

Living Word Small Group Study Guide

March 8-14, 2020

Sermon Series: This Changes Everything

Week Two: "From Mother to Follower"

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week's Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday's sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

Suggested Opening Prayer:

Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.

Almighty God, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, open our eyes, ears, hearts, and very lives to Your presence so that today we may worship and serve You in faithfulness, be blessing and healing reminders of Your love to all whose lives we touch. We offer our prayers in the name of Christ. Amen.

Sermon Series Theme:

Throughout the Gospels we find that when people encountered Jesus they were changed, and for the better. That same transformation is available to you, a change for the better, when you encounter Christ in your life.

This Week's Sermon Theme:

Mary goes from being the mother of Jesus to a follower of the Son of God. Are you able to step out of a position of leader to follower?

Sunday Scripture Reading: Acts 1:12-14 (A group member should read the passage aloud)

For Group Discussion:

What does the text actually SAY?

The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.

Who returns to Jerusalem at the beginning of the passage? You will need to look back at the beginning of the chapter to see who "they" are. (1:2)

Where had they been? (1:12)

Where did they go when they arrived? (1:13)

Which four disciples are listed as being present first? (1:13)

Which four disciples are listed next, in two sets of two? (1:13)

Which three disciples are listed last, individually? (1:13)

What were the disciples united in doing? (1:14)

What other two groups of people were present at this gathering? (1:14)

Which individual woman receives a prominent mention as being part of the gathering? (1:34)

What questions does the text raise for us?

The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Questions are suggestions, but open discussion is encouraged. These are "I wonder" questions that the group might want to pursue together.

Do you think the place they went was the same upper room where they had shared the Last Supper?

Why do you think there is an emphasis on the disciples being united in prayer?

What do you think is implied by the fact that the named disciples who were there were joined by "some women," and "Jesus' brothers"? Do you think they were also followers of Jesus at this point? Look ahead at verse 15 to help you decide.

Why do you think the author (Luke) makes the specific point that Jesus' mother, Mary, was there?

Why do you imagine these people, all of whom were relationally close to Jesus, chose to gather together like this?

How do you think Mary, especially, felt about taking on the role of a follower of Jesus, after having given birth to Him and raising him throughout infancy and childhood?

How do you think the others gathered in the room would have reacted to Mary's presence as another Christ-follower?

Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

Read also: Luke 21:37; Luke 19:29; Luke 24:49-51; Acts 1:9; Acts 9:37-39; Acts 20:8; Luke 6:13-16; Luke 8:1-3; Luke 23:54-56; Luke 24:1-10; Acts 2:17-20; Joel 2:28-32

The book of Acts is the second half of the two part work Luke-Acts. Luke refers to part one of his work (our Gospel of Luke) in Acts 1:1. From a literary perspective, Luke wants to show in part two of his work that the earliest followers of Jesus, empowered by the same Holy Spirit that dwelt in Jesus, went about doing the same kinds of actions, and proclaiming the same message, that Jesus had before His crucifixion, death, and resurrection.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each mention the Mount of Olives as the starting point for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, as the location for Jesus' teaching about the destruction of the Temple, and as the location of Jesus' arrest. Only Luke also says that it was the place where Jesus rested during His ministry of teaching in the Temple (Luke 21:37). Luke also says that Bethany is located at the Mount of Olives, and that Bethany is where Jesus was taken up into heaven (Luke 19:29 and Luke 24:50). In this first scene, then, in the book of Acts, it seems likely that the scene in Acts 1:1-11 takes place in Bethany. Compare Luke 24:50-51 and Acts 1:9. Jesus had asked the disciples to stay in the city until they had received the Holy Spirit (see Luke 24:49), and the proximity of the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem (a Sabbath day's journey) is meant to demonstrate to us that they have been obedient to Jesus' command.

It is possible that Luke does intend for the reader to have in mind the same upper room that the Last Supper was held in. He uses two different Greek words for this room but the two words are synonyms in ancient Greek. Acts 9:37-39 and 20:8 show us that these types of "upper rooms" were often used as places of large group assembly. The fact that the disciples, along with Jesus, had made arrangements with a particular homeowner in Jerusalem to assemble for the Passover meal in his upper room suggests that the same location is in mind here.

This is the second list of apostles Luke has provided, along with the one in Luke 6:13-16. The names are the same, although the order has varied. Of course, the glaring omission is Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus. The following passage in Acts shows the entire fledgling Christian community gathered for the purpose of choosing a replacement for Judas in the core leadership of twelve. One of the themes that dominated the Gospel of Luke was prayer – and by emphasizing the disciples' being gathered in prayer here, at the beginning of Acts, Luke continues the theme of prayer as a critical practice for guiding and unifying the community.

When Luke says the disciples were joined by "some women," he means the same women who had followed Jesus in His ministry (Luke 8:1-3), and who had witnessed His death (Luke 23:49), burial (Luke 23:54-56), and resurrection (Luke 24:1-10, 22). While the narratives in Luke's Gospel focus on the male disciples, it is clear from these passages, and the inclusion of these women here in Acts in the earliest assembly of Christ-followers, that they are included among those who will receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:17).

All of this brings us to Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is no accident that Luke explicitly identifies her here, at this gathering of followers. Luke has not mentioned Mary by name since the infancy narrative in Luke 1-2. Since Luke strives to draw specific parallels through the "Acts of the Apostles" in the book of Acts to the "Acts of Jesus" in the book of Luke, it is significant that just as Mary experiences the overshadowing presence of the Holy Spirit enabling her to give birth to Jesus, Mary also experiences the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit giving birth to the church! She was, at Jesus' conception, and is again, at the birth of the church, among the "sons and daughters of Israel" who were to have the Spirit poured out upon them according to the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32, which Peter quotes in Acts 2:17-20. Although this is also the last time Mary is directly mentioned in the Bible, it is clear from her presence here that Mary had made the transition, the transformation, from mother of Jesus to follower of the Risen Christ.

Final Thoughts for Discussion:

The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.

When have you had to step out of one role, and into a different role that required you to exercise humility?

Where is the line between a healthy sense of pride in one's accomplishments and a sense of humility?

What do you think biblical teaching would encourage you to do with your greatest gifts and skills?

Are there places in your life where it would be better for you to step out of a position of leadership to allow someone else to lead?

Where in your life are you able to demonstrate a willingness to step out of the position of a leader and into the position of a follower? Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to ensure that such a change really is in the best interest of God's Kingdom.

Suggested Closing Prayer:

Loving God, we ask You to give us a spirit of humility. Show us the places in our lives where we are called to follow, rather than to lead. By Your grace, remove our temptation to boast in our own accomplishments, and fill us with the awareness of what You have done for us. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.