



Anchored in God's Word — Leader's Guide

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 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.”

Note to Leader: This chapter can be read from more than one translation at the same time if there is a momentary pause at the end of each verse.

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord Forever. Amen.

When receiving difficult news, often we pray that God will completely heal us, our loved ones, 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 firsthand 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? ___

Luke 10 ³⁸Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

John 11 ¹Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

The sisters and Lazarus loved Jesus and were His close friends, and Jesus felt the same

way about them. Before He healed their brother, He taught at their house. Later, Mary would anoint Jesus with oil and wiped His feet with her hair.

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

They immediately sent word to Jesus trusting His ability to heal their brother.

Read **John 11:4-6**. Mary and Martha entertained Jesus in their home and 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? _____

⁴But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Jesus waits two days longer before coming to them.

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 to understand His words in John 11:4? _____

²⁷My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one."

Jesus' "sheep" follow Him; they will never perish or be left in need.

Nothing, not even death, can separate the "sheep" from the love of God. When Jesus says, "this illness does not lead to death," Jesus is referring to both Lazarus' faith that assures him eternal life, and Jesus' own literal ability to raise Lazarus from the dead.

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? _____

⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." ¹²The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." ¹³Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, ¹⁵and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

The disciples are surprised because Jesus had just escaped Jerusalem, just 2 miles from Bethany. At the Temple, Jesus had proclaimed clearly that "I and the Father are one." In

response, the Jews “picked up stones...to stone him” (John 10:31) and “sought again to arrest him” (John 10:39). The disciples think returning to the area is a death sentence after such a violent incident just days before.

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)? _____

Jesus said Lazarus’ death is “for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (John 11:4). He also says they must return because Lazarus has died. He refers to the miracle He is about to perform, and explains the miracle will be another opportunity for the disciples to see the truth of who He is, so that they will believe He is the Son of God.

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

When Thomas says, “Let us also go, that we may die with him,” he is expressing that he is prepared to follow Jesus anywhere, even if it means his own death.

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 chosen 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? _____

¹⁷Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” ²³Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” ²⁵Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.” ²⁸When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come into the village but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵Jesus wept. ³⁶So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”

She expresses her frustration when she says, “Lord if you had been here, my brother

would not have died.” She wholeheartedly believed Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and she had personally witnessed Him healing many others. She didn’t understand why her brother had to die. However, she expresses her faith by immediately saying, “even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” She doesn’t let her lack of understanding diminish her trust in Him.

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

Jesus is “deeply moved in spirit and greatly troubled.” Then “Jesus wept.” Perhaps He was greatly troubled because He knew the doubting thoughts of the people around him (expressed in verse 37). Maybe He felt moved because Mary, like His disciples, still didn’t understand. Jesus probably wept because He felt Mary’s heartbreak and He felt overcome with emotion when He saw Lazarus dead in the tomb. He was mourning His friend but also mourning the sinful condition of man.

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, and 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?

³⁸Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” ⁴⁴The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Jesus had just told Martha “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” Martha had expressed her firm belief that He was the Christ, the Son of God. Yet she is confused when he says to roll away the stone. She still can’t fathom His intentions and His power.

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? _____

⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”

Jesus prays aloud to emphasize to those around Him that the Father sent Him. He is

connecting His miracle and the power He just displayed with His statement in the Temple that “I and the Father are one.” He is demonstrating the truth to everyone around Him so that they will believe His promises.

Resurrecting Lazarus not only provided hope to Mary and Martha, but also 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(omit) by faith know He is with us**, Him with us, read His Word, and speak to Him in prayer. Read

John 14:26-28. What help does Jesus promise His disciples? _____

²⁶But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

Jesus promises them the Holy Spirit who will teach them and help them remember. He promises them peace. The disciples who couldn’t grasp Jesus’ power are the same disciples who were transformed into titans of faith overnight by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

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

2 Timothy ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

1 John 5 ¹⁴And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

Because of Jesus’ resurrection, God has given us the privilege of coming directly to Him in prayer. He answers us through His Word. He promises salvation in Baptism and forgiveness in the Lord’s Supper.

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, hears 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, sang through familiar liturgy that I knew by heart, and listened to Christian music constantly. As the

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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.