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## Day 1

**Learn:** Prayerfully read John 11.1-16. This Bethany [11.1] was a village less than two miles from Jerusalem [11.18], on the other side of the Mount of Olives. This is the first we have heard of this family in this gospel [11.2]; the scene with Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet [11.2] is yet to come [12.3]; but we see that all three siblings were close friends with Jesus [11.3, 5]. Jesus had real friendships and loved people on a personal level. The Greek word for "sir" is the same as for "lord"; Mary and Martha would have spoken and written in Aramaic [similar to Hebrew], so probably they called Jesus "Rabbi" [as the other disciples did in 11.8] to acknowledge Jesus as their teacher [see 11.28], and this was translated by John into the Greek word for "sir" or "lord" [11.3, 21, 27, 32, 34, 39].

Jesus knew that the end result would reveal the glory of God the Father and himself as the Son [11.4]. The Greek text hints that 11.4 and 11.5 are related, as are 11.5 and 11.6. It is because of his love for the family and to bring about the result of his glory, that Jesus responded to Lazarus' sickness by remaining where he was [11.6]. Rather than going to heal Lazarus, he deliberately waited until Lazarus was dead [11.13-14] before leaving. The text makes clear this was because he loved them! What will happen will strengthen their faith.

The disciples were not happy about heading back to Judea, the region of Bethany and Jerusalem, because the religious leaders there had been trying to kill Jesus [11.7-8; referring to 10.31, 39]. Jesus replied they had to do the work of God while he was there [11.9-10]. Without accurate watches or clocks, the custom was to divide the daylight into twelve hours which would vary in length with the change in seasons. People worked during daylight. Jesus previously said they must do the work of God the Father while he, the light of the world, was with them [9.4-5]. Just as with Lazarus' family, Jesus knew his miracle would strengthen the faith of the disciples who were with him [11.15]. Showing devotion in the face of fear, Thomas said the disciples should go and die with Jesus [11.16]. Thomas believed in Jesus as the Christ, even if he later would have doubts about Jesus' own resurrection [20.24-28].

**Reflect:** Sometimes events that make us grieve are actually for our own benefit. This was a traumatic event, but Jesus knew it would end up a blessing for Lazarus, his sisters, the other disciples, and even some of the crowd at the tomb. Does this cause you to change your perspective on God's love when you suffer? Can you see how hard times in your life have resulted in benefit down the road? What does this say about God's priorities regarding your happiness and your spiritual health? How should that change your perspective on things?

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## Day 2

**Learn:** Prayerfully read John 11.17-27. Jesus set out for Bethany when Lazarus died [11.7, 14], so it took four days to arrive [11.17], showing he was quite far away. Jesus postponed leaving until Lazarus had died, to show he was not rushing to heal him, and to arrive four days later when decomposition would be obvious and nobody could wonder if Lazarus had not been dead. Two centuries later, rabbinic belief would be that the soul hovered near the body for three days; if this belief existed in Jesus' day, it would be another reason to wait for the fourth day, to prove this was the most powerful act of God possible. It appears that many Judeans from the Jerusalem area had come to mourn with the family [11.18-19], suggesting the family was prominent in society.

Some scholars see Martha's comment as a polite rebuke [11.21], that Jesus should have been there to heal her brother [they had called for him in 11.3]; others see it as a statement of grief and faith in what Jesus could have done. Martha will be surprised by the immediate resurrection of Lazarus [11.39], so her words here [11.22] are an expression not of this expectation, but of continued confidence in Jesus despite her grief over her brother's untimely death. When Jesus promised Lazarus would rise from the dead [11.23], Martha naturally took this to refer to the resurrection of all the faithful on the last day [11.24], which was believed by most Jews, including the Pharisees. Jesus then made an extraordinary statement and asked whether Martha could believe that [11.25-26]. One thing Jesus said was that anyone believing in him – even if s/he should physically die – would live: this is the promise of resurrection to physical life at the end. Another thing Jesus said was that everyone who is spiritually living and believing in him certainly will not spiritually die ever. To be spiritually living is to have an internal change from spiritual death to life made by God, to be believing is the outward change we make in response; Jesus says those who experience these will never spiritually die. A third thing Jesus said was that he was the resurrection and the life, that he was the only source of these two blessings. This differed from the teaching of the Rabbis, and Jesus wanted to know if Martha believed not only that Lazarus would be resurrected, but that Jesus alone could resurrect him.

**Reflect:** Martha said she had believed that Jesus was the Christ [Messiah] and Son of God, the one prophesied to come into the world as the savior from God the Father [11.27]. It is because she knows who he is that she can believe in his promises. Prayerfully consider those promises for yourself: spiritual life that will never end; physical resurrection to new physical life on the new Earth at the end of time; that only Jesus can provide this and he does. Can you believe these things? Why or why not? How would you explain your confidence to someone else?

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### **Day 3**

**Learn:** Prayerfully read John 11.28-37. After her discussion with Jesus, Martha offered Mary the same opportunity [11.28], but when Mary went to Jesus [11.29-30], many of her friends followed, thinking she was heading for the grave [11.31]. Mary was more dramatic, perhaps more emotional, than Martha, but she expressed her confidence in Jesus with almost the same words [11.32]. When Jesus observed Mary and her friends weeping before him, he was *deeply moved* in spirit and himself *unsettled emotionally* [11.33]. Some scholars take the first verb to mean Jesus was outraged, while others take it to mean he was deeply moved or saddened. Looking at historical uses of the verb, when it described an action toward someone else, it revealed anger, rebuking or censuring someone; but when it described a state of being, it meant being deeply moved. The second verb is what John used to describe how Jesus felt about being betrayed by Judas [13.21] and facing his death to come [12.27]. What so disturbed Jesus? Perhaps it was the pressing reality of the work of evil, visible in death and grief; perhaps it was seeing actions that went past grief to despair, indicating a lack of confidence in God's scriptural promise of resurrection. In that regard, it was Jewish custom for even the poor to hire two flute players and a professional wailing woman for the time of grieving, and this family was more prominent, so there would have been a lot of commotion to their grieving, and maybe the weeping was excessive. When Jesus wept at the tomb [11.35], John used a different verb, one that means shedding tears, not issuing loud cries of lament. Jesus would not weep out of grief for Lazarus, since he was about to resurrect him, but perhaps this was part of his response to being so deeply moved and troubled.

**Reflect:** How do you react to the sinfulness of other people? Jesus could be upset at the effects of sin and yet weep for those plagued with it. What can you learn from this? How *should* you react to the sinfulness of people around you? Jesus wept for them in their unbelief and suffering, even though it frustrated him. Grief without outrage is mere sentiment, while outrage without grief hardens us into self-righteous arrogance. Prayerfully reflect on that.

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### **Day 4**

**Learn:** Prayerfully read John 11.38-46. Many Jewish graves were carved out of the rock, with a stone at the entrance to keep animals out [11.38]. Lazarus had really been dead for four days, so Martha was alarmed at the thought of opening the grave and offending everyone with the stench of decomposition [11.39]. This shows Lazarus was not embalmed, just wrapped with spices. A person bound like this could hop and shuffle, but not walk [11.44]. What Jesus said to Martha [11.40] either referred to something not recorded or was a summary of their discussion [11.23-26], in that to raise to life was a revelatory act, a manifestation of the glory of God in Christ. Jesus' prayer [11.41] indicated he already had prayed for Lazarus's life to be restored [11.11 indicates Jesus already knew about the resurrection to come]. Jesus used this prayer to draw listeners to truth, so they could believe [11.42]. When Jesus called to Lazarus, Lazarus was restored to life and obediently came out of the tomb [11.43-44]!

**Reflect:** This miracle was a sign of Jesus' identity and power, but also a sign of his resurrection to come which would be a promise of ours at the end. As a result, many believed in Jesus, while others betrayed him to the Pharisees [11.45-46]. What is your reaction? This is perhaps Jesus' greatest miracle prior to his own resurrection, to call a dead fellow back to life; does this inspire faith in you? What does it tell you about Jesus and about your future?

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### **Day 5**

**Learn/Reflect:** The prophet Daniel predicted the captivity of Israel under four Gentile nations, until God's kingdom would come through the "Son of Man," who would be killed by the fourth nation but would rule Israel and conquer the nations. Daniel predicted God's people rising to everlasting life. Raising Lazarus, Jesus identified himself as the prophesied Son of Man through whom God would resurrect the dead, end Gentile rule, and establish his kingdom. This strengthened the disciples' faith in him and in the promise of resurrection. How was this a "sign" pointing back to prophecy to help identify who Jesus was? How was it a "sign" pointing forward to what he would do?