



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Midweek Experience Curriculum

Witnesses to the Risen Christ | Thomas the disciple
The disciples on the road to Emmaus | Peter by the sea

2015

April

2015 April

FACILITATOR GUIDE

Session 1: Witnesses to the Risen Christ

Additional Content

Timeline of Events

(according to the Thomas Nelson
Chronological Study Bible NKJV)

Sunday: Morning at the Tomb

- Matthew 28:1-8
- Mark 16: 1-8
- Luke 24: 1-12
- John 20: 1-13

Early resurrection appearances

- Matthew 28: 9-15
- Mark 16: 9-11
- John 20: 14-18

Appearances in Judea:

Emmaus and Jerusalem

- Mark 16: 12-13
- Luke 24: 13-49
- John 20: 19-31

Later appearances in Galilee

- Matthew 28: 16-20
- Mark 16: 14-18
- John 21: 1-25

This month we're going to look at Jesus' resurrection through the eyes of the people who saw and experienced it. In Session 1 we'll explore some characteristics of the Risen Christ and what He brought to those whom He appeared to in those few days.

First of all, the Risen Christ brought restoration. In the time after Christ's death, we read about many broken people; people who had denied Him, fled from Him, betrayed Him, grieved over Him, and forgot His words. The Risen Christ restored these relationships and reconciled His closest followers to Himself. Their past failures were forgiven and forgotten.

Some examples are:

- Mary Magdalene - Jesus calls her by name and she responds, as she always had with "*Rabboni!*" meaning "my dear Teacher" (John 20:11-16);
- His disciples - Christ refers to them as His "brethren" for the first time, and appears to them multiple times (John 20:17); and
- Peter, whom Jesus reconciles to Himself (John 21: 15-19).

Additionally, Christ not only restored, but **He brought joy and belief.** In every record of the resurrection the witnesses are either told, "*Do not be afraid!*" or "*Peace be with you.*" The angels at the grave told the women, "*Come, see...*", meaning: Come, see what God has done and how He has made a beginning out

Going Deeper

It is not about us...

Many people gather in our churches under the misapprehension that church is mostly about them. Church is where I come to get pumped up to do my bit to fix the world, to be given strength for my daily living, to see where I have taken the wrong path and how I can get on the right path, to discover what I'm searching for.

The story before us is not about us. It is a narrative of a God who is not simply love, but love for us, love in action, taking on our battles with sin and death, doing for us that which we could not do for ourselves. Petty, humanistic moralizing in daily life wilts in the face of eternal death. (Romans 6:23) There is a force loose in the world stronger than death, more powerful than Caesar's legions or our betrayal and infidelity. Here is a story that defies our tendency to reduce preaching either to pastoral care, as if our greatest need were for comfort and pacification, or to ethics, as if charitable human action could change the world. This story rises above, "What am I to do?" and pushes us to think about, "What is God doing?"

No exclusively human help is sufficient for us and our deepest need. Therefore the most interesting character in this drama is not us, or even the women who bravely testify. The most interesting is a God who raises the dead and makes a way when we thought there was no way. This is the new "normal." Dare we come to church in the darkness of the unknown and peer with the women into so great and inexplicable a wonder? The women leave the tomb with "fear and great joy" (v.8) Any Sunday we contend with this story we leave church with a mix of emotion: joy at God's great victory through Jesus Christ and fear at the earthshaking implications of God's great disruptive shaking of the world by resurrection.

With excerpts from William H. Willimon
Feasting on the Gospels

Who is our focus on when we walk into church? When was the last time you left church with "fear and great joy"? What caused these feelings?

6. What do you think caused those who experienced the risen Christ to change so dramatically? The following was stated in the video, *Following the Risen Lord means living differently than the way we did before He changed us*. What does "living differently" mean to you?

7. Think of a time when you have been refocused by the Gospel. Share it with the group.

8. In what ways do you feel called? How does Christ equip you for that purpose?

9. What would've happened if the disciples went on living like they had before Christ's resurrection? What does this mean for us?

10. "To work. To risk. To challenge. To take up the cross..." What do these words mean to you?

Going Deeper

Thomas & Habakkuk

We can compare Thomas's encouragement to our Chief Apostle's year beginning word from Habakkuk 3:18. Let's look briefly at the verse previous:

VERSE 17

Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—

We can see from verse 17 that everything was going wrong. Similarly, there were a whole list of reasons for Jesus not to go to Judea: Lazarus was dead, the people wanted to stone Jesus and the disciples. But then comes verse 18:

Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Joy and belief in God overcame the circumstances of verse 17. So too, Thomas says to the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him," encouraging the disciples along. He believed in the leadership of Jesus and was prepared to face any challenges that came with following Him.

How have you made the leap from the realities in your life to the strength that comes from the knowledge that The Lord is your greatest joy, and in trouble the God who will deliver you?

How have you been encouraged by the examples of others who follow in the steps of Jesus no matter the challenges in their life?

Where can we find the strength to encourage ourselves and others in difficult times?

Discussion Questions:

1. Read John 20:24-29. What themes or key points do you see in this story of Thomas' encounter with Jesus?

2. Discuss the ways in which you personally identify or relate to Thomas' behavior.

3. Share the characteristics of a deep and healthy personal relationship. How might you develop those same characteristics in your relationship with Jesus?

4. Discuss the ways that you approach God.

5. How will you assess yourself to answer the question, "am I really attached to Christ?"

3. What are some ways to overcome disappointments and feelings of hopelessness?

4. Describe a time when you failed to recognize the Lord walking with you but recognized it later.

5. Between today and a year ago, how has Jesus changed your life?

6. "How foolish you are..." Jesus' words sound harsh, but where in this passage do you find words of restoration, trust, and patience?

7. Share ways that you can relate to the disciples traveling to Emmaus.

8. Discuss what you imagine Christ was thinking when He first joined the men travelling to Emmaus and heard their disappointment.

9. How do you suspect Jesus feels when He “travels” with you in your life and hears your complaints and disappointments?

10. How do disappointments, uncertainty and frustration cloud your ability to see Jesus?

11. How do you experience Jesus walking with you in daily life?

Session 4: Peter by the sea

Bible References

John 21: 1-19

Hello and welcome back. We’re going to conclude this month’s series on the Risen Christ by discussing the appearance of Christ to His disciples by the sea of Tiberius. I mentioned in session one that restoration was a characteristic of the Risen Christ. In this encounter, Jesus reaches very directly to Peter and restores their relationship that was damaged during the fearful moments of Jesus’ arrest, suffering and crucifixion. He publically expresses His trust in Peter within the circle of disciples by placing the care of His church into his hands.

To see the full picture, we must remember the conversation between Jesus and Peter at the Last Supper when Peter declares his desire to go wherever the Lord goes; even to die with Him. Jesus contradicts Peter openly, and publicly describes Peter’s denial and abandonment of Him in the next hours.

Let’s read the actual Bible verses so we can get a better sense of how shocking Jesus’ reply must have been to Peter.

In John 13 we can read the following: *“Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow*

Me afterward.” Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.” Jesus answered him, “Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times”.

In all four Gospels, Peter’s subsequent denial of Christ is reported. In the Synoptic Gospels, namely Matthew, Mark and Luke, Peter is described as having wept bitterly in personal disappointment over his actions.

In the 21st chapter of John we find his testimony of a unique encounter and conversation between Jesus and Peter at the seaside after Jesus’ resurrection. Specifically, Peter and six of the disciples have returned to their fishing boats. Is this in itself significant? Have they returned to their old life? Jesus appears to them in the morning after they have fished all night without success and tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. They all seem to know that this is the Lord but nobody wants to acknowledge it openly.

Miraculously, the disciples catch 153 fish but their nets don’t break. Then John says, *“It is the Lord”*. Peter plunges into the sea to meet Him and the remaining disciples take the boat. It’s fairly evident at that point that Peter is eager to be with the Lord again. The Lord speaks directly and publicly to Peter with the disciples as witnesses. It is interesting to note that Christ does not remind Peter of his moments of weakness nor does He demand an accounting. He doesn’t say “I told you so!” Rather, He asks him three times *“Do you love me?”* Peter had denied him three times, and now the Lord requires Peter to affirm his love for Christ three times.

Each time that Peter says *“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you,”* Jesus responds with a different command:

- *Feed my lambs.*
- *Tend my sheep.*
- *Feed my sheep.*

These are all “pastoral” references, meant to give Peter a sense of his future ministry. The Lord intentionally reaches out to Peter and restores his place in the group of disciples. Most importantly, he reestablishes His trust in Peter’s leadership. I hope Peter’s experience can give you a similar hope and eagerness to reach out to the Lord. Even when you’ve sinned and denied the Lord, He makes it known to you and to others that there’s still a hope and a future for you.

By looking at the different witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection in this past month, the same themes make themselves evident. Jesus forgave past transgressions and restored an active, living hope in people. This hope turned peoples’ perspectives

around about his departure from the earth. They understood the reason why Jesus had to suffer and die the way He did. For many, the realization came because of a personal encounter with Christ, and in this personal encounter, they were given instructions to take action and continue the work that Christ began on earth.

Take the opportunity now to think about what this means for you. Now that Christ is risen, what does He expect of you? Everyone has been given a unique task. Now let us understand our task and fulfill our calling.

Discussion Questions:

Read John 21:1-17.

1. Put yourself in Peter's shoes. How do you think he was feeling when he saw Jesus again at the Sea of Tiberias after denying him a few days earlier?

2. Why do you think that Jesus chose to have this conversation with Peter after His Resurrection?

3. Why is the testimony of John regarding this conversation important to our understanding of Peter's role within the church of Christ? What evidence do you have of this from the Biblical description in John 21?

4. What effect do you think this interaction between Jesus and Peter had on Peter's life as a disciple at that moment? In the future as an apostle of Christ?

5. Assuming you have disappointed someone important to you at some point in your life, what does a restoral of their trust and confidence feel like to you?

Additional Content

**Excerpt from Chief Apostle
Schneider's service in
Stadtgarten, Germany
December 7, 2014**

"Peter, do you love Me?" If the Lord had asked Peter this question before His death and resurrection, He would most likely have said, "Yes! Of course I love You!" After all, he also told the Lord that he would gladly die for Him and that he did not want to be parted from Him. In the meantime, however, he had made the experience that—under the pressure, and in fear for his own life—he actually denied the Lord.

Now, after the Lord had resurrected, He came back to Peter and never even mentioned this denial. Peter had thus discovered how much greater the Lord Jesus was now, this Lord Jesus who had given His life, who had forgiven His own, who had gained the victory over hell and death, and who now stood before Him without wasting a single word on Peter's denial. Jesus, who now appeared so great in his eyes, was now asking him the question, "Do you love Me?"

And when the Lord posed this question the third time, we read that "Peter was grieved" (John 21: 17). Why did he become so sad? It was because He had now understood just who was asking this question. He had now become aware of exactly who it was that was standing in front of him! This was no longer merely his good friend, not just the man who had performed all those miracles, not merely the preacher whom he had followed all this time, but the God of love, the God of grace, the God of mercy, the Perfect One, the Victor! Now he was finally aware of the fact that he would never be able to love Him adequately in return! That was the reason for his sadness! He was no longer concerned about saying, "But I have proven to You that I love You!" He simply said, "Lord, You know that I love You! Even though I denied You, just look at my heart!"

In John 21:16 we read: *So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"*

6. What is Jesus referring to when He says "more than these"? What/who are "these"?

Do you love me more than you love being a fisherman?

Do you love me more than you love your friends?

7. What "message" is Christ communicating to His church through His choice of questions to Peter?

8. What relevance does this encounter have to you within your life of service to Christ and your sense of calling to serve others?

9. Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Why do you think He asked him three times? How does Jesus ask you, "Do you love me?"

10. Share what it means to you to know that there is always hope, forgiveness and restoration when you sin and disappoint God.
