



from the Market Harborough Methodist Circuit

Session 1.4: NEW LIFE

INTRODUCTION: THINKING ABOUT NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Our lives can be changed for the better through faith in the risen Lord Jesus – this is part of the good news ('gospel') we proclaim as Christians. This session begins to explore what that means for us. Over the next few sessions, we will be looking at different aspects of what Jesus has done for us in his death and resurrection. We'll be thinking about *forgiveness*, *eternal life*, and then a whole series on *the Holy Spirit* and finding God's help to live as disciples of Jesus. This session is a starter for looking at what we call '**New life in Christ**', or, as the Bible sometimes simply calls it: '*Life*'. It is about knowing God's love and forgiveness, and about being assured that this grace carries us into eternal life with God. But it's not *only* about forgiveness from the past and hope for the future. New life in Christ is about *now*. How are things different in our present lives because of our relationship with Jesus?

Near the end of his gospel, St. John wrote: *'these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have **life** in his name.'* (John 20:31).

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

There's nothing to bring, nothing to find, nothing to do.

Except... if you want to... Take a walk. Hear the birds singing. Notice the leaves or blossom growing on the trees. Breathe the fresh air. Then, imagine God is walking with you, like in the Garden of Eden with Eve and Adam, or in the Easter Garden, where Jesus met Mary Magdalene. As God / Jesus / the Spirit walks with you, try to be at ease with God's presence. Be thankful for the moment. No need for lists of things to pray for, no need for big conversations. As you walk in God's presence, just be thankful, and know God's peace.

Group leaders: you might want to prepare a **plant pot with some soil** and some **seeds** to plant, which will bloom in the summer. These will be used in the Activity later.

STARTING THE SESSION: OPENING PRAYER

God of new life,
after fear, betrayal and suffering,
we come to a new season:

Christ is risen!

You have been with us through the dark times,
and you are with us in the new life you give us.

Although we cannot be free of suffering in this world,
help us to know your peace, hope and joy as we walk with you.
May you bless this time together,
in the name of Jesus our risen Lord. Amen.

FINDING OUR ROOTS

Share with your group or just think by yourself:

What are the signs in your life that you are a follower of Jesus?

What are the signs that Jesus is alive in you or around you?

How does your relationship with God make a difference to you?

READING THE SCRIPTURES (1)

In this session, we will be exploring two of the Easter resurrection stories from John's Gospel. These are very famous stories usually read on Easter Day or the following Sunday.

In the first, we meet Mary Magdalene, whose part in the gospel story has been quite limited up to now. She is mentioned as one of the significant women who supported Jesus' ministry. But when it comes to the Easter stories, Mary is a key player: All four gospels record that she was a key witness to Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. We do not know much about Mary's life, other than she had had a troubled past – Luke tells us that Jesus had healed her of 'seven demons' (Luke 8, verse 2). She is not to be confused with Mary of Bethany (sister of Martha), and please note that *nowhere* in the Bible does it say that she was ever a prostitute.

According to John, after Mary had gone to the tomb to find the huge stone had been rolled away, she went to find Peter and another disciple, who both ran to the tomb and found the linen burial cloths lying there, with the head-cloth rolled up. These disciples returned home without meeting anyone, but Mary stayed...

John 20: verses 11-18 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and

said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher).
¹⁷ Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

DIGGING DEEPER (1)

What do you make of this part of the story?

How would Mary be feeling...

- *first, as she went to the tomb that morning?*
- *and second, as they found the wrappings but no body?*

Why might Mary have failed to recognise Jesus at first?

What helped her to see him more clearly?

Jesus called her by name. He is not a distant god, nor simply a means of getting to heaven. Relationship matters to Jesus. He is the Lord, and he is also a friend.

What do you make of Jesus' words: 'Do not hold on to me... I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'?

The risen Jesus was to become the ascended Lord of the world – reigning in heaven – and he offers us the chance to know God as '**Father**' and '**God**'. *What difference does this make to you?*

Does your relationship with God, through Jesus, give you a new or different perspective on the world?

Have you had times of seeing through the tears to renewed hope or joy? Have you known renewed strength or peace after hard times?

Mary's experience of Jesus led her to be the first evangelist of the Easter good news – that the crucified Jesus is risen. *What good news about God do you have to share?*

LISTEN TO A SONG

All Things New – song by Hillsong Worship

Available on YouTube using the link below:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wz45cFnr66A>

READING THE SCRIPTURES (2)

John's Gospel moves next to the evening of that first Easter Day...

John 20: verses 19-31 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not

doubt but believe.’ ²⁸ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ ²⁹ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

DIGGING DEEPER (2)

What do you make of this part of the story?

When Jesus met with ten of the disciples, he offered them **peace**, and he showed them his wounds – the real scars of the crucifixion – revealing to them the **resurrection life** he had been given. Jesus had gone all the way through death into this resurrection life. But the **new life** he offered them was different. Resurrection would come later, after death. Now, he offered them new life through the Holy Spirit. As part of this, he gave them the authority **to forgive sins**. And they found that their fear was replaced with **joy**. Peace, forgiving others, and joy are some of the signs of the new life in Christ.

The word ‘believe’ is used five times in this passage. In the Greek language, the words *belief*, *faith* and *trust* are pretty much the same. *What does it mean to you to ‘believe’ in Jesus?*

Thomas earned the nickname ‘Doubting Thomas’ because of this episode. But he didn’t doubt Jesus; he doubted the testimony of his friends. He wanted to experience it for himself. *Can you relate to Thomas? How important is it for you to actually experience something yourself? How do you feel when others have experience of God that seems missing from your life?*

Jesus commended those who ‘believe’ without having seen him. That’s most of us! *Where does our belief come from? How much is based on experience of God, and how much on trust?*

What would you like to **experience** more in your Christian life? And where would you like to be able to **trust** more? God is known to give to those who ask for such things.

ACTIVITY: PLANTING SEEDS

In our 'new life' through Jesus, we are never the finished article. Instead, we grow and develop in our relationship with God. Sometimes we can think others are progressing better in their faith, or know Jesus better. Sometimes, groups of Christians can make others feel inferior. But the Lord Jesus is interested in each one of us: he calls us by name – not to be competition, but to support one another as we grow.

If you have a **plant pot, some soil and some seeds**, use this space to let everyone plant a seed, as a sign of their growing relationship with God. One person might like to take responsibility for watering and looking after the plants as they grow, and could share the progress over time. *(Remember: your ability to grow plants is not a sign of your relationship with God! If they fail to grow, don't worry!)*

A SUMMING-UP PRAYER (based on Ephesians 3: 14-21)

Father God,
who calls us, and gives us new life in Christ,
we bow on our knees before you and pray that,
according to the riches of your glory and through your Spirit,
we may be inwardly strengthened by your power;
and that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith,
as we are being rooted and grounded in love.
We pray that, with all your people, we may come to understand
the breadth and length and height and depth of your love
which reaches far beyond our knowledge,
and be filled with all the fullness of God.
Lord, you are at work in us
and, as we grow, you are able to accomplish in us
abundantly more than we can ask or imagine.
To you be all glory, to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

PRAYING TOGETHER

- Bring to God any prayers for the group, or for the church;
- Pray with joy for anything that you want to give thanks for;
- Thank God for the blessings of knowing Jesus, and the signs of new life you can see;
- Pray for those who are suffering in our world or community;
- You might like to **say the Lord's Prayer to finish.**

MORE TO EXPLORE

St. Paul has many things to say about the new life we find through Christ. You might like to read and reflect on some of these passages, or talk them through with a friend:

Romans chapter 6: verses 1-11

Ephesians chapter 4

Colossians chapter 3: 1-17

WHAT IS GOOD SOIL?

When Jesus told the Parable of the Sower, he indicated that for the seeds of God's Kingdom to take root, grow strong and bear fruit, they needed to be planted in **good soil**. Christians have always realised that in order to grow in faith that is lasting and strong, we need to encourage and support one another, and find a place or a pattern that enables us to go deeper, ask questions and pray together, learning from each other and the traditions of the church. We hope that these '**Good Soil**' resources will help and equip you to grow and be nurtured in faith, as part of the family of the church, in addition to weekly worship. They are meant to be flexible and optional, and to work in small groups, fellowship groups, families, with a friend, or can also be used as individual personal devotions. You do not need to use everything suggested. As you choose what is right for you, know that God is with you.

COMING UP: SESSION 1.5: FORGIVENESS

SESSION 1.6: ETERNAL LIFE