

# ASSURANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

Believers find assurance for this life and the life to come through the resurrected Lord.

## JOHN 20:2-9; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-28

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20**

- **READ** John 19-20 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-58, First Thoughts (p. 54), and Understand the Context (pp. 54–55). Focus on how the passages provide assurance for this life and the life to come through Christ's resurrection.
- **STUDY** John 20:3-9 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, using Explore the Text (pp. 55–59). Try to notice details of familiar verses (such as the resurrection account in John 20) as if you were reading them for the first time. Pay close attention to words and phrases that might be unfamiliar or require extra explanation.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 60–61) and More Ideas (p. 62). Create a plan for warmly welcoming guests and following up with them in the coming weeks. Other ideas for customizing your session may be found online at [Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible/Adults/LeaderExtras](http://Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible/Adults/LeaderExtras).
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid ([MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible](http://MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible)).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides. Prepare to display the following Pack Item:  **PACK ITEM 6** (Poster: *Plan of Salvation*);  **PACK ITEM 10** (Handout: *Resurrection Appearances in Scripture*). For More Ideas (p. 62):  Pre-enlist a volunteer to share about how Jesus' resurrection has changed his or her life



## KEY DOCTRINE

### *The Kingdom*

The full consummation of the kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.

## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read “The Ark of the Covenant and the Empty Tomb” in the Spring 2018 issue of Biblical Illustrator. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).

# FIRST THOUGHTS

Life in the twenty-first century has proven to be anything but secure. Extremist attacks, escalating violence, and racial tensions have put many of us on edge. Many perceive life today to be more advanced than any time in history, yet we also seem to be more determined to find ways of using those advances in destructive ways.

(In PSG, p. 46) **Do you feel safer or less safe than you did ten years ago? Explain. How is a person’s sense of security related to what one is willing to trust for that security?**

In some ways, life in the first century was like our own, taking into account they did not have the advanced technology that we do. But various groups in society did not trust each other. The Roman army was often brutal. Justice was often meted out by corrupt emperors and governors. Life was not guaranteed safe and secure for first-century Christians. There was not much that anyone could really be certain of. In other words, human nature has been remarkably consistent when it comes to exploiting others.

Paul was well aware that life is unfair and that little if anything in this life has been guaranteed. That’s why he placed all his confidence in the resurrection of Jesus. In the resurrection, Paul found a sure foundation for this life, as well as for the life to come. He expressed this hope in terms of the future resurrection of those who have believed in Jesus. In particular, he wanted the new believers in Corinth to understand the crucial connection between Jesus’ resurrection and the coming resurrection of all those united with the Lord Jesus.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## JOHN 19–20; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-58

The Gospel of John’s account of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection provides a beautiful narrative to complement Paul’s discussion of the theological meaning of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. The core verses for this week’s lesson are taken from both inspired sources.

The following points briefly summarize John 19–20.

- *Jesus was flogged and mocked (19:1-5).* The Roman governor Pilate, believing Jesus to be innocent of a capital crime, tried to appease the bellowing crowd by resorting to torture.
- *Jesus was sentenced to death (19:6-16).* Pilate was cornered into agreeing to the crucifixion because the crowd threatened to report that he would not be “Caesar’s friend” if he did not do so.

- *Jesus was crucified (19:17-24)*. The placard above Jesus' head proclaimed that He was killed as "King of the Jews"; the soldiers fulfilled biblical prophecy by casting lots for His tunic.
- *Jesus made provision for His mother (19:25-27)*. The Lord entrusted Mary to John's care.
- *Jesus' work was finished (19:28-30)*. Jesus knew that everything was "finished," so He proclaimed "It is finished" and then He died.
- *Jesus' side was pierced (19:31-37)*. The blood-and-water flowing from Jesus' side proved that He was truly dead; yet in fulfillment of Scripture none of His bones was broken.
- *Jesus was buried (19:38-42)*. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus gave Jesus' body a hasty burial in a garden tomb near the place of crucifixion.
- *The empty tomb was seen by Mary, Peter, and John (20:1-10)*. On Easter morning, Jesus' tomb was found to be empty. That, plus the evidence of the grave clothes, persuaded John to believe.
- *Jesus was seen by Mary Magdalene (20:11-18)*. Mary mistook Jesus for the gardener, but she was persuaded that Jesus had risen when He called her name. She reported this to the disciples.
- *Jesus was seen by ten disciples (20:20-23)*. On Easter evening Jesus appeared behind locked doors. He gave them His peace and commissioned them to go out "as the Father has sent me."
- *Jesus was seen by Thomas, who believed (20:24-29)*. A week later Jesus appeared to eleven disciples, with Thomas present. Jesus invited him to touch His wounds. Thomas believed.
- *The purpose of John's Gospel is stated (20:30-31)*. John declared that he wrote so that people may believe Jesus is Messiah and Son of God and "may have life in his name."

The following points summarize 1 Corinthians 15.

- *Jesus' resurrection is essential to the gospel (15:1-11)*. The essence of the good news—the gospel—is the death and resurrection of Jesus. He was seen alive by many eyewitnesses.
- *Jesus' resurrection is essential to the faith (15:12-19)*. If Christ has not been raised, then trust in Jesus is worthless and those who hope in Him "are of all people most to be pitied."
- *Jesus' resurrection guarantees ours (15:20-28)*. Because of His resurrection, Jesus is the "firstfruits," with believers yet to be resurrected at His second coming.
- *Jesus' resurrection (and ours) is supported by Christian practice (15:29-34)*. Both baptism and the difficulties believers experience in this life have meaning only in the resurrection.
- *The nature of the resurrection body is discussed (15:35-49)*. Paul developed analogies to help us understand that the resurrection body will be incorruptible, glorious, and "a spiritual body."

## BIBLE SKILL

*Use a concordance and/or Bible dictionary (either print or on the Internet) to learn more about a feature of Israel's religious life.*

Use a concordance to find references to "firstfruits" in Scripture. What were the circumstances and regulations for offering firstfruits in the Old Testament? Identify how the New Testament writers took the Old Testament usage and adapted it to apply to believers.

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- *Those who will receive resurrection bodies will be utterly victorious (15:50-58).* When believers receive resurrection bodies, death will be abolished forever. So then, keep doing God's work.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### BELIEVING IN THE RESURRECTION (JOHN 20:3-9)

#### JOHN 20:3-8

<sup>3</sup> So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;

#### VERSES 3-5

In light of Mary's disturbing news that Jesus' body had been taken (v. 2), **Peter ... with the other disciple ... were going toward the tomb.** Neither Mary nor the men had any thought of the resurrection.

Throughout the Fourth Gospel, the writer, John, typically referred to himself in the third person. Here he called himself **the other disciple.** He and Peter were in a hurry. It was a mile or so from the place they were staying inside the city to the garden outside the walls where Jesus had been buried. Bible students have speculated about why it was important for John to mention that he **did outrun Peter.** Perhaps he was significantly younger. Perhaps he was more eager to discover for himself what Mary had seen. In any case, he .

We are to think of a stone burial chamber with a low entrance, requiring John to stoop in order to peer through the opening. There was enough morning light by now that he could make out **the linen cloths lying there,** which at the least indicated that the body of Jesus had not been stolen, either by robbers or friends (or enemies) of Jesus. It is not clear whether the body of the resurrected Jesus had passed through the cloths (like He would later pass through locked doors). It's possible that Jesus unwrapped the cloths from His body after He arose and left them behind.

#### VERSES 6-7

Think of Simon Peter huffing and puffing and out of breath, arriving a few minutes after John. He was not one to meekly pause at the doorway and observe. Ever the audacious disciple, he charged in and was confronted with the same evidence that John had been content to observe from the door: the tomb was empty and the **linen cloths** in which Jesus' body had been wrapped were **lying there.** John, writing perhaps fifty years later, remembered the odd placement of the wrapping that had been on Jesus' head. At the least the implication, again, is that no grave robbers had been there. They would have been in haste and would never have folded up the cloth. Perhaps Jesus Himself had taken off the cloth and neatly folded it, leaving it as evidence to be discovered and interpreted.

#### VERSE 8

Whenever we are faced with various bits of data, we are invited to draw a conclusion. What does the data mean? John provided a glimpse into his thoughts at that moment. Bolstered by Peter's audacity, he entered the tomb. First he **saw,** then he **believed.** He had sufficient evidence to interpret



the meaning. As far as the record of the Gospels shows, John was the first one to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead.

#### VERSE 9

Looking back—again, from a distance of fifty years or so—John provided additional reflection. Neither he nor Peter nor any of the disciples understood the **Scripture** about Jesus' resurrection. First they believed because they saw the evidence; only later did they recognize that it was in the prophecies all along (to say nothing of Jesus' own predictions). John did not specify which Scripture he had in mind. Bible students have suggested such passages as Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 53:10-23; and Hosea 6:2.

Further, John was emphasizing that the disciples did not invent the story of the resurrection because of any predetermined view of what the prophecies meant. The statement that Jesus **must rise** means that the resurrection was God's will. So fixed in the plan of God was the resurrection that He had revealed it to certain of the Old Testament prophets.

(In PSG, p. 50) **What is the connection between seeing and believing? How can a person believe in Jesus without fully understanding?**

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### MADE ALIVE THROUGH THE RESURRECTION (1 COR. 15:20-22)

#### VERSE 20

In the previous section (15:12-19), Paul had stated the horrible consequences if Christ's resurrection had not actually happened. Here he turned the corner. There was no need to dwell on that false scenario, because Christ has been raised. The contrasting term **but** marks the pivot in Paul's thinking. The verb he used, translated **has been raised**, is a form that implies a completed action with ongoing results. The resurrection continues!

The term **firstfruits** was taken from the history of the Jewish people. It referred to the first sample of agricultural produce which indicated the nature of the entire harvest that was soon to follow. Among the offerings required by the law was the firstfruits of grain (Ex. 23:19; Lev. 23:10). The firstfruits was evidence of the rest of the harvest, as well as a symbol that the entire harvest was consecrated to the Lord. **Fallen asleep** is a biblical metaphor for death, indicating that death is a temporary condition for believers (1 Thess. 4:13). In this verse we see that Christ's resurrection, like the offering of the firstfruits, points to the entire "crop" of believers receiving eternal life, the opposite of death.

#### VERSE 21

Paul now moved to a slightly different understanding of the impact of Jesus' resurrection. He developed the concept of the first instance of a particular event as the fountainhead from which a like event issues for

#### JOHN 20:9

<sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

#### 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20

<sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

#### 1 CORINTHIANS 15:21

<sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

a later group. Thus, he considered the impact of Adam's act of sin, which resulted in **death** to all those humans who came after our first ancestor (Gen. 3:17-19). But now there has appeared in history another human being who has acted in such a way as also to become a fountainhead. Christ was **a man** just as Adam was. He too achieved something with phenomenal impact on those who followed Him, just as Adam did. He brings about **the resurrection of the dead** for all who will be raised to eternal life. One of the recurring themes in Paul's writings is that Christ's experiences on earth were much more than His experiences as an individual. What happened to Him in both His death and His resurrection also happens to all who are united to Him by faith.

### 1 CORINTHIANS 15:22

<sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

#### VERSE 22

Paul's parallel between Adam and Christ is carefully drawn out (*as in Adam ... so also in Christ*). Adam's action led to death for all those identified with him—his biological descendants. Christ's resurrection leads to resurrection life for all those identified with Him—those who are His spiritual descendants. Paul was not teaching that every human being will be **made alive**, because only those joined to Him by faith—the “in Christ” group—will receive resurrection life (John 5:25; 1 Thess. 4:16-17; Rev. 20:6). Later on, when Paul wrote the Letter to the Romans, he expanded his thinking about the parallel between Adam and Christ (Rom. 5:12-21).

(In PSG, p. 51) **What do these verses reveal about the results of Jesus' resurrection? How do the results identified by Paul give hope? Hope for what?**

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### 1 CORINTHIANS 15:23-24

<sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

### FUTURE FOUND IN THE RESURRECTION (1 COR. 15:23-28)

#### VERSES 23-24

Just as a harvest of grain occurs in a certain order (firstfruits, then the rest), so it is with resurrection to eternal life. First is **Christ the firstfruits**. Although there had been others who had been raised prior to Jesus' resurrection, He was the first to be raised never to die again. Second is the group of believers that will be raised afterward at His coming. Again, note that not every human being will be raised; only **those who belong to Christ**.

Paul was not interested in developing a complete scenario for events related to Jesus' return, the last judgment, and so on. His mind went immediately from the second coming to **the end**. The culmination of all things is for Christ the Lord to acknowledge that all His authority belongs to God the Father. The Father has entrusted to the Son the responsibility to abolish **every rule and every authority and power** that would oppose Him (Phil. 2:9-11). When that is accomplished, He will hand over the kingdom of God. There will then be no more opposition.

## VERSES 25-28

Paul offered a tantalizing glimpse of the rule of Christ after the resurrection of believers that focuses on His subduing all opposing forces. As we observed in John 20:9, Jesus “must rise,” that is, His resurrection was God’s determined will. Paul used the same verb form that John had used, **he must reign**. It is the heavenly Father’s plan, which cannot be thwarted, that God will put **all his enemies under his feet**. The image, based on Psalm 110:1, of a general-king forcing his enemies to grovel before him, implies complete conquest.

Yet Christ has already begun to rule over His enemies. Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:20-21 that Jesus began to exercise His rule at the resurrection. Death began to be defeated when it lost its grip on Jesus. When Christ returns and His people are raised, death will be abolished. If death became the first enemy of humanity, brought about by human sin, then death at the end will be **the last enemy to be destroyed** (1 Cor. 15:54-55; Heb. 2:14-15; Rev. 20:13-14; 21:4).

Paul returned to the language of Psalm 110:1. It’s not just that this Psalm pictures a victorious king; it’s that the King in mind is the Messiah, the One to whom **God has put all things in subjection under his feet**. The victory of Christ has already begun to be expressed, even though His rule has not yet been fully manifested. Paul clarified the obvious that the heavenly Father has not placed Himself in subjection to the resurrected, messianic King. All things, the Father excepted, have been placed under the Son.

## No more will there ever be an enemy—death or the devil—rising to challenge God.

When the glorious splendor of Christ’s rule has been fully manifested, when at last death has been destroyed, **when all things are subjected to him**, then Jesus will demonstrate that He is subject to the heavenly Father. Paul was not in any way implying that the Son is inferior to the Father. The Persons of the Trinity are equal in essence and glory. The subordination Paul spoke about was one of role or function. The ultimate end—goal, consummation—of all things is that the triune God **may be all in all**. This does not mean that God will be everything and that everything will be God (as taught in some religions). Rather, God’s excellence and superior authority over all things will be eternally exercised. No more will there ever be an enemy—death or the devil—rising to challenge God.

**How should being sure of the coming resurrection affect our daily lives?**

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## 1 CORINTHIANS 15:25-28

<sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. <sup>28</sup> When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**WELCOME:** In advance, write the following on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper: “Stormy Forecast,” “Bombing,” “Flat Tire,” and “Identity Theft.” As group members arrive, direct attention to the list and lead individuals to reflect on how they feel when reading the posted words. Begin the session by inviting volunteers to name emotions that accompany the phrases. Write responses on a whiteboard or paper. Comment that like today, life was not guaranteed as safe and secure for first-century Christians. Summarize the second paragraph under First Thoughts from your personal study (p. 54).

**DISCUSS:** *Do you feel safer or less safe than you did ten years ago? Explain. How is a person’s sense of security related to what one is willing to trust for that security?* (PSG, p. 46)

**TRANSITION:** *Paul was well aware that life is unfair and little, if anything, in this life has been guaranteed. That’s why he placed all his confidence in the resurrection of Jesus. Explain that Paul wanted the new believers in Corinth to understand the crucial connection between Jesus’ resurrection and the coming resurrection of all those united with the Lord Jesus.*

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**EXPLAIN:** Provide context by explaining that Mary Magdalene, having seen the empty tomb, informed Peter and John that Jesus’ body was missing.

**READ:** As a volunteer reads aloud John 20:3-9, encourage the group to consider the emotions evoked by this passage. Invite volunteers to share responses.

**GUIDE:** Focus on the significance of the linen cloths in verses 5-7. Use the comments under Verses 5-7 (PSG, p. 49) to provide more information. Ask: *How do the details included by John give credence to his account of Jesus’ resurrection? Which detail carries the greatest weight or significance for you?* (PSG, p. 49)

**STUDY:** Lead the group to search for the action words (verbs) in the passage. Invite the group to name the actions in the order John recorded them.

**DISCUSS:** *What is the connection between seeing and believing? How can a person believe in Jesus without fully understanding?* (PSG, p. 50)

**TRANSITION:** Call attention to **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Resurrection Appearances in Scripture*), and say: *The resurrection of Jesus grounds our faith, undergirds our mission, and establishes our hope in the life to come. In nearly all of his letters found in the New Testament, Paul had something to say about the resurrection of Jesus and its impact upon our lives.*

**READ:** Direct the group to read silently 1 Corinthians 15:20-22, looking for the references to Jesus’ death and resurrection.

**CLARIFY:** Call attention to the word “firstfruits” (v. 20). Ask the group to locate additional information about firstfruits under Verse 20 (PSG, pp. 50–51).



**GUIDE:** Lead the group to locate the bad news (Adam's sin/death) and good news (Christ's resurrection/eternal life) in this passage.

**EMPHASIZE:** *Paul proclaimed that since death entered the world through one man (Adam), eternal life could be granted through one man as well (the resurrected Christ). Believers find true life through faith in Jesus Christ.*

**DISCUSS:** *What do these verses reveal about the results of Jesus' resurrection? How do the results identified by Paul give hope? Hope for what?* (PSG, p. 51)

**READ:** Direct the group to listen for a sequence of activities as you read aloud 1 Corinthians 15:23-28. Note that Paul explained, in due time, believers would experience resurrection and the eternal reign of Christ. Every generation of Christians has prayed and longed for the return of Christ in its time.

**DISCOVER:** Create three teams (an individual can be a team). Assign to each team one of the following Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 15:24; 1 Corinthians 15:25-27; and 1 Corinthians 15:28. Direct each team to use information under Verses 24-28 (PSG, pp. 52-53) to locate profound activities that occur as a result of Christ's victorious resurrection and triumphant return. After allowing each team to work, call for a volunteer from each team to share.

**DISCUSS:** *How does the promised return of Christ give strength when facing challenges in this life? How can you demonstrate the hope you have in Christ?* (PSG, p. 53)

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**REVIEW:** Call attention to the summary statement under the session title on page 46 of the PSG: *Believers find assurance for this life and the life to come through the resurrected Lord.* Call for volunteers to suggest ways this truth is demonstrated in today's Scripture passages.

**TESTIFY:** Encourage the group to consider their responses to the questions under In My Context (PSG, p. 54). Focus on second question set: *Reflect on the time when you first placed your trust in Jesus. (If you have not done so, review the information on the inside front cover to find out more about how you can do this.) With whom can you share about your salvation this week?* Invite volunteers to briefly share their experience with the group.

**GUIDE:** Display **Pack Item 6** (Poster: *Plan of Salvation*). Use the poster as a guide for reviewing the key elements of praying to receive Christ as Lord and Savior. You may also direct attention to the information on the inside front cover for those who are not yet Christians and want to know more.

**MEMORIZE:** Call attention to 1 Corinthians 15:20, the memory verse for this session. Challenge everyone to memorize the verse as a way of remembering the assurance of Christ's resurrection.

**PRAY:** Lead the group in a sentence prayer, inviting volunteers to pray a sentence praising God for the assurance of the resurrection. Close the prayer by thanking God for His assurance and praying for the group as they share the good news of Christ with others in the coming week.



## PRACTICE

- What does Easter mean to you? Reflect on your most memorable celebration of this holy day. How do you personally stay focused on Christ's resurrection?
- Pray for anyone in your group who has not yet accepted Christ and for the group as individuals share their faith.
- Follow up on guests, and invite them to be present for the next session.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As the group arrives, read aloud each of the following and ask how we can be assured it is true. Suggested responses are in parentheses following the word or phrase. Birth (birth certificate), ownership of vehicle (title), completion of an educational program or degree (diploma or certificate), residency (utility bill or tax receipt), membership in an organization (membership card). Then read aloud Jesus' resurrection and await responses. After group has suggested responses, direct attention to the session title (Assurance of the Resurrection). Explain that today's study focuses on how believers find assurance for this life and the life to come through the resurrected Lord.

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To illustrate John 20:3-9, enlist a volunteer to dramatically read aloud John 20:3-9 as two additional volunteers role-play Peter and John. Encourage the volunteers to communicate the emotion of the experience.
- To supplement the discussion of 1 Corinthians 15:20-22, pre-enlist a volunteer to complete the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 50) and share information about firstfruits with the group.
- To enhance the study of 1 Corinthians 15:23-28, encourage the group to list some benefits of the resurrection in a believer's life. Allow time for a pre-enlisted volunteer to explain how Jesus' resurrection has changed his or her life.

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Lead in a discussion of the first question set to conclude the session (PSG, p. 54): *As a group, discuss how the church can bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus throughout the year, beyond the emphasis of Easter. How can your group lead the way?* Select at least one idea for implementation; form a team of volunteers to make plans.

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Celebrate the assurance of Christ's resurrection by leading the group in singing "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today," by Charles Wesley, or playing a recording of the song.