

## “Do You Believe?”

John 11:1-46

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for March 31, 2024

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On Easter, a pastor or Christian teacher might say something like: “The resurrection was when Jesus proved that He had power over death.” And that statement is partially true. By rising from the dead, Jesus did demonstrate that He is in control over even death. But His own resurrection wasn’t the first time Jesus demonstrated this authority. In fact, He did it three times previously during His earthly ministry: once with a young girl, once with a young man at a funeral procession, and once with His good friend Lazarus. Stephen Davey focuses our attention on this latter demonstration in this special Easter message.

Some time ago, I purchased Chuck Swindoll’s book entitled, *The Darkness and the Dawn*.

The volume carefully walks the reader through the last few days of Christ’s life on earth, ending with a close look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave.

He ends his book by telling the true testimony of a woman whose life revolved around the truth of Easter—the truth of the resurrection of Christ.

This is the testimony of the last few months in a woman’s life named Edith Burns. She was a faithful Christian widow who lived in San Antonio, Texas. She was the patient of Dr. Will Phillips, a kind physician who also knew the Lord.

One morning, Dr. Phillips went to his office with a heavy heart, however, and it was because of Edith Burns and her cancer that she yet knew nothing about. When he walked into the waiting room, there sat elderly Edith with her big black Bible in her lap, earnestly talking to a young mother sitting beside her about Christ.

Edith Burns had the habit of introducing herself by saying, “Hello, my name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?” Then she would explain the meaning of Easter, and many times, people would place their faith in the living Lord.

Dr. Phillips walked into his office area and said good morning to his office nurse, Beverly. Beverly was another person who had met Edith in that same unusual way. She remembered that she was taking Edith's blood pressure one day and Edith had said to her, “My name is Edith Burns, do you believe in Easter?” Beverly had responded, “Why, yes I do.” “Well, what do you believe about Easter?” Edith asked. “Well, it's all about egg hunts and getting all dressed up and going to church and hearing nice music.”

Edith shared with Beverly about the true meaning of Christ's resurrection, and the true meaning behind what the world calls “Easter”; and she led that nurse to understand that Easter was all about a Savior, who came and died and rose again so that those who place their faith in Him and ask Him to forgive their sins can become children of God. Beverly prayed that same day for Jesus to save her and forgive her.

Well, on this particular morning, Dr. Phillips invited Edith back to his office. She sat down, looked at his face, and said, “Dr. Phillips why are you so sad?”

Dr. Phillips said gently, “Edith, your lab report came back, and it reveals you have advanced cancer. Edith, there's really nothing we can do, and you won't live much longer.”

“Why, Dr. Phillips, do you think God makes mistakes? You've just told me that I'm going to see my Lord Jesus; I'm going to see my husband, and many of my friends and family members again. You have just told me that I am going to celebrate Easter forever. And here you are having difficulty giving me my ticket!” Dr. Phillips thought to himself, “What a magnificent Christian this Edith Burns is.”

Within a few weeks, Edith had reached a point in her illness where she needed to be hospitalized. She was in a room that shared space with another patient; and she asked, “Dr. Will, would you make sure that they put women in this room who need to know about the Lord?”

He did just that, and one patient after another shared the room with Edith. She would always introduce herself the same way, “My name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?”

Several patients would enter that room as unbelievers and be discharged as believers. It wasn't long before everyone on that floor, from staff to patients, began calling her Edith Easter.

Everybody that is, except Phyllis Cross, the head nurse on the floor. Phyllis made it plain that she wanted nothing to do with Edith because, as she put it, “That woman is a religious nut.” Phyllis had been a nurse in an army hospital; she'd heard and seen it all before. She was hardened, cold and angry at life.

One morning the two nurses who were to attend to Edith were sick, so Phyllis Cross had to go in and administer the medicine. When she walked in Edith had a big smile on her face as she said, “Hi Phyllis, I want you to know that I’ve been praying for you.” She frowned, “Well, you can quit praying for me. It won’t work. I’m not interested at all.

“But I will pray,” Edith responded, “and I have asked God not to let me go home until you’ve become a part of the family of God.” “Then you will never die,” snapped Phyllis, “because that will never happen,” and she marched out of the room.

Every day when Phyllis Cross had to enter Edith’s room, she’d be greeted by that smile and Edith’s reminder that she was praying for her.

Finally, one day, Phyllis found herself being drawn to Edith’s room, almost like a magnet would draw iron. She sat down on the side of the bed and said, “Edith, you have asked everybody here the same question, ‘Do you believe in Easter?’ But you’ve never asked me that question—why not Edith?” “Well,” Edith said, “I wanted to many times, but I sensed the Lord wanting me to wait until you asked, and now you have.”

With that, Edith took her big black study Bible and shared with Phyllis Cross the account of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Then Edith said, “Phyllis, do you believe in Easter? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is alive and that He died for you, that He wants to live in you and through you and direct the steps of your life?” “Yes, Edith, I believe that now.” And right then and there Phyllis prayed and gave her heart and life to Jesus Christ.

A few days later, it was Easter Sunday. Phyllis stopped at the hospital flower shop; she wanted to take up some Easter lilies to Edith. When Phyllis walked into Edith’s room, Edith was lying still in her bed. She immediately knew, Edith Easter was gone.

Her big black Bible was open on her lap and her hand was resting on John 14 which read, “In my father’s house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” Phyllis lifted her face toward heaven, and with tears streaming down her cheeks, said, “Happy Easter, Edith. Happy Easter!”

Later, Phyllis walked quietly out of Edith’s room and noticed a table nearby where two student nurses were sitting. She walked over to them, smiled, and then said, “Hello, my name is Phyllis Cross. Do you believe in Easter?”

Adapted from [The Darkness and the Dawn](#) by Charles Swindoll (Word Publishing, Nashville), 2001, p. 334

I want to ask you this Easter Sunday morning that same question, “Do you believe in Easter?” You might say, “I’m here, aren’t I?” No, I mean, do you really believe?

The Biblical word for “believe” means “to put your faith in; to place your trust in.” In biblical terminology, it means “to entrust your life to the living Lord.” So, do you really believe in Him?

There’s a moment in biblical history when that same question is asked, and it was asked by none other than Jesus Christ.

He asked the question several days after a funeral. There was a family tomb nearby, a cave really, carved out of a hillside.

A stone had been rolled in front of this tomb and there were grieving people nearby who missed their friend and family member, their companion. He had been dead now for at least four days.

His name is Lazarus and his resurrection will provide people with an opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ and especially His claim to be more powerful than death.

***Let me invite you to that scene today; it’s found in John’s Gospel account in chapter 11.***

Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus have already sent to Jesus the message that Lazarus had been deathly ill. They never asked Jesus to come to Bethany, where they lived, because they just assumed He would.

But when Jesus heard the news, He waited until four days after Lazarus had died before showing up. It was the superstition of this day that a spirit hovered over the body for three days, able to re-enter and revive the deceased. For that reason, I believe Jesus waited four days. There would be no room for superstition here.

Let’s re-enter this scene here at **verse 20**:

*So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*

*John 11:20-21*

Now, in case you have the idea that Martha is the only sister upset with Jesus, look down at **verse 32**, where Mary says the same thing even more dramatically:

*Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*

*John 11:32*

They're all upset. And rightly so. You can you understand their agony and frustration and sorrow all mixed together; this didn't have to happen! “Lord, you are capable of healing every disease! Where were You?”

Have you ever said something like that to God? Lord, if you had done something:

- my spouse wouldn't have died.
- my business wouldn't have gone under.
- my health wouldn't have failed.
- my child would have lived.

Where were you?

That's basically what these women were asking, “Lord, Jerusalem is two miles away from here; you were 30 minutes away; we thought you loved us; where were You?”

Some of the hardest lessons for us to learn are:

- When God waits, He's still at work.
- When God seems absent, He's actually present.
- When God doesn't come through, He's got something better in mind.

We wonder where He is when He wants to show us *who* He is.

He wants to show us something more revealing about His nature and His wisdom and His sovereign purposes in our lives.

Which means that waiting *on* God and waiting *for* God is often the *will of* God.

And because of that, Jesus was never seen in a hurry.

The amazing thing about Jesus Christ is that He only had three years to reveal Himself and train His disciples and declare His kingdom message. He had 36 months, plus a few more, yet never once do you hear Him say to His disciples, “Hurry up! Hurry up or we're never going to make it.”

A friend of mine once said to me that he had been convicted recently by the thought that if someone asked his children what he most often said to them, they would answer, “Hurry up.”

Mary and Martha wanted Jesus to hurry over, because they wanted Jesus to demonstrate His power as a healer. But Jesus didn't want to heal Lazarus.

He wanted to reveal something greater; He wasn't just a healer, He was God come in the flesh, capable of breathing life back into someone who was already dead.

Let me tell you, beloved, Jesus Christ's most powerful demonstration of His deity did not take place in a synagogue, or on the stormy sea of Galilee, or at the wedding of Cana; it took place at a cemetery.

**Now verse 23:**

*Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”*

*John 11:23*

Now with that statement, she thinks Jesus is giving her an Old Testament prophecy pop quiz, asking her if she believes in the general resurrection that the Old Testament clearly anticipated.

**And she fully believes it; verse 24:**

*Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”*

*John 11:24*

She believes that God will demonstrate His power over the grave and bring about a general resurrection in the end. And He will!

She believes in that power! She just doesn't know the *Person* behind that *power*.

**So, Jesus makes the connection in verse 25:**

*Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”*

*John 11:25-26*

That is: they won't die forever, they're going to live forever instead.

Everyone dies, but there is life after death!

And that's good news because the entire human race is terminally ill—heading toward their death and appointment with God (**Hebrews 9:27**).

We are in the land of the dying.

Twenty-six people die every ten seconds on planet earth. That’s almost three people every second.

So, we need to reverse our thinking.

We’re not in the land of the living, heading for the land of the dying; we’re in the land of the dying, but through Christ, we’re heading for the land of the living.

Jesus effectively says to Martha, “I happen to be the Person behind the power over death and the grave; I will take you from the land of the dying into the heavenly land of the living.

**Now, with that, Jesus looks directly at Martha and asks this question at the end of verse 26:**

*“Do you believe this?”*

*John 11:26*

“Do you believe this Martha? Do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life.”

That’s another way of saying in our vernacular today, “Do you believe in the meaning of Easter?”

**Verse 27:**

*She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”*

*John 11:27*

But from what happens next, she still doesn’t understand what Jesus is saying about Himself.

This is true for Martha and Mary and others; it’s true for you and me today: we have the facts straight, but we need more understanding of who the Lord is, especially in times of sorrow.

Are you old enough in the faith to know by now that sorrow creates an environment for accelerated growth and depth?

The disciples are about to learn one of the most faith-deepening truths about Jesus Christ: Who He really is.

Now John’s Gospel takes us to the tomb of Lazarus in **verse 38:**

*Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of*

*the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.”*

*John 11:38-39*

Martha thinks that Jesus wants to go inside; He missed the funeral, so now He evidently wants to go inside and say goodbye to His friend.

Jesus doesn't want to say goodbye, He wants to say, “Welcome back!”

He doesn't want the stone rolled away so He can go in; He wants the stone rolled away so Lazarus can come out!

After praying to his Father, verse 43 says that:

*He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”*

*John 11:43*

Literally, “Lazarus ... here ... outside.”

Augustine was the first church leader to suggest that had Jesus not specified Lazarus by name, everyone in that cemetery, at that moment, would have come back to life.

“Just Lazarus; Lazarus: come out!”

**Verse 44:**

*The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”*

*John 11:44*

I can't even imagine all the miracles within this miracle of resurrection:

- His heart has been still for 96 hours, yet now, the heart suddenly springs to action, pumping blood that is also miraculously stabilized.
- For the brain to go without oxygen for four minutes is deadly serious; his brain has been without oxygen for four days, yet now he's immediately functional and alert.
- Muscles that had begun to atrophy without blood flow or movement were immediately capable of walking and balancing. In fact, since he's still wrapped with linen strips, he's really hopping out of the tomb.

Can you imagine the tears and laughter and joy, and total shock and astonishment.



Jesus Christ is more than a Healer!

If you go back to the latter part of **verse 41**, where Jesus is praying, you discover the motive behind this miracle. **Jesus prays:**

*“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”*

*John 11:41-42*

That they might believe.

We so often refer to the empty tomb of Jesus Christ as the living, ratifying proof of Christ’s divine power, and it certainly is!

However, in the mind of Christ, the empty tomb of Lazarus was proof enough that Jesus was believable.

That He was: the Christ—the anointed One, the Messiah—the promised One, the Son of God—the all-powerful One, and the personal Savior of all who believe in Easter—that is, in the power of Christ, who is the resurrection and the life.

And that’s exactly what happened to some here in verse 45:

*Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, ...*

*John 11:45*

They placed their faith in—they believed in—the Person of Christ; they completely entrusted their lives to the Savior.

Some truly believed.

What about you? Have you placed your faith in Christ? Have you entrusted your life to Him?

What are you waiting for? Why not today? Begin to truly believe!

So that you can join us in saying: *He is risen—He is risen indeed!*

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Access the complete archive of Stephen Davey’s teaching ministry at [wisdomonline.org](https://wisdomonline.org) or on the **Wisdom for the Heart** app.

# Study Guide

## Sermon Summary

In the Gospel of John, we find the story of Lazarus, a man who experienced death only to be called back to life by the voice of Jesus Christ. This account is not merely a historical event but a powerful demonstration of who Jesus is and what He offers to each one of us.

Jesus, upon hearing of Lazarus' illness, chose not to rush to his side but to wait. In His divine wisdom, He knew that there was a greater purpose at work than merely healing a sick man. His actions were always purposeful, always in line with the Father's will, and always for the greater revelation of His glory.

When Jesus finally arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days. Martha, Lazarus' sister, expressed her faith in the resurrection at the last day, but Jesus had something more immediate and personal in mind. He declared, "I am the resurrection and the life." This statement was not just a claim to power but an invitation to know Him personally as the source of eternal life.

Jesus commanded the stone to be rolled away and called Lazarus to come out. This miracle was a sign for all present that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, with power over life and death. It was a foretaste of His own resurrection, which would ratify His claims and secure our hope.

The resurrection of Lazarus prompted many to believe in Jesus, but it also serves as a challenge to us today. Do we truly believe in the power of Christ?

## Key Takeaways:

- God's timing is perfect, and His plans are often beyond our immediate understanding. This challenges us to reevaluate our own impatience and to learn to wait on God with expectant hope.
- The declaration "I am the resurrection and the life" is a personal invitation from Jesus to each of us. It is not enough to believe in His power; we must know and trust the Person behind that power. Our faith must be rooted in a relationship with Jesus, recognizing Him as the source of eternal life and the conqueror of death.
- The miracle at Lazarus' tomb was a sign for all to see that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of God with authority over life and death. This event points us to the ultimate victory of Jesus' own resurrection, which validates our faith and secures our eternal hope. As believers, we are called to live in the reality of this victory and to share it with others.

## Discussion Guide

### Bible Reading:

- John 11:25-26
- John 11:43-45

### Observation Questions:

1. What does Jesus claim about Himself in John 11:25-26, and what question does He ask Martha?
2. What command does Jesus give at Lazarus' tomb, and what was the immediate result as described in John 11:43-44?
3. What was the response of many of the Jews who witnessed the event at Lazarus' tomb according to John 11:45?

### Interpretation Questions:

1. In what way does Jesus' statement "I am the resurrection and the life" challenge our understanding of life and death?
2. How does the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection demonstrate Jesus' authority over life and death?
3. What implications does the belief of the Jews who witnessed Lazarus' resurrection have for understanding the nature of faith?

### Application Questions:

1. Reflect on a time when you had to wait for something significant. How can you use that experience to trust in God's timing and His greater purpose for your life?
2. Can you identify an area in your life where you need to move from simply believing in Jesus' power to developing a deeper relationship with Him? What is one step you can take this week to grow in that relationship?
3. When faced with a difficult situation, how can you remind yourself of Jesus' power over life and death, and how might this change your perspective?
4. Is there a "stone" in your life that needs to be rolled away to experience the fullness of life Jesus offers? What action can you take to address this obstacle?