

# InCredible

## **Small Group Study Participant Guide**

**April 12, 2020 - May 3, 2020**

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## InCredible!

*Incredible.* Is that a description of Easter? Can we possibly believe that the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus are credible? Against all models, against what's seemingly possible, the answer is yes. And it means that you can experience a truly **#InCredibleEaster!**

The resurrection of Jesus is central to the Christian faith. 1 Corinthians 15:14 puts it this way, *"And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."*

So what do you believe about the resurrection? How does the resurrection of Christ impact your faith? How do historical accounts line up with the accounts of Scripture?

Join us on this 4-session journey through the incredible accounts of the resurrection!

*"A lynch pin is the pin stuck through an axle that keeps the wheel on. Without it, the wheels will literally fall off the wagon. The resurrection of Jesus is the lynch pin of understanding God. If there is no resurrection, the wheels come off the wagon. All the talk about Jesus being God incarnate, forgiveness, the authority of Jesus, the importance of the Bible, and life after death is simply a waste of time. If there is no resurrection, there is no reason to believe in Jesus."*

Thomas Zelt (2013) *The Lynch Pin: Seven Reasons to Believe Jesus Rose from the Dead*. Introduction page.



## **Leader Tips/How to Use This Study**

Before you start: Be sure to give people a copy of the study. As the group leader, prior to each session you should read the Scriptures, consider your own answers, pray for your group members, and pray for the group time together. If your group meets weekly, you can follow along with the sermon series each week. If you meet twice a month, the study will simply take 2 months to complete and will not line up each week in worship, but that will still be fine!

Group members are not required to prepare answers ahead of time, however some people in the group may prefer to read ahead in order to have more time to think about their responses.

Each session is written to be approximately 75-90 minutes long, however you may tailor the material to the needs and length of your group time. You should also allow time to welcome people at the beginning and time for comfortable departures at the end. It's not all about the study – be sure to share hospitality with one another.

Don't feel obligated to get through all the questions. The point is for the study to get through you, NOT for you to get through the study! Therefore you are encouraged to have thoughtful, good discussion on fewer questions, rather than brief answers on more questions.

Involve group members as often as possible in Scripture readings, hosting, prayer, and facilitating questions.

Have fun and enjoy the time together!

# Week 1: InCredible Mystery

## Big Idea:

In spite of some of the Christians you've met or interacted with, in spite of revivals and scandals, in spite of your view of the Bible or your view of church, you should consider believing in Jesus as your Savior. Why? It has nothing to do with you. It has everything to do with an incredible mystery.

## Opening Prayer: [~1 Minute]

*Led by the leader, apprentice, or volunteer from the group.*

Heavenly Father, you are good, gracious, and full of mercy. Thank you for sending your Son Jesus here to earth. We receive this incredible gift from you that by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus our sins are fully paid for and we are restored to a right relationship with you. Help us to live in that relationship with the full assurance that we are your beloved children. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may bring your Kingdom here to earth. Be with us in this time today that we will grow to look more and more like you in our thoughts, words, and actions. Amen.

## Opening Questions: [~10 Minutes]

Name something in technology, nature, science, or medicine that you are thankful for yet could not fully explain how it works.

Does the item/process noted above impact either your life specifically, or life on earth in general? If so, how?

## Read and Discuss: [~50 Minutes]

*A group member(s) is encouraged to read the Scriptures aloud for all.*

We live with many mysteries in our life. We put our belief in all kinds of things even in things we don't understand.

The resurrection is a mystery and yet it is still true. Jesus is alive! What a crazy, miraculous, and life-changing mystery. It was a mystery to the disciples who were closest to Jesus, and yet because they were eyewitnesses to the resurrected Jesus, they proclaimed the resurrection boldly.

## Read John 20:1-10

- Which details in this passage stand out to you and why?
- In what way do details lend to the credibility of the resurrection?
- John, described as “the one Jesus loved”, reached the entrance of the tomb first, but went into the tomb second after Peter. Why do you think John stopped outside the tomb? What might he have been thinking?
- Peter goes into the tomb right away. He sees the strips of linen lying there as well as the cloth that covered Jesus face separate from the others and folded up. Grave robbers would not likely have taken the time to fold up the cloth covering Jesus’ face and leave it in its place. What do you think Peter was processing in his mind?
- John saw and believed (John 20:8). Yet Peter went away wondering to himself what had happened (Luke 24:12). Why do you think they had different reactions upon seeing the same thing? What do you think your reaction would be?

This same Peter who didn’t know what to make of the empty tomb, later encounters the resurrected Jesus. He talks with him, eats with him, and believes so fully what he saw, that he goes from hiding and denying Christ, to boldly preaching to the people who killed Jesus!

## Read Acts 2:22-36

- What are the key points of the gospel that Peter gives here?
- Peter is speaking to first-hand witnesses here. What words or phrases indicate this?

### **Read John 11:25, Luke 9:20 and John 14:6**

- What do you learn about who Jesus is from these passages?

### **Read Romans 8:11 and Romans 10:9-13**

- What are the implications for you if you believe in the resurrected Jesus?
- What have you learned as a result of today's reading and discussion?

### **Closing Prayer Activity: [~8 minutes]**

How can this group pray for you?

On a piece of paper write down two statements (this is easier if a sharpie is available):

1. "Dear Jesus, thank you for\_\_\_\_\_."
2. "Lord, in your wisdom, power, and mercy, help me with \_\_\_\_\_."

Hold up your piece of paper to the screen. The leader will start by praying for one other person's paper they hold. Then each person will pray until everyone has offered up a prayer for someone else. The leader will close the time in prayer.

### **Live It Out This Week: [~1 minute]**

Pray that Jesus would open your eyes to the truth that he is alive and active today. Ask him to show you how he is at work in your life this week.



## Week 2: InCredible Confession

### Big Idea:

If an event happens, there's a trail of evidence. The resurrection of Jesus is no different. While sometimes the argument is made that the Christian faith evolved throughout the first two centuries, an early writing with an incredible assertion invites us to see the good news: Jesus really is alive!

### Opening Prayer: [~2 minutes]

Read Psalm 145 as an opening prayer of praise to God. Have each person read one verse until all the verses have been read.

### Opening Questions: [~5 minutes]

What did you learn as a child that you can still recite or sing today? The Pledge of Allegiance? The Scouts Oath? The Common Table Prayer? The ABC's? The Itsy Bitsy Spider? Something else interesting or fun?

Share also how you came to learn it. (Extra credit – say or sing a few lines for the group!)

### Read and Discuss: [~50 Minutes]

*A group member(s) is encouraged to read the Scriptures aloud for all.*

*Confession – a formal statement of religious beliefs: CREED*  
[“confession.” Merriam Webster.com, March 2020]

### Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

- In what ways do you think verse 6 lends credibility to the resurrection?
- What kinds of conversations do you think these 500 people had after seeing the resurrected Jesus? How many people do you think each person talked to about it?

- There are many things important about Jesus' life, death and resurrection, yet verses 3-7 are primary to the story. Take a minute to explain the good news of the gospel summarizing these verses in your own words now. (Take turns with a number of people sharing.)

In verse 1 Paul notes that he is reminding his readers in Corinth of the gospel. In verse 3, he says, "I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me." This is a statement of faith that is being passed on. People are sharing what they know again and again in a repeatable way.

1 Corinthians was likely written within 25 years of Jesus' death and here we see a creed that had already been shared and solidified prior to that. That is important because not enough time passed for the story to be changed. Eye-witnesses were still around!

1995 was 25 years ago. Windows 95 was released by Microsoft. Ebay begins an online auction and shopping website. The OJ Simpson trial began in January and a verdict of innocence announced in October of that year. The Oklahoma City bombing occurred April 19, 1995. Perhaps you recall these events. If not, you could still talk to many witnesses who were there or impacted by them. Trying to change the facts of these events today would be too soon because the eye-witnesses would correct the errors. A trail of evidence is left behind by people who saw these things happen.

- How do the number of eye-witnesses, the number of different sightings, the early forming of a creed, and an early written account of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians impact your view of the credibility of the resurrection?

### **Read Romans 6:4-11**

(Consider reading a few different translations including *The Message* if you have access to it.)

- Jesus died to sin, once for all. All sin of all time in all people. Your sins a year ago, yesterday, and tomorrow. They have all been paid for. Is that easy or difficult for you to grasp? Explain.

- Paul uses very strong and heavy imagery by using the word slave here. Try to imagine how horrible being enslaved is. Why do you think he likens sin to slavery?
- Believers are included in this life-saving resurrection! We are no longer slaves to sin, but in fact have been set free. Dead to sin, but alive in Christ Jesus. How does this impact the way you view eternity and your life here on earth?

### **Closing Prayer Activity:[~10 minutes]**

Break into pairs. Text prayer requests to your prayer partner sometime this week. Reply with a written prayer back. Continue to keep them in your prayers throughout the week.

The leader, apprentice, or group member may close the group time with the following prayer:

*Dear Jesus, may we live for you, remembering that we are set free from the power of sin in our lives. Thank you for your life, death, and resurrection that paid for our sin conquering it once and for all. Help us to live with the full joy and freedom that comes from you. Amen.*

### **Live It Out This Week: [~2 minutes to read]**

Read through the 5 points below. Stop at the step that most closely applies to you. Make it a point to practice that ONE step this week.

1. If you are unfamiliar with the Apostles' Creed, an ancient creed stating what Christians believe, then read it and consider the statements of faith for yourself.
2. If you already believe the statements, consider committing the Apostles' Creed to memory.
3. If you already have it memorized, reflect and meditate on each part through the week and consider what each part means to you personally.
4. If you've already meditated on and recited the Apostles' Creed for years, consider learning supporting Scripture verses for it.

5. If you have supporting Scriptures in mind, consider how you would explain any part of the Apostles' Creed to someone who does not yet know Christ and has questions for you about your faith. Then pray and watch for God to bring that person into your life.

## **The Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.

He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

## Week 3: InCredible Details

### Big Idea:

The events of the New Testament are filled with incredible detail about Jesus. If you read an account and the timeline and geography don't match the story, you know it is not true. Yet at every turn, the New Testament presents information that is amazingly accurate to what is known about the setting from other sources. If those details are true, it also means that the picture of what it means to follow Jesus is also true. The resurrection details invite us into an incredible relationship.

### Opening Prayer: [~1 minute]

Led by the leader, apprentice, or volunteer from the group.

### Opening Question: [~15 minutes]

#### "Two truths and a lie"

Each person shares three facts or stories about themselves. Two things are true and one is not true, but could be believable. The group will then try to discern which one is the lie based on what they already know about you. Have fun!

### Read and Discuss: [~50 Minutes]

*A group member(s) is encouraged to read the Scriptures aloud for all.*

Christianity ties its truth claims to the reality of events. The events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection occur in an actual place and time in history. The New Testament presents information that is amazingly accurate to what is known about the setting.

### Read Matthew 27:57-66 and John 19:38-42

- What details do you see here? (About Joseph of Arimathea? How the tomb was secured and why? Time and location? Jesus' body prepared for burial?)
- There are slight differences in these accounts, although not conflicting. Does this add to or take away from their credibility? Why?

The details below are noted by Thomas Zelt (2013) *The Lynch Pin: Seven Reasons to Believe Jesus Rose from the Dead*. Chapter 7: The Details Make Sense.

Many details of Jesus' trial and death are given in Matthew chapters 26-27. Zelt identifies the details as fitting with the time and place and from other sources:

1. The locations are all where they are reported to be: Mount of Olives, Kidron Valley, Gethsemane, Temple Mount...None is out of place.
  2. Ruins of opulent houses in the Old City of Jerusalem were excavated in the upper city in 1967. They found courtyards and balconies in the dwellings of this area consistent with those described by Peter in the courtyard of the high priest.
  3. The fact that Jesus was not placed in one of the tombs designated by the Sanhedrin for the executed indicates they did not conduct Jesus' execution. Jewish executions were not done by crucifixion; that was a Roman practice.
  4. Pontius Pilot ruled for 10 years from A.D. 26-36. He is the fifth of eighteen Roman prefects and is listed in multiple historical sources.
  5. Annas was High Priest from A.D. 6-15 and was noted as having four sons who also served as High Priest, the fourth of which was his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who served from A.D. 18-37. In 1990 a tomb complex was discovered containing an ossuary (a bone box) inscribed with the name Caiaphas. Most have concluded that it is the same individual as in Jesus' story.
  6. Burial nearby-yet outside the city, rock-cut tombs, large stones covering the tomb entrance, bodies wrapped in a shroud and prepared with spices, were all common practices in Jesus' day.
- These details are different from forms of mythology that are disconnected from real people and places. What does it mean to you that Christianity ties its truth claims to the reality of events?

Review the details about Jesus' death from prophecies in Scripture in the chart on the next page.

- What do you take away from this chart considering the level of detail given to us and the fulfillment of the Scriptures?

## Holy Week Details in Scripture - Prophecy of, and Fulfillment in Jesus

	Old Testament Prophecy	New Testament Fulfillment in Jesus
Betrayed by a friend	Psalms 41:9	Matthew 10:4
Sold for 30 pieces of silver	Zechariah 11:12	Matthew 27:15
Money to be thrown in God's house	Zechariah 11:13b	Matthew 27:5a
Price given for potter's field	Zechariah 11:13b	Matthew 27:7
Forsaken by his disciples	Zechariah 13:7	Mark 14:50
Accused by false witnesses	Psalms 35:11	Matthew 26:59-61
Silent before accusers	Isaiah 53:7	Matthew 27:12-19
Wounded and bruised	Isaiah 53:5	Matthew 27:26
Smitten and spit upon	Isaiah 50:6	Matthew 26:67
Mocked	Psalms 22:7, 8	Matthew 27:31
Fell under the cross	Psalms 109: 24, 25	Luke 23:26
Hands and feet pierced	Psalms 22:16	Luke 23:33
Crucified with thieves	Isaiah 53:12	Matthew 27:38
Made intercession for his persecutors	Isaiah 53:12	Luke 23:34
Rejected by his own people	Isaiah 53:3	John 7:5, 48
Hated without a cause	Psalms 69:4	John 15:25
Friends stood from afar	Psalms 38:11	Luke 23:49
People shook their heads	Psalms 109:25	Matthew 27:39
Stared upon	Psalms 22:17	Luke 23:25
Garments parted and lots cast	Psalms 22:18	John 19:23, 24
Suffered thirst	Psalms 69:21	John 19:28
Gall and vinegar offered	Psalms 69:21	Matthew 27:34
His forsaken cry	Psalms 22:1	Matthew 27:46
Committed himself to God	Psalms 31:5	Luke 23:45
Bones not broken	Psalms 34:20	John 19:33
His side pierced	Zechariah 12:10	John 19:34
Darkness over the land	Amos 8:9	Matthew 27:45
Buried in a rich man's tomb	Isaiah 53:9	Matthew 27:57-60

When people are in relationship, they know the details of each other's lives. Relationships are in the details. God has given us many details of the death and resurrection of his Son, so that we may believe. God concerns himself with details of your life as well. He is a God of relationship and wants one with you.

### **Read Romans 8:1-2, 11-17a**

- Verse 14 states, "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God." Describe the relationship of a good parent and their child. What do they do for their child? What do they know about their child? How do they feel about their child?
- A child does nothing to earn their status of being an heir. You do not need to earn your relationship with God, but simply accept the gift of grace through faith in Jesus. Is it easy or difficult for you to accept the unconditional love of God for you? Explain.
- Consider a difficult situation you are currently facing. What would it look like if you were no longer a slave to fear, but rather claimed your relationship as a child of God? What do you think God would want to say to you as his child in this situation?

### **Closing Prayer Activity: [~3 minutes]**

Get a small notepad to use as a prayer journal this week. Write down each person's prayer request in the journal. Use the prayer prompts in the *Live it Out* section in journal during the week. The leader may open the time in prayer and pray the first request written in the prayer journal. Then the leader will ask the next person to pray listed in the journal until all names have been prayed for.



The leader, apprentice, or group member may then close the group time with the following prayer:

*Dear God, thank you for the details you have given us in your Scriptures, in historical writings, and in artifacts that we may believe in Jesus. Thank you for loving us as a good and heavenly Father. Help us to live no longer as slaves to fear, but as your dearly loved children and co-heirs with Christ, that while we share in Christ's sufferings, we may also share in his glory and in the incredible relationship with you. Amen.*

## **Live It Out This Week:**

Use the following as a daily prayer prompt to thank God and to lean into your relationship with him.

**Day 1:** There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Jesus has paid the price for your sin. You can rest in his work. You can confess your sin holding on to the promise of his redemption.

**Day 2:** You have the life-giving Spirit of God. God is present with you. God walks with you. Jesus is interceding in heaven on your behalf.

**Day 3:** You are free from the power of sin and death. It doesn't mean that they won't sting you, but they will not overcome you. Jesus has overcome the power of sin and death. Call on his name.

**Day 4:** We can come to God with anything and he will hear what we really need, the way a perfect parent would. He is our good Father.

**Day 5:** We are heirs of the promise of eternity. This life is not all there is. Live with an eternal perspective.

**Day 6:** We are no longer slaves to fear. Instead we are children of God and can call on our Heavenly Daddy.

**Day 7:** The mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. Let Jesus take every thought captive today and fill you with his life and his peace.

## Week 4: InCredible Responsibility

### Big Idea:

Where is Jesus leading? What's the payoff? Is it being a better person? Is it eternal life after you die? The resurrection of Jesus invites us to see that it is way more than either of those things. No one is willing to die for a lie. We aren't invited to either. Jesus is alive and that means we are invited into an incredible responsibility.

### Opening Prayer: [~1 minute]

Led by leader, apprentice, or volunteer from the group.

### Opening Questions: [~8 minutes]

What was one of your responsibilities around the house as a child? How were you at completing it?

What is your first reaction when you hear the word responsibility? In general, do you like being given responsibilities or do you shy away from them? Explain.

### Read and Discuss: [~50 Minutes]

*A group member(s) is encouraged to read the Scriptures aloud for all.*

#### Read Matthew 28:16-20

- List the parts of the call to action outlined by Jesus in verses 19-20.
- We were meant to represent Jesus here on this earth. God has a plan to redeem and restore all of humanity and He asks us to be a part of it. This plan is to be done through the power and authority of Jesus. How would you describe the difference between acting out of your own power and authority versus the power and authority of Jesus?
- Jesus assures us of his presence with us. How do you need to rely on his presence to do what he asks?

- Verse 17 notes that some doubted. What do you think of this command in light of the fact that some still doubted? Does this encourage you or challenge you?
- Sometimes the thought of making disciples of *all nations*, baptizing and teaching them *everything* Jesus commanded can feel overwhelming, but we can start somewhere. You likely know one person who does not know Jesus today. Consider someone who you know who is open to you, welcomes you, and is willing to hear what you have to say. Name that person and your relationship to them.
- Sometimes the thought of making disciples of all nations, and baptizing and teaching them everything Jesus commanded can feel overwhelming for any one person. But we could explain one thing we know about Jesus, and we likely know one person who does not know Jesus today. Consider someone who you know who is open to you, welcomes you, and is willing to hear what you have to say. Name that person and your relationship to them.
- What small step could you take with this person that might lead to you fulfilling this call to make disciples? (Note: think relationship building before speaking truth.)

## **Read Luke 24:44-52**

- Jesus explains that the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms all point to him! He reminds the disciples about what was said about his death and resurrection and how it will lead to preaching to all nations about repentance and the forgiveness of sins.
- The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to turn in repentance to Jesus, opens up our minds that we may understand the Scriptures, and clothes us with power from on high. Which of these do you want to ask for an extra measure of this week and why?

## Study Wrap Up:

- What have you learned about God as a result of these 4 sessions on the resurrection? What have you learned about yourself? Has this caused you to do anything differently? How does this cause you to praise God?

## Closing Prayer Activity: [~10 minutes]

Share prayer requests. The leader will open up a time of “popcorn” prayer for others to pray aloud for someone as the Spirit leads. You may also pray silently for them during this time. After a time of silence, the leader may close the group time with the following prayer:

*God, help us in all the ways we have lifted up to you today and in all the ways you know are still heavy on our hearts that were not shared here today. Continue to lead us in greater understanding of the Scriptures. Help us to know Jesus more and to become more like him. Send us your Holy Spirit so that we may live in your power and authority. Let us show your love to others in all we do and say. That your Name will be glorified. Amen.*

## Live It Out This Week:

Write the name of someone in your life who does not know Jesus on a sticky note, or notecard, or in a prayer appointment to yourself on your electronic calendar. Post it somewhere that you will see it often. Make a habit of praying for them. Pray also for yourself that God will fill you with the Holy Spirit to carry out the work he has given you to do.

# Appendix

## About Small Groups

Small groups are a place to grow in our relationship with God and others while learning to live out the WLC Mission, Vision, and Values. Groups generally meet weekly or twice a month in homes, café's or on the church campus. Typically 3-12+ people are in a group allowing for guided discussions, prayer, and care for one another.

## WLC Mission:

To follow Jesus Christ, grow as His disciples, serving and telling others, so that all may know Him as Savior and Lord.

## WLC Vision:

Multiplying Disciples. Transforming Lives.

## WLC Values:

### **Truth: Rooted in God's Word**

*"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness..."* – 2 Timothy 3:16

### **Each Person: Come as You Are**

*"The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* – 1 Samuel 16:7b

### **Relationships: Life is Better Together**

*"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another."* – 1 John 3:16

### **Our Community: Serving and Welcoming**

*"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* – Matthew 9:36

### **Compassionate Care: Bringing Hope to the Hurting**

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* – Matthew 11:28

To find out about joining a group or starting one, contact the Multi-Site Director of Small Groups, Diana Vander Pas, at [vanderpasd@woodburylutheran.org](mailto:vanderpasd@woodburylutheran.org).

# Sample Group Covenant

**Leader:** Jane Doe

**Apprentice Leader:** Joe Schmoe

## **Goals of our group:**

- To strengthen one another through practical study and discussion of the Scriptures
- To support one another through Christian fellowship and having fun
- To actively pray for one another
- To be bold witnesses for Christ through our conduct and actions
- To invite others to join us on this journey

**Frequency of meetings:** 2x/month on the second and fourth Mondays

**We will begin and end:** 7 p.m. and end no later than 9 p.m.

**We will meet at:** Each other's homes rotating among those who are willing to host

## **Attendance:**

We will make this group a priority in our schedules and schedule other things around it. We will make every effort to attend our group.

## **Confidentiality:**

Nothing of a personal nature that is shared in this group will be shared with anyone outside this group. What is said here—stays here.

## **Participation:**

We will be real and honest in our sharing with each other. We will not pretend to be something we are not. We will love, support, and encourage each other unconditionally no matter what is shared as God has done the same for us.

## **Strategy for inviting others to group:**

Partying (hosting a BBQ or Open House each quarter). Actively watching for others at church and in our neighborhood who could benefit from a group like this. Being intentional about introducing them to others in the group and inviting them to the quarterly party or to small group.

**Responsibilities for:**

- Hosting: Switching each month
- Snacks: Responsibility of host family
- Babysitting: Responsibility of families with children

These commitments are made to my Lord and to my fellow group members. Signed here: