

NEW HOPE MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

“SURPRISED BY HOPE, LIVING THE RESURRECTION”

BIBLE STUDY SERIES



(Participants Guide)

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Getting the Most Out of *Living The Resurrection*

We've seen tragedies in our world with such atrocities as World Wars 1 & 2, The Vietnam war, The Korean War, Russia invading Afghanistan, the middle Eastern Conflict and now Russia invading the Ukraine. Not only war, but we have seen horrors of terrorism in the attacks of 1995 of the Murrah Federal Building and the 9/11 attacks on the world trade center where thousands lost their lives. Over these last two years we have seen what appears to be some very unprecedented times. As we are seemingly coming through a worldwide pandemic where the death toll is reported to be over 6,149,408 people worldwide and 900,000 of those deaths are reported here in the US. For many believers and non-believers there are many questions that linger regarding the times in which we live, the frailty and brevity of life, salvation, end times, and the resurrection. Listen and you hear many opinions some even mixed with scriptural backing but what is the biblical truth about life beyond this life?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. When dawn broke on that first Easter morning, the sun rose on an entirely new world. The very fabric of creation had been transformed. The direction of history had been altered. The power of death had been broken. Life of every believer in Christ was made victorious through Him (Christ).

How are we to live in the light of that glorious day? How does Christ's great victory play out in our everyday lives? As people of the risen Lord, our identity and calling are rooted in the resurrection. We are the people of God's new creation living in the midst of a world still reeling from the longstanding effects of sin and death. As we receive healing and experience our own transformation in Christ, we show forth his risen life to others. Our renewed lives proclaim his resurrection, and those around us are drawn to the ever living source of that warmth and light.

Our next series of studies will explore the significance of Christ's resurrection for our everyday lives. Some may be Surprised By Hope as see biblically the impact of the resurrection on every believer as we live in our present reality as people of the Resurrection and the Risen Lord. We will see how the prophet Ezekiel spoke of a day of restoration and new beginning for God's people when they had all but given up hope. We will boldly approach Christ along with Jairus and the bleeding woman, trusting that he alone has the life-giving power to heal the sick and raise the dead. We will weep with Mary and Martha outside the tomb of Lazarus, and marvel at the way Christ's love reaches beyond the grave. We will walk with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and discover that Christ has been with us the whole time. We will run with the women from the tomb to tell the disciples the great news and learn to take our place in the great mission of Christ to the world. We will hear Peter's bold testimony to the resurrection and join him in steadfast allegiance to the true Lord and King of all. With the Corinthian church we will discover that our life and work in the present age hold great meaning for our risen life to come. With the church at Rome we will learn that the Spirit of the risen Lord frees us from our bondage to sin and death. Along with the Colossians we will discover that the Christian life is lived through participation in Christ's resurrection and shows forth in the new clothing we wear. Finally, with John we will watch as God makes all things new and finally banishes death from his world.

My hope is that as we reflect together on the wonder of our lives as the people of the resurrection and the risen Lord, we will more deeply embrace God's promises to us and more fully embody his resurrected life for all the world to see.

Session 1

New Breath for Old Bones

Ezekiel 37:1–14

At the sudden loss of a close friend one friend consoled another who was heavily grieving “Breath.” What strange advice. Isn’t breathing one of those few things we aren’t supposed to have to “remember” to do? In this instance, however, she was distraught and grieving this sudden death of an old friend she was apparently in desperate need of such basic guidance. Grief and loss had nearly drained the life out of her. It is in times like these that our insides can feel withered and starved of essential nutrients. To her amazement a few deep breaths began to calm her and bring back the sensation of life. In this study we’ll explore God’s promise to send his own life-giving breath to renew our lives in a way we could never do for ourselves.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Has there ever been a time when you experienced such distress? Describe a time when you could have used a reminder to breathe. What was happening in your life? Was someone there to help you?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How do you experience the presence of God’s Spirit in times of pain and loss?

The people of Israel lost their home to foreign invaders and were taken away as captives to a strange land. Overcome with grief, they wept aloud to the God who was supposed to look out for them. In response, the Spirit of the Lord came to the prophet Ezekiel and gave him a vision for the people. *Re-read Ezekiel 37:1–14.*

1. Imagine how Ezekiel must have felt after wandering back and forth through a valley full of old human bones. How does he respond to the Lord’s surprising question in verse 3?

2. Notice that Ezekiel is not permitted to be a passive bystander in this vision. How did the Lord require Ezekiel to participate (v. 4)?

3. Why is it so important for the dry bones to “hear the word of the LORD” (v. 4)?

4. What prevents you from hearing God’s Word in times of pain?

5. What happens as Ezekiel begins to prophesy as he is commanded (v. 7)?

6. Why are the bodies still lifeless after the bones come together and are covered with sinews and skin (v. 8)?

7. Why might the two-stage process of bringing these dead back to life mirror the two-stage creation of human beings in the very beginning (see Genesis 2:7)?

8. What do the bones (v. 11) and breath (v. 14) represent?

9. What did God promise the people through this vision (vv. 11–14)?

10. How does God’s promise to raise up the dry bones and breathe new life into them give you courage in the face of pain and loss?

11. Who are the people in your life who feel that “hope is gone” (v. 11)?

12. How is God calling you to “prophesy” to the “bones” and “breath” today?

Give thanks to God that all hope is not lost, and pray that his Spirit would continue to breathe new life into you and all his people. Ask God to give you such confidence in his promises of resurrection and new creation that you joyfully speak this good news to all who are tempted to despair.

Now or Later

Ezekiel 37:1–14 is just one of several key Old Testament passages that began to cultivate a hope for resurrection among the people of Israel. Others you may want to reflect on are Job 19:25–27; Daniel 12:1–3; Isaiah 53:10–12 and Hosea 13:14. What images are used in each of these passages to communicate God’s promises to his people? How do they find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ?

Session 2

Healing and Restoration

Mark 5:21–43

B.C Powder, Father Johns, Black Draught, Castor Oil, Three Six's, these were all the remedies for ailments for just about any sickness that dared inflict itself on anyone of us in my family and probably yours as well when you were growing up. Only when things got desperate, totally beyond our control would our family trouble a doctor or anyone else with our ailments. Most of the time we could handle it ourselves, "thank you very much." Not only has this philosophy stayed with me as an adult, it has worked its way into other areas of my life as well. It is often very difficult for me to admit that something is out of my control. I'm embarrassed to cry out for help. But when I hit that point of desperation, when I realize that I simply don't have the personal resources to overcome a challenge, I reach out for others who do have the power to help me. In this study we'll meet two characters in desperate situations who take the risk of turning to someone more powerful than themselves for healing and restoration.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Describe a time when you felt overwhelmed by a problem and reached out to someone for help. How did you feel before you asked for help? How did you feel after? What was the result?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. In what circumstances is it difficult for you to trust in others to help you?

After leaving the Gentile region of the Decapolis, Jesus returns to Galilee to continue his ministry of teaching and healing. There he is met by a great crowd of people who are eager for his time and attention. *Re-read Mark 5:21–43.*

1. Imagine that you are in the crowd of people gathered around Jesus (v. 21), excited that such a great healer has come to your town. Would you try to approach him? If so, what kind of healing would you ask for?

2. In the midst of this needy multitude, one particularly desperate man makes his way to center stage. What does he ask of Jesus (v. 23)?

3. Jairus is identified as a synagogue leader. Why might it have been risky for him to throw himself at Jesus' feet and beg for help in public?

4. What risks do you need to take in order to turn to Jesus for help?

5. In verse 25, the scene is interrupted. The story of Jairus is suspended as yet another desperate character pushes her way into the picture. What do we learn about this unnamed woman (vv. 25–26)?

6. Why do you think the woman tried to get away with touching Jesus' cloak in secret (v. 28)?

7. When she touches Jesus' garment, the woman immediately knows that she is healed of her disease. But before she can run home rejoicing, Jesus calls her out: "Who touched my clothes?" (v. 30). Why do you think Jesus insisted on meeting the person who secretly sought healing from him?

8. Consider the kind words that Jesus speaks to the woman in verse 34. He calls her "daughter" and sends her home with a blessing of peace. What do we learn about the character of Jesus and the kind of healing he brings from this encounter?

9. In verse 35 the story of Jairus resumes with some devastating news: "Your daughter is dead." Jesus has taken too long to get there and now all hope is gone. How might Jairus have felt toward Jesus at this moment?

10. Jesus, however, is not discouraged by this news of the girl's death. What does Jesus mean when he tells the distraught people that "the child is not dead but asleep" (v. 39)?

11. Imagine yourself in this scene. What might it have been like to be among the people mourning the death of the girl at one moment and then "completely astonished" at the next?

What might it have been like to be the little girl who was brought back from death?

12. In both stories told here, desperate people reach out to Jesus, daring to trust in him as their last hope. As a result of their faith, we catch a glimpse of resurrection wholeness as Jesus brings healing and restoration right here in the midst of our world. Where do you see the healing and resurrection power of Jesus at work in your world?

Spend some time in praise and thanks to God for the healing and restoration that come through Jesus Christ. Offer prayers for specific needs in your life and those around you, daring to trust that God will demonstrate the power of the resurrection in your world today.

Now or Later

Mark's Gospel tells many stories of the healing and resurrection power of Jesus. For example, look at Mark 1:29–31; 1:40–42; 2:1–11; 3:1–6; 5:1–20; 7:31–37; 8:22–26. What do these stories have in common? What do we learn from them about Jesus, his concern for people, and the kind of healing and restoration that he brings?

SESSION 3

A Love Stronger Than Death

John 11:17–44

Boy and girl meet and fall in love. Someone puts an obstacle in the way of their love. Girl fakes her death to get around obstacle. Boy finds girl and thinks she’s dead. Boy despairs and kills himself. Girl wakes up and finds boy dead. Girl despairs and kills herself.

Does this story sound familiar to you? Many of us would quickly identify it as (roughly) the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*. Indeed it is. But Shakespeare’s story didn’t come out of nowhere. Similar stories of passionate human love ending in tragedy and death have been quite common throughout history. There seems to be a widespread belief that love is powerful stuff—and potentially fatal! But in this study we’ll discover another kind of love that is even stronger. And unlike the broken human love that can end in devastation and death, this love leads to resurrection and life.

GROUP DISCUSSION. What are some popular love stories from books, television, movies or real life? How do they reveal both the intensity and the brokenness of human love?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How has human love brought both joy and pain to your life?

Jesus didn’t show up. Mary and Martha called for him when their brother Lazarus grew very sick. They waited for him, but he didn’t come. And then it was too late. But when Jesus finally does arrive on the scene, he demonstrates that his love for Lazarus is far greater than mere human love could ever be. *Re-read John 11:17–44.*

1. Many friends and relatives gathered around Mary and Martha to offer consolation (v. 19). If you had been there, what would you have said to these grief-stricken sisters?

2. How did Martha react when Jesus finally showed up (vv. 21–22)?

3. Jesus attempts to comfort Martha by assuring her that her brother will “rise again” (v. 23). How does Martha understand this promise?

4. What new perspective and promise does Jesus offer Martha in the midst of her grief (vv. 24–25)?

5. Think about how you would answer Jesus' question in verse 26. How does a person's answer to this question affect the way he or she responds to death?

6. How does Mary's reaction to Jesus (vv. 32–33) compare with Martha's?

7. This story emphasizes several times that Jesus is "deeply moved" and "troubled," even to the point of weeping (vv. 33–35, 38). How do those gathered around Jesus interpret his display of emotion (vv. 36–37)?

8. Earlier in John's Gospel, we are told that Jesus, God's only Son, has "made known" the Father to us (John 1:18). What in particular do Jesus' tears at Lazarus's grave make known to us about the Father?

9. How do Jesus' tears challenge your understanding of God?

10. Along with the others gathered around, Jesus offers words of hope and tears of solidarity. But that's not all he does. As the one who himself embodied resurrection and life (v. 25), Jesus was able to do much more than anyone could have ever expected that day. How does Martha's reaction to Jesus' request in verse 39 demonstrate that she had not totally grasped the meaning of her earlier conversation with Jesus (vv. 21–27)?

11. How do you sometimes fail to understand and embrace God's promises?

12. This story invites us to trust in the strength of God's love for us. Just as Jesus loved Lazarus (v. 36) and had the power to call him forth from the grave, so is his love for us much stronger than death. How does God's strong love enable you to live and love more fully today?

Pray for Transformation

Rest quietly and gratefully for a minute in the strength of God's love for you. Hear Jesus' voice calling you forth from death into new life. Pray that his love will give you courage and strength to live more fully for him each day.

Now or Later

Take a few minutes to read and reflect on the follow-up episode in John 12:1–11. Here we see different responses to the life-giving love that Jesus demonstrated to Lazarus and his sisters. What characters are present in this scene (vv. 1–4, 9, 10)? How does each character (or group) respond to what Jesus has done? Who demonstrates true understanding? Who totally misses the point?

SESSION 4

Broken Bread, Open Eyes

Luke 24:13–35

When I was enlisted in the military it was my first-time living miles away from home and my family, actually this tour took me all the way around the world away from everyone I had ever known in my entire life. It was close to Christmas and my normal custom was to spend Christmas with my family. I became very anxious and lonely as major holidays would approach. I was faced with the reality of not being able to celebrate holidays with my family. But something quite remarkable happened, various friends and church members would notice my predicament and take pity on me. They would invite me into their homes and give me a place at their dinner tables. Though I would walk through the door a total stranger to many who were gathered, something wonderful would happen as we would fellowship and prayers of thanksgiving were offered, dishes were passed and the feasting began. Somehow by the end of the meal I would feel known, loved and accepted as part of the family even if just for that occasion. Meals shared in a spirit of love and friendship would often transform my holiday sadness into great laughter and joy. In this study we'll see how the risen Lord transformed a similar occasion.

GROUP DISCUSSION. What is one of your most memorable meals with friends or family?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How have shared meals opened up new relationships or deepened existing relationships in your life?

On the day Jesus rose from the dead, two disheartened followers set out from Jerusalem to return to their home in Emmaus. Let's explore their encounter with the "stranger" along the way and see how it transformed their lives. *Re-read Luke 24:13–35.*

1. What mix of emotions might the two followers have been feeling as they began to make their way back to Emmaus?

2. How did the two followers initially respond to Jesus when he "came up and walked along with them" on the road (vv. 15–18)?

3. What might have kept them from understanding his true identity?

4. What keeps you from recognizing the presence of Jesus walking along the road with you in your life?

5. Verse 27 tells us that “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” Why was it important for Jesus to explain from the Hebrew Scriptures his identity and all that had happened in recent days?

6. How does studying the Scriptures help prepare you to recognize the presence of Jesus in your life and in the world around you?

7. What does Jesus do after he sits down at the table with the two followers (v. 30)?

8. Why do you think their eyes are opened at this particular moment (v. 31)?

9. How does the risen Jesus still make himself known to us in the breaking of bread and sharing of meals?

10. Why is it significant that the two recall feeling as though their hearts were “burning” within them as they walked along the road with Jesus (v. 32)?

11. What did the two followers do when they returned to Jerusalem (v. 35)?

12. How might you help others recognize the presence of the risen Lord and invite them to share in all that he offers them?

Prayer for Transformation

Give thanks to God for walking with you in the midst of your particular struggles and revealing himself to you as the risen Lord. Pray that you might know him more deeply as you feast with him and are transformed by his presence, and that you might joyfully invite others to know him too.

Now or Later

Genesis 3:6–7 speaks of another incident where two people shared a meal and had their eyes opened. Scholars have suggested that Luke 24:30–31 is intended as a reversal of what happened in the Genesis 3 story. Read Genesis 3:1–19 and reflect on the “meal” described there and its consequences for humankind. Who offered Adam and Eve the food? What did they “know” or “recognize” once they ate of it? What impact did this have for them and all their future descendants? Then, by way of comparison, look again at Luke 24. Who offered the food? What did they “recognize”? What was the long-term impact? Spend some time reflecting on the ways the resurrection of Jesus reverses the fall of the first human couple and what that means for your life as a follower of the risen One.

SESSION 5

A Mission with Promise

Matthew 28:1–10, 16–20

It's your first day at a new job. You arrive at the office expecting to have some time to settle into your cubicle, learn your way around and meet your coworkers. No such luck. Your boss has already assigned you a major project. As you look over the expectations, your heart rate rises. Panic sets in. You have no idea how to do this job. You begin to wonder if they've made a terrible mistake hiring you. You momentarily consider packing it in and heading home in quiet defeat.

But suddenly one of your new colleagues pokes her head in your office. She introduces herself and explains that she's worked at the company for many years. Seeing the fear in your eyes, she assures you that she knows well the pressures of your job. In fact, she had even served in that position herself for the past few years before being promoted to her current role. Then, totally unexpectedly, she volunteers to work alongside you this week to help you through your project. Your joy and relief are incalculable. Rather than dreading the week, you now look forward to it. The promised presence of a caring and experienced mentor makes all the difference. In this study, we'll see how the risen Christ goes before us and with us in his mission to the world.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Describe a time when a more experienced colleague, friend or mentor came alongside you to help you accomplish something. What did you learn from him or her?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Who are the people in your life that have gone before you and walked alongside you? How has their guidance and presence made a difference?

Matthew's account of Jesus' crucifixion mentions the presence of many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and provided for his needs in his most desperate hour (Mt 27:55). Among them were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph (v. 56), who stayed with Jesus until his body had been laid in the tomb. These two women returned to the tomb on Sunday morning and became the first of Jesus' followers to learn the incredible news. *Re-read Matthew 28:1–10.*

1. Notice how quickly this story progresses. In just the first six verses there is a rapid and radical change of circumstances. What unexpected events unfold before the eyes of the women in this opening scene (vv. 1–6)?

2. Why does the angel invite the women to “come and see the place where he lay” (v. 6)?

3. What message does the angel give the women to pass on to the rest of the disciples (v. 7)?

4. Why was it important for Jesus to go ahead of them to Galilee (v. 7)?

5. How has Jesus gone ahead of us as well?

6. What two ways do the women clearly demonstrate that they have believed the angel's message (vv. 8–9)?

7. Matthew doesn't actually give us a report of the women passing along the news of Jesus' resurrection to the other disciples, but this next scene implies that they did so. *Read Matthew 28:16–20*. Why is there a split reaction among the disciples when Jesus comes to them (v. 17)?

8. In what ways do you sometimes hesitate to respond to the risen Lord?

9. What threefold mission does Jesus give his disciples (vv. 19–20)?

10. How are you called to participate in this mission today?

11. What two promises does Jesus give his disciples as they carry out his mission (vv. 18, 20)?

12. What difference do these promises make as you take your place in Christ's mission?

Prayer for Transformation

Give thanks and celebrate the Lord's promise to be with you until the end of the age. Ask that he reveal to you what role you can play in the work of speaking the good news of his resurrection and inviting others to follow him where he leads.

Now or Later

Matthew's Gospel locates some of Jesus' most important moments on mountains. For instance, read and reflect on a few of these: the third temptation (Mt 4:8–10), the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7), Jesus' solitude (Mt 14:23), the transfiguration (Mt 17:1–6), and the final teaching on the Mount of Olives (Mt 24). How does Matthew 28:16–20 function as the grand finale to all of these mountain moments? How does each mountain moment find its fulfillment in this climatic interaction between the risen Lord and his followers? How do they make sense only in light of the resurrection? How do they help us understand what it means to participate in the mission of Christ?

SESSION 6

Bold Allegiance

Acts 2:22–36

My grandfather was a Tampa Bay Buccaneers fan until the time he transitioned from this earth. He caught the spirit of the team from the beginning and never looked back. His loyalty kept him watching their games and he would boldly let the whole world know whose side he was on no matter the odds against them. In this study we will reflect on the beginning of something much greater. We'll be invited to radical devotion and bold allegiance to One who is supremely worthy. And unlike our favorite sports teams, this One will never disappoint us.

GROUP DISCUSSION. How do you publically demonstrate your association with a favorite team or organization?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. What are you most deeply devoted to? How do you act on this devotion?

On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came with great power on the disciples of the risen and ascended Jesus. In response to the confusion and outright mockery of those who observed, Peter boldly testified that the promises of God had been fulfilled. *Re-read Acts 2:22–36.*

1. If you had been in the crowd of Israelites that day, what overall effect do you think Peter's speech would have had on you?

2. What serious accusation does Peter bring against the gathered Israelites (vv. 22–23)?

3. Why was it “impossible” for Jesus to be held in the power of death (vv. 24–28)?

4. What Scriptures does Peter base his message on (vv. 25–28, 34–35)?

5. What central point does Peter make by quoting these particular Scriptures (vv. 29–31, 34–36)?

6. In verse 32 Peter describes himself and the other apostles as “witnesses” of the risen Jesus. What does it mean to be a witness?

7. How are you also a witness to the risen Lord?

8. After he was raised, Jesus was exalted to the right hand of the Father. What gift did he receive from the Father that he graciously passed along to his people (v. 33)?

9. How has this gift helped you as a follower of Jesus?

10. Why does Peter insist that Jesus is “both Lord and Messiah” (v. 36)?

11. What difference does Jesus’ exaltation as the true Lord of all make in your own life?

12. How does your allegiance to Jesus as King, like Peter, give you confidence to bear witness to him?

Prayer for Transformation

Give thanks to God for forming a community of faithful witnesses who declare their allegiance to the true Lord and King of all. Ask God to strengthen you to be part of that faithful community so that you may boldly testify to the risen Christ everywhere you go.

Now or Later

Reflect prayerfully on Psalm 16 and Psalm 110. What does each of them teach about the faithful rule of God? How do they help you understand what it means to live as a subject of God’s kingdom in Christ?

SESSION 7

A Meaningful Life

1 Corinthians 15:35–58

A fascinating study of entomology reveals some rather interesting facts about caterpillars and butterflies. Scientists have long marveled at the metamorphosis these creatures undergo and the way their entire substance seems to break down and form into something totally new. One particular study discovered that caterpillars that were trained to avoid certain smells retained that training even after their complete transformation into butterflies. In other words, the caterpillars gained experience and formed habits that had enduring value. What happened to them in their immature state was meaningful for their life as mature creatures. In this study we'll discover that in the resurrection the same is true for us as converted believers.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Describe an event or experience from your childhood that continues to shape who you are as an adult today.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. What have been some of the most meaningful experiences of your life? How would you be a different person without them?

The apostle Paul begins his extended reflection in 1 Corinthians 15 on the significance of Christ's resurrection by recounting the tradition about the bodily resurrection of Jesus that had been passed down through those like himself who personally encountered the risen Christ (vv. 3–11). He then addresses a number of questions and misunderstandings that had arisen in the Corinthian church about the implications of Christ's resurrection for the rest of us. *Re-read 1 Corinthians 15:35–58.*

1. We get the sense from verse 35 that some of the Corinthian believers were struggling to wrap their minds around Christian teaching about life after death. When you picture the afterlife, what do you see?

2. What three analogies from the natural world does Paul use to help us understand about various types of bodies (vv. 36–41)?

3. What is the main point of each of these analogies?

4. Paul contrasts two types of bodies in particular: "natural" and "spiritual." What are the characteristics of each type of body (vv. 42–44)?

5. What is the point of Paul’s comparison of the “first Adam” and the “last Adam” (vv. 45–50)?

6. What “mystery” is revealed in verses 51–53?

7. How does this mystery bring about the fulfillment of the saying, “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (v. 54)?

8. Paul bursts into praise of God (v. 57) after contemplating this mystery. How do you react to this mystery after reflecting on it?

9. What overall conclusion does Paul draw from this discussion of resurrection (v. 58)?

10. Why does Paul draw a conclusion focused on this present world when his whole discussion has been oriented toward the future?

11. Why is our work in the Lord “not in vain” (v. 58)?

12. How might you devote yourself more fully to your own “work of the Lord” (v. 58)?

Prayer For Transformation: *As you reflect on the great mystery of transformation, offer praise to God who gives you victory over death through Jesus Christ your Lord. Ask God to strengthen you to devote yourself fully to the work of the Lord that will never fade away.*

Now or Later: It can be a bit mind bending to ponder what life will be like in a transformed body. Since Jesus Christ is the only one so far who has gone through this human metamorphosis, it’s worth exploring what we know of his post-resurrection experience. Read and reflect on John 20–21. What similarities do you see in how Jesus looks, behaves and interacts with others as the risen Lord compared with before he died? What differences do you see? How do these post-resurrection stories of Jesus help shape the way you understand your own future and the future of God’s world?

SESSION 8

Freedom to Live

Romans 8:1–11

Shouts of “freedom!” and “we’re free!” echoed through the hallways and across the schoolyard. It was as though the shackles of their public school education had been loosed and the prison doors of their classrooms thrown wide open. The wondrous glory of summer vacation reflected off their faces in great gap-toothed grins. Of course, as elementary school students, they were far too young to understand the long-term benefits of education. All they knew in this moment was that life would be different for the next two and a half months, and they couldn’t wait to embrace all it had to offer. In this study, we’ll explore the kind of freedom we experience through Christ’s resurrection.

GROUP DISCUSSION. What are some common uses of the term *freedom* in today’s world?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. When in your life have you felt truly free? What emotions or actions accompanied your sense of freedom?

After describing in detail the sad state of humankind in captivity to sin and death (Romans 7), the apostle Paul looks to the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead for hope in an otherwise hopeless situation. *Re-read Romans 8:1–11.*

1. How would you define or describe the nature of true freedom?

2. What assurance is offered in verse 1 to those who are in Christ Jesus?

3. In what way has the Spirit of life set us free from sin and death (vv. 2–4)?

4. What does the Spirit desire and what does the flesh desire (v. 5)?

5. What does it look like for us to “live in accordance with the Spirit” in everyday life (v. 5)?

6. What comes to those who set their mind on the Spirit instead of the flesh (v. 6)?

7. If we are Christ's people who live in the Spirit, why do we sometimes still experience the hostility of the flesh toward God (vv. 7–8)?

8. In what areas of your life do you seek freedom from the flesh in order to live for God?

9. In what way are our bodies already dead (v. 10)?

10. The very same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in us. According to verse 11, what is this Spirit doing for us?

11. Where do you see the Spirit of the risen Lord at work in your own life?

12. How might you more fully embrace the freedom of the Spirit?

Prayer for Transformation: *Celebrate that you are no longer condemned for your sins and failures. Rejoice in your freedom from captivity to sin and death through the Spirit of the risen Lord. Ask God to help you live more fully in step with the Spirit of resurrection at work in you so you may experience his life and peace more each day.*

Now or Later: The nature of true Christian freedom seems to have been one of Paul's favorite subjects. Reflect on Romans 6; Galatians 5 and 2 Corinthians 3. How does the biblical understanding of freedom compare with popular notions of freedom? What role does the Spirit play? Why does the resurrection matter?

SESSION 9

New Clothes

Colossians 3:1–17

It didn't take her long to realize that she was terribly underdressed. The first time at one of her new acquaintance's garden parties and she had really misjudged the dress code. She had never noticed before just how raggedy her favorite jeans were. Or how obvious that stain on her blouse was. And why did she opt for the flip-flops today of all days? As the other attendees began glancing skeptically in her direction, she wished she could vanish and reenter the party wearing the proper attire. In this study we'll get a "fashion lesson" from the apostle Paul, who instructs us what not to wear in the presence of the risen Lord and offers us a much better wardrobe instead.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Describe a time when you were either embarrassed by what you were wearing or felt that your clothing gave a wrong impression of you. Did this experience change the way you dressed in the future?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How do your actions function as "clothing" in the way they reveal to others something about who you are or what you value?

The Colossian believers were struggling to understand how to live as Christians. Some were even turning back to various human traditions and philosophies (2:8) or rules and observances (2:16) for guidance. So Paul explains the unique nature of the Christian life to them in terms of what it means for believers to be included in the risen and exalted life of Christ. Then he invites them to strip off their old clothes and put on some new ones. *Re-read Colossians 3:1–17.*

1. In what ways do you share the Colossians' struggle with knowing how to live as a Christian in a not-so-Christian world?

2. How do verses 1–4 challenge and reorient the way you understand who you are as a Christian?

3. What are the "things above" that we are instructed to set our hearts and minds on (vv. 1–2)?

4. What will happen to us when Christ "appears" (v. 4)?

5. What are some of the earthly things that we are instructed to "put to death" or "rid ourselves of" (vv. 5–9)?

6. Why must we strip off these earthly things?

7. What earthly things do you most struggle to get rid of in your life?

8. What are some of the wide-reaching, society-altering benefits of being clothed with the new self (vv. 10–11)?

9. How is our new clothing characterized (vv. 12–14)?

10. Why do we often have a difficult time wearing some of these new items?

11. How does Paul encourage us to draw on Christ’s own resources as we clothe ourselves (see particularly vv. 13, 15, 16)?

12. How would your life look different if every “word” and “deed” were done in the name of the risen Lord and with gratitude to God (v. 17)?

Prayer for Transformation: *Give thanks to the Lord for the great riches that are yours in the risen Christ. Express your desire to be finished with the tattered sin-stained clothing of your old self and be fully adorned with the beautiful garments of the new self, reflecting the glory of Christ in all things.*

Now or Later: The image of putting off the old self and “clothing” ourselves with something new is a common image in the New Testament. Take some time to read and reflect on Ephesians 4:22–25; 1 Peter 5:5–6 and Revelation 3:17–18. What specifically do each of these passages ask us to put aside? What new clothing do they encourage us to put on? How do the characteristics of the new clothing reflect the character of Christ himself?

SESSION 10

All Things New

Revelation 21:1–8

I'm always inspired by artists who take old, worn out, broken items and make them into something beautiful and new, maybe that's why I like re-upholstery. An old chair re-upholstered. A Collage made from scraps of paper. A piece of art made from recycled metal. Sculptures made from the remains of aluminum cans. Wallets made from old clothes and rags. Things that look to most of us as though they have no further purpose in this world are refashioned and given a new future. Perhaps this is a little bit like God's intention for our world. In this study we'll watch with John as a new future for God's resurrected people is fashioned out of the brokenness of this world.

GROUP DISCUSSION. When have you seen someone take something old and apparently useless and make it into something new?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. What feels broken and worn out in your life? In what areas do you long to be made new and given new direction and purpose?

Much of the wild, apocalyptic book of Revelation is concerned with the brokenness of the world and the dire consequences of evil and rebellion against God. But it also assures us that God has not abandoned the world. It promises that death will be cast out and the whole creation be renewed by the power of the one who triumphed over the grave. There is an unimaginably beautiful future in store for the resurrected people of God. *Read Revelation 21:1–8.*

1. Imagine that you are with John watching this vision unfold before you. How would you respond to each of the images?

2. What happens to the first heaven and the first earth that we live in now (v. 1)?

3. Why do you think this must this happen?

4. The voice from the throne declares that "God's dwelling place is now among the people" (v. 3). How will this be different from the way we experience God's presence with us now?

5. What will life be like in this place (v. 4)?

6. Perhaps the most striking promise is that death itself “will be no more” (v. 4). How does the work of Jesus Christ, the Lamb who sits on the throne in Revelation, ensure that this promise will be fulfilled?

7. What is included in the “everything” that will be made new (v. 5)?

8. What gift is promised to those who are thirsty (v. 6)?

9. What do you thirst for?

10. How do we achieve victory in order to inherit this brand new creation (v. 7)?

11. Why will some people be kept out of the new creation (v. 8)?

12. How might this vision of a death-free future—where all creation is healed from its hurts and made beautiful and new—shape the way you live today?

Prayer for Transformation: *Give thanks to God that death’s days are numbered. Marvel before him at the great work of resurrection and transformation that he has already begun in Jesus Christ and will one day carry to completion. Pray that you will learn to live each day as a new creature, as one who reflects the beauty of the world to come right in the midst of the present time.*

Now or Later

The vision of the new heavens and new earth reflected here in Revelation 21 comes straight from the Hebrew prophets. For instance, read and reflect on Isaiah 65:13–25 and 66:10–24. Do some of these images sound familiar? How does the vision offered in Isaiah help complete the picture of the new heavens and new earth that we glimpse in Revelation 21? What hope do these passages offer to the world? What warning do they bring?
