

JESUS WEPT

John 11:33-35

This year, we are focusing on **discipleship** – our commitment to follow Jesus and learn from him so that we can be like him and lead others to him. Four areas of focus come out of our definition of discipleship:

1. Learning to **act** like Jesus – “our commitment to follow Jesus.”
2. Learning to **think** like Jesus – “to learn from him.”
3. **Transforming** into a Christlike person – “be like him.”
4. **Teaching** other people about Jesus – “lead others to him.”

Those four areas – **acting, thinking, transforming, and teaching** – will form the foci for our preaching in 2022. This month, we begin focusing on acting like Jesus and will give attention to learning to act like him in our relationships with other people. This lesson will consider Jesus’ interaction with Lazarus’ family in John chapter eleven to help us think about our interactions with suffering and hurting people.

“See how he loved him!”¹

- The story of Jesus’ resurrection of Lazarus offers more than merely an anecdote John picked up and included in his gospel; it provides readers an intentionally crafted transitional narrative designed to reinforce the meaning of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection (*cf. John 11:25-26*). Consider:
 - John, in his gospel, gives readers constant reminders that Jesus’ ministry culminated in his death, an outcome Jesus knew and anticipated, and the goal towards which John’s story determinedly moves (*cf. John 1:36; 2:18-22; 3:13-14; 8:28; 12:32-33*).
 - John uses the story of Lazarus, which takes place just before the final week of Jesus’ life (*cf. John 11:55-56; 12:1, 12, 32-33*), to preview Jesus’ death and resurrection and offer insight into its significance.
- The narrative backdrop of Jesus’ impending death provides a context for understanding his curious response to the news about Lazarus’ illness.
 - Even though he had a close relationship with Lazarus and his sisters (*cf. John 11:3, 5*), Jesus did immediately race to be with his friend after receiving news of his sickness (*John 11:6*).
 - Instead, Jesus commented that Lazarus’ “illness does not lead to death” (*John 11:4*) and “stayed two days longer in the place where he was” (*John 11:4, 6*).

¹ John 11:36. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- After two days, Jesus told his disciple Lazarus had “fallen asleep” and that he would awaken him (*John 11:11*). The disciples’ confusion about his reason for traveling led Jesus to tell “them plainly, ‘Lazarus has died.’” (*John 11:11-14*).
- John records Jesus’ explanation for his behavior – “It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (*John 11:4*).
 - John repeatedly refers to Jesus’ death as his ‘glorification’ (*John 7:39; 11:4; 12:16, 23; 13:31-32; 17:1*), a word that connects Jesus’ death with the display of God’s sovereign rule and the event through which Jesus would be exalted to join God and share in that rule (*cf. Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:15-21; Revelation 4:1-5:14; Isaiah 52:13-53:12*).
 - Jesus anticipated that Lazarus’ death and resurrection would enflame the already-existing hostilities directed at him.
 - Lazarus lived in Bethany (*John 11:1*), a small village located just outside of Jerusalem, a region Jesus left because the people there tried to kill him (*John 10:22-31*).
 - The disciples’ evidenced their understanding of the tensions between Jesus and the people in Jerusalem when they said they expected to die like Lazarus upon returning to the region of Jerusalem (*John 11:16*).
 - Jesus’ resurrection of Lazarus caused many people to believe in him, coalescing the Jewish leadership’s opposition to him and prompting them to make plans “to put him to death” (*John 11:45-53*).
- Despite the more significant issues moving in Lazarus’ death, Jesus responded in a surprising way to the mourning crowd when he arrived at Lazarus’ home – he “wept” with them (*John 11:33-35*).
 - John noted that Jesus was “deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled” when he saw the people weeping over Lazarus (*John 11:33*). “Deeply moved” (*embrimaomai*) offers a ‘softened’ translation of a word usually understood to mean ‘angry’ or ‘indignant’ (*cf. Mark 1:43; 14:5*).
 - Jesus’ interactions with Martha and Mary do not reveal anger or frustration towards them for their mourning even though his ministry included numerous miraculous signs that demonstrated his identity as God’s anointed king who possessed the authority to give eternal life to those who believed in him even if they were dead (*John 20:30-31; 11:25-26*).
 - Instead, it seems Jesus’ anger was directed at the hurt death – a partner to sin and an enemy he came to defeat (*1 Corinthians 15:1-56*) – caused in the lives of the people for whom he cared.
 - Even though he came to restore Lazarus’ life, Jesus nevertheless wept alongside those mourning Lazarus’ death.
 - John’s use of Greek words indicates a difference between Jesus’ weeping and the weeping of those gathered to mourn Lazarus’ death – they were ‘weeping’ (*klaio, John 11:33*) while he ‘shed a tear’ (*dacryon, John 11:35*).
 - Jesus ‘shed a tear’ alongside those mourning Lazarus’ death because he empathized with their suffering and mourned the ways in which sin and death



oppressed them, but he did not weep because he came to free people from that oppression and to defeat death.

Applications

With Jesus' interaction with Lazarus' family in mind, consider the following applications:

- Jesus' power to give life offers genuine hope in a world plagued by death and suffering.
- Even though Jesus offers real, life-changing hope, death and suffering continue to afflict people.
- Jesus commissions us to take the message of his hope to hurting people, but not in ways that diminish or dismiss their pain.
- We embody the message of Jesus, in part, by coming alongside hurting, suffering people and mourning with them.
 - Like Jesus, we weep with people because we learn from Jesus to genuinely love them.
 - We can genuinely love and empathize with others because of the freedom Jesus gives to us (*Galatians 5:13-14*).
 - Our loving empathy thus displays the reality and goodness of Jesus.

Jesus wept with those mourning Lazarus' death because he mourned their suffering and lamented the hurt caused by sin and death. But Jesus also broke the power of sin and death and initiated healing through his death and resurrection (*cf. 1 Corinthians 15*). Let's, therefore, follow Jesus' example and weep with those suffering in our world while also bringing them the good news of Jesus' healing power.

