

## Small Group Guide: The Dawn When Darkness Lifted

**\*\*Based on John 20:1–18 | Easter Sunday Sermon\*\***

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### ## Opening Prayer & Welcome (5 minutes)

Begin your group time by welcoming everyone and opening in prayer. Ask God to illuminate His Word and help group members encounter the risen Christ in a fresh way.

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### ## Ice Breaker (5-10 minutes)

**\*\*Question:\*\*** What is your favorite time of day, and why? Have you ever experienced a powerful sunrise or "dawn moment" that stayed with you?

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### ## Sermon Recap (5 minutes)

Briefly summarize the main points:

- The resurrection happened "while it was still dark"—God acts even when we can't see clearly
- Faith begins with belief, not complete understanding
- Jesus personally calls each of us by name, just as He called Mary
- The empty tomb is evidence of triumph, not tragedy
- We are called from servants to siblings—adopted into God's family

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## ## Discussion Questions

### ### \*\*Section 1: Faith in the Darkness (15 minutes)\*\*

\*\*1. The sermon emphasized that "the resurrection happened while it was still dark." What "darkness" were you walking through when you first encountered Jesus?\*

\*\*2. Mary, Peter, and John all responded differently to the empty tomb. Which disciple do you most relate to and why?\*

- Mary: Emotional, loyal, lingering in grief
- Peter: Impulsive, rushing in without hesitation
- John: Cautious, observant, processing before entering

\*\*3. Verse 9 says "they did not yet understand the Scripture." How does it encourage you to know that the disciples believed before they fully understood?\*

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### ### \*\*Section 2: Personal Encounter (15 minutes)\*\*

\*\*4. Jesus spoke one word to Mary: her name. When has God felt most personal to you? Share a time when you sensed Him calling you specifically.\*

\*\*5. Mary initially mistook Jesus for the gardener. The sermon noted that Jesus is indeed "the Gardener"—the second Adam reclaiming what was lost in Eden. How does this image change your understanding of redemption?\*

**\*\*6.** Jesus told Mary, "Do not cling to me." Why do you think He said this? What might we be "clinging to" that prevents us from fully trusting God's plan?**\*\***

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**### \*\*Section 3: From Servants to Siblings (15 minutes)\*\***

**\*\*7.** This was the first time Jesus called His disciples "brothers." What does it mean to you that you're not just a servant of God, but part of His family?**\*\***

**\*\*8.** Mary became the first messenger of the resurrection—"an unlikely messenger chosen not by status or strength but by faithfulness and love." Who are the "unlikely messengers" God is using in your life or community today?**\*\***

**\*\*9.** The sermon stated: "Christians don't wish—they wait." What's the difference between wishing and waiting with confident hope?**\*\***

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**## Key Takeaways**

Review these three main applications from the sermon:

1. **\*\*Resurrection means forgiveness is final\*\***

- The cross was payment; the resurrection is the receipt
- Our sins are not just covered—they're conquered

2. **Resurrection means our life has meaning**

- Eternal life (zoē aiōnios) is about quality, not just duration
- This life can be lived with deep purpose, hope, and joy

3. **Resurrection means our hope is anchored**

- Hope (elpis) is confident expectation based on God's character
- Our hope doesn't depend on our circumstances

**Group Reflection:** Which of these three truths do you most need to embrace right now?

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## ## Practical Applications

### ### **This Week's Challenge:**

Choose one of the following to put into practice:

#### **Option 1: Personal Reflection**

- Spend 15 minutes in silence this week, asking Jesus to speak your name. Journal about what He might be saying to you personally.

#### **Option 2: Share Your Story**

- Like Mary, be a messenger. Share with one person this week about how Jesus has changed your life. It doesn't have to be elaborate—just honest.

#### **Option 3: Study the Evidence**

- Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-20. Research one piece of historical evidence for the resurrection. Be prepared to share what you learned with the group next week.

**\*\*Option 4: Live with Purpose\*\***

- Identify one area of your life that feels meaningless or hopeless. Ask God to show you how the resurrection brings meaning to that specific area. Take one practical step this week.

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**## Prayer Requests & Closing (10-15 minutes)**

**\*\*Guided Prayer Focus:\*\***

- **\*\*Praise:\*\*** Thank God that the tomb is empty and grace is not
- **\*\*Confession:\*\*** Confess areas where you've been living in darkness or doubt
- **\*\*Supplication:\*\*** Pray for those who don't yet know the risen Christ
- **\*\*Personal:\*\*** Share specific prayer requests with the group

**\*\*Closing Prayer Prompt:\*\***

**\*\*"Jesus, You know each of us by name. Help us to hear Your voice calling us out of darkness and into Your marvelous light. Give us the faith of Mary—to believe even when we don't fully understand, and to go and tell others what we have seen. Amen."\*\***

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**## Looking Ahead**

**\*\*Next Week's Preparation:\*\***

If your group is continuing through John's Gospel or Easter themes, consider reading John 20:19-31 (Jesus appears to the disciples and Thomas) before your next meeting.

**\*\*Memory Verse for the Week:\*\***

"Jesus said to her, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord.'"\* — John 20:17-18

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**## Leader Notes**

- Be sensitive to those who may be encountering this message for the first time
- Create space for silence and reflection—not every question needs immediate answers
- If someone expresses interest in accepting Christ, be prepared to walk them through the gospel and pray with them
- Encourage authentic sharing by modeling vulnerability yourself
- The goal is transformation, not just information

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**\*\*Remember:\*\*** The same Jesus who called Mary by name in the garden calls each person in your group by name today. Create an atmosphere where people can truly encounter the risen Savior.