it is important to go back (**John 11:4, 14-15**)? _____

Even though Jesus' return to Judea meant danger, His disciples returned with Him. What do you think Thomas meant in verse 16?

Faith Talk: Most of us think of "Doubting" Thomas because of his refusal to believe Jesus had risen from the dead until he saw the resurrected Christ for himself. Yet, in this moment, Thomas was willing to follow Jesus anywhere, even unto death. The disciples didn't really understand what Jesus meant or planned, but they still trusted Him. When have you felt scared to follow where Jesus leads? Have you ever felt you didn't understand God's plans or His purposes, but chose to trust Him anyway? Discuss with the group.

Read **John 11:17-37**. When Martha sees Jesus coming, finally, she rushes to meet Him. She doesn't pretend to be happy her brother passed away, and she doesn't disguise her pain. How does Martha express both her frustration and her faith to Jesus? _____

What does Jesus promise Martha? _____

How does Jesus react when he sees Mary's weeping? _____

Sometimes we might feel like God doesn't care about our human troubles, yet in verses 33-35, we see Jesus express clear emotion. Jesus knew He would raise Lazarus from the dead, but He was still "deeply moved" and "greatly troubled" when He saw Mary's weeping, as well as the weeping of others around her. Jesus even wept with them in their grief. Jesus was literally with them, both physically and emotionally.

Read **John 11:38-44**. Just moments before this, Martha had confessed that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of God" (verse 27). How do Martha's words in verse 39 reveal she still didn't understand Jesus' intentions? _____

Martha believed Jesus was the Christ, but still didn't realize He planned to literally resurrect her brother. Her trust in Jesus went so far that she believed His purposes to be good and true, even if it meant the death of her brother.

Reread **John 11:41-43**. Why did Jesus voice His prayer aloud? _____

Why did He allow Lazarus to die? _____

Resurrecting Lazarus not only provided hope to Mary and Martha, but also to dozens of witnesses to the miracle. The very next chapter describes how Mary anointed Jesus at Bethany, followed by Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem a few days before His death on the cross. Raising Lazarus was planned at the perfect time to clearly illustrate His victory over death and His identity as the Son of God. How amazing that Jesus raised Lazarus just days before He Himself rose from the dead!

Even though we don't physically see Jesus the way Mary and Martha spoke with and saw Him, we can still feel Him with us, read His Word, and speak to Him in prayer. Read **John 14:26-28**. What help does Jesus promise His disciples? _____

Read **2 Timothy 3:16-17** and **1 John 5:14-15**. What incredible gifts has God given us? _____

We know *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever* (Hebrews 13:8). The same Jesus Who was a friend to Mary and Martha, wept for His friend, and raised Lazarus from the dead, is the same Jesus Who loves us, saves us, gives us His Word, and hears our prayers.

Though I prayed daily for God to heal my unborn baby, my son Daniel was born with Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome. My baby was born six weeks early at 34 week's gestation, weighing just 5 pounds 2 ounces.

I spent weeks praying through the Psalms, pouring my heart out to God, and asking Him, "How can this be good, Lord?" I began reading the Gospels through my chronological Bible, reading familiar liturgy that I knew by heart, and listening to Christian music constantly. As the Spirit inspired me to find answers through God's Words rather than my own fears, something incredible happened. The moment they wheeled my six-day-old infant to the operating room for his first open heart surgery, a profound peace came over me. In that moment I knew — *I don't know how it can be good, but if it is Your will, it must be.*

God is faithful, and He is always with us. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30, *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* How incredible it is: God has given us His own Words that guide us, instruct us, inspire us with faith, and help us in our weaknesses!

Closing Prayer (read aloud together from Psalm 119:10-13, 34-38, 89-90): *With my whole heart I seek you. Let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Your faithfulness endures to all generations. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Read more about Staci Geiger and her story on pages 4-8 of this issue of *LWQ*.