



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is the seventh and final sign of Jesus that John records.¹ It is the climactic sign because it illustrates beyond doubt Jesus' power to triumph over death. Many times in John's gospel, Jesus revealed His life-giving power:

- He said that only through believing in Him can we have eternal life (John 3:15–16).
- He offered the water of life (4:14; 7:37–38).
- He saved the life of the royal official's son (4:46–54).
- He offered Himself as the Bread of Life (6:33, 35, 47–48, 53–58).
- He declared Himself as the Light of the World who grants us the light of life (8:12).
- As the living Door, He opened the way to abundant, eternal life (10:7–10).

All that Jesus said and did culminated in His most spectacular miracle in John 11, which displayed His crowning claim: "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25).

Raising Lazarus not only proved Jesus' power, it prefigured His own approaching death and resurrection and opened the door to the Passion Week. "The raising of Lazarus leads directly to the death of Jesus," explains commentator Leslie Newbigin.

It is at the cost of life that he gives life. The "abundant life" that he gives is life through death. He is the life only because he is the resurrection from the death (v. 25). It is in this sense that the illness of Lazarus is for the glory of God (v. 4).²

Quotable

*My friend,
there is a place
in the beloved
family of God
for tears.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



With this big picture in mind, let's enter the text fully aware of the significance of what Jesus was foreshadowing when, standing at Lazarus' tomb, He commanded, "Roll the stone aside" (John 11:39).



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

We may deny death's reality, get angry about it, feel depressed, or even try to bargain with God to avoid it. Nevertheless, death awaits us all. It's likely that you or someone close to you has journeyed grief's dark valley during the past year. As you begin this study, open your heart to the Lord—He is with you in your grief just as He was with Martha and Mary in the cemetery. Write a prayer inviting the Lord to minister to you through His Word and His tears.



Observation: The Miracle and the Reactions

Take a few minutes to read John 11 in its entirety. Enter the scenes with your senses alive. Hear the weeping mourners, see the tomb, and imagine the reassuring voice of Jesus bringing calm and comfort.

As you read, notice key words that John repeats for emphasis, such as *love*, *death*, *weep*, *believe*, *glory*, and *life*. Circle or underline these words in your Bible, if you wish, and any other key words, contrasts, or cause-and-effect statements that you find.



Searching the Scriptures Tool

In these *Searching the Scriptures* studies, we use the same Bible study method Chuck Swindoll uses. It consists of four steps: observation, correlation, interpretation, and application. During observation, we examine closely the words, phrases, and flow of the text. During interpretation, we use study resources, such as Chuck Swindoll's *Insights on John*, which can be obtained through the Insight for Living Ministries online store. Another reliable commentary that we'll use in this study is *Constable's Notes* which can be accessed online.



As you trace the themes, observe five sections: the sickness of Lazarus, the response of Jesus, the reaction of Martha and Mary, and the raising of Lazarus—followed by the plot to kill Jesus.

The Sickness of Lazarus—John 11:1–3

John 10 ends with Jesus leaving Jerusalem to go “beyond the Jordan River near the place where John was first baptizing” (John 10:40). He stayed there through the winter weeks and then, perhaps, traveled to Perea or Galilee, which was at least a two-day walk from Bethany.

Find these locations on a map in the back of your Bible, or you can access a set of maps at the Insight for Living Ministries Web site, [NLT Bible Maps](#). Scroll down the list and find the map “Bethany, Jerusalem, Emmaus, Mount of Olives, and Bethlehem.”

Now that you have your bearings, focus on John 11:1–3. What are the crisis, problem, and names of the central characters? Also, what did the sisters naturally assume Jesus would do when He received the message of Lazarus’ death?

Martha and Mary’s spirits sank deeper with each sun that set without Jesus. What could be keeping Him?

The Response of Jesus—John 11:4–16

John 11:4–7 explains the reason Jesus delayed in going to Bethany.³ What did Jesus mean when He said, “Lazarus’s sickness will not end in death” (John 11:4) if Jesus knew Lazarus would die?

Some might say that if Jesus had the power to heal but didn’t, He lacked compassion. And yet, Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters (11:5). Or, they might say that if Jesus loved but didn’t heal, He lacked power. And yet, Jesus healed the government official’s son who was gravely ill and even did so from a distance (4:46–54).



Jesus must have had higher purposes for delaying—reasons so vastly important as to defer His love and restrain His mighty hand. What greater good compelled Jesus to delay (John 11:4, 15, 40–42)?

Now read John 11:8–16, which includes the disciples' attempts to talk Jesus out of returning to Judea. What were their concerns?⁴

The Reaction of Martha and Mary—John 11:17–35

Read what happened when Jesus met Martha and Mary as He neared the village in John 11:17–32. We'll come back to Jesus' "I am the resurrection and the life" statement in verse 25 when we interpret the passage. For now, enter the heartache and confusion of the two sisters. What emotions were they expressing when they both said to Jesus, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21, 32)?

Although the sisters' words are identical, their approach to Him was different. What do you observe about Martha's approach to Jesus in John 11:21–22 versus Mary's reaction in 11:32–33?⁵



Martha expressed her grief in words, and Mary, in tears. Martha needed an explanation, and Mary, an emotional connection. Compare John 11:23–27 and 11:33–35. Write down how Jesus met each woman at her point of need.

Martha needed to know that Jesus was in control, so Jesus gave her truth. Mary needed to feel that Jesus cared, so Jesus showed her His tears.



Correlation: Jesus Meets Our Needs

Jesus had dealt with the disciples' fears, handled Martha's grief, and empathized with Mary's heartache. They all felt safe with Jesus to express their feelings honestly, and not once did He shame or scold them. What do the following verses say about God's understanding and our freedom to express our feelings to Him?

Psalm 56:8; 116:15; Hebrews 4:14–16; 1 Peter 5:7

The Raising of Lazarus—John 11:33–44

Mary's weeping struck a chord of emotion deep within Jesus' heart. No more delays. *It was time to act.* Read John 11:33–44, and notice the range of Jesus' emotions: anger, anguish, grief, and love all mixed together.⁶

What do you think prompted so many emotions in Jesus? (Note: Jesus' anger was righteous indignation toward death's curse and the pain it caused.)



How did Jesus explain the reasons why He brought Lazarus back to life in John 11:40–42?

The Plot to Kill Jesus—John 11:45–57

Infuriated by Jesus’ growing popularity, the religious leaders grew more determined to kill the Life-giver. They called on the Sanhedrin—the ruling council of the Jews—to plot Jesus’ death, etching in stone Israel’s official rejection of Jesus.

What did the Sanhedrin discuss, and what unintended prophecy did Caiaphas make (John 11:47–53)?

Caiaphas’ prophecy that *one should die so many should not perish* (11:50) echoed Jesus’ words to Martha: “Everyone who lives in me and believes in me *will never die*” (11:26, emphasis added). Let’s look more closely at Jesus’ statement, “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25)—the center-point of Jesus’ message.



Interpretation: “I Am the Resurrection and the Life”

As we interpret a passage, it’s helpful to consult a reliable Bible commentary. Take a few minutes to read Chuck’s *Insights on John*—if you own a copy—on page 216. Also, read the online commentary “Constable’s Notes,” which is available at lumina.bible.org. Find John 11:25–27 in the left panel, and then select “Constable’s Notes” in the right panel.

Martha believed in the doctrine of the resurrection, but Jesus urged her to put her trust in Him. Based on your reading, what did Jesus mean when He said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25)?



What is the meaning of Martha's confession of belief in John 11:27 in light of John's purpose for writing his gospel (John 20:31)? By comparison, Peter's similar confession is the focal point of Matthew's gospel and the foundational doctrine of the church (Matthew 16:16–19).

Are you sitting in the waiting room of God's delays? Are you mourning the loss of a loved one or a cherished dream? We leave Lazarus' empty tomb with hope in a God who cares and comes just when we need Him.



Application: Truth for Today

Chuck offers two words of counsel:

- *Although the Lord delays, He is never late.* God keeps time by His watch, not by our deadlines. Remember, when delays occur, God has better timing and a better way.
- *When facing sickness and death, we can trust God.* The human perspective makes demands on God for immediate action, but the divine perspective trusts Him for a better plan and a better purpose.

Jesus delayed in going to Bethany so that when He did arrive, God would be glorified and many would believe. In your waiting period, how can God be glorified and your faith strengthened?



Whether our need is intellectual or emotional, Jesus meets us where we are. He speaks to our minds where faith is formed or ministers to our hearts where devotion is kindled. Take a moment to express your heart to the Lord as Martha and Mary did. Never has the Lord refused His tearful child who draws near for reassurance. What do you need to express to the Lord, and what is He saying to you through His Word?

Let's close in prayer with the assurance of the Lord's promise of eternal life and the anticipation of our own empty tomb.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, like Martha, I confess my wholehearted belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, who has come into my world. I am “eagerly waiting for him to return as [my] Savior” (Philippians 3:20), and I proclaim my trust in Him who will take my weak body and change it into a glorious body like His own. Thank You for this hope. You are my resurrection and my life. Amen!

ENDNOTES

1. The seven signs in John are these: Jesus turned the water into wine (John 2:1–12), healed the official's son (4:43–54), healed the lame man at Bethesda (5:1–15), fed the 5,000 (6:1–15), walked on water (6:16–21), gave sight to the blind man (9:1–7), and raised Lazarus from the dead (11:1–44).
2. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 138.
3. Jesus waited two days (John 11:6). The trip by foot from Galilee to Judea took two additional days. When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days (11:17), which meant that Lazarus may have died around the time the messenger arrived four days earlier.
4. Jesus faced increasing danger with each trip to Jerusalem, narrowly escaping arrest and stoning on several occasions (John 7:30–32; 8:59; 10:31, 39).
5. Each time Mary, the sister of Martha, appeared in the Gospels, she was at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39; John 11:32; 12:3).
6. “The Greeks believed in an isolated, passionless and compassionless God. What a different picture Jesus gave. He showed us a God whose heart is wrung with anguish for the anguish of His people. The greatest thing Jesus did was bring us news of a God who cares.” William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, (Chapters 8 to 21), rev. ed., *The Daily Study Bible Series* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 98.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Back from Beyond

John 11

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



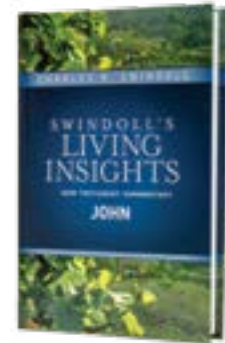
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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