



HOLY CONVERSATION Session Seven—A Listening Heart: John 11:1- 44

Key verse: *If you had been here, my brother would not have died* (11:21). Spiritual conversation involves empathetic listening. Jesus, in his encounter with Mary and Martha following their brother's death, demonstrates a full range of human emotions. He enters into their pain even as he declares the truth of the resurrection. The conversationalist hears and feels deeply.

I. DEBRIEFING

- a. Introducing Loss: **Have you had a friend or loved one experience a significant loss in his or her life? If so (without disclosing the person's identity), what did you learn about the nature of loss? What actions by you or others were helpful to this person? What actions were unhelpful?**
- b. Leader's input: Session overview
 - i. **The human condition involves the experience of loss.**
 - ii. **Jesus—in his encounter with Martha and Mary following their brother's death—demonstrates a full range of human emotions even as he raises Lazarus.**
 - iii. **Today we explore ways to listen with our hearts as we engage people in spiritual conversations.**

II. ENCOUNTERING THE STORY

- a. Engage the senses: DVD clip from *The Gospel of John*
 - i. Pre-viewing-assignment: **Try to put yourself in the place of Mary and Martha. How might you have felt when Jesus finally arrived? ...when you saw him weeping?**
 - ii. View DVD
 - iii. Debrief DVD

b. Read **The Text in Context: *Jesus at Lazarus' Tomb***.

John's Prologue (1:1-18) continues to provide our lens for interpreting the conversations of Jesus. The preexistent Word became the Jesus of history, and made his "tabernacle" among us (*The Message*: "moved into the neighborhood"), full of grace and truth. Note the depths of grace and truth in his conversations with Martha and Mary. Jesus prayed to the Father: "as you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them..." (17:18). Jesus' mission from the Father forms the pattern for our mission in the world, even with those who grieve.

John 11 is a powerful example of the link between Jesus' signs and claims in the Gospel of John. Jesus claimed to be "the resurrection and life" (11:25), and raised Lazarus in demonstration of both his veracity and compassion. Other examples of this link include Jesus' multiplication of the loaves and claim to the bread of life (6:35), and Jesus' healing of the man born blind and claim to the light of the world (9:5). John 11 is the climax of "the Book of Signs" (John, chapters 2-11) and the turning point of the Gospel of John (SESSION ONE APPENDIX 2). Up to this point, Jesus has turned the water into wine, healed the nobleman's son, healed the paralytic, multiplied the loaves and fishes,

walked on the water, healed the man born blind, and has had many conversations along the way. In a moment of intense irony, this climax of the signs—this victory over death—results in the most vicious opposition, and winds up bringing Jesus to his own death. The Book of Glory (chapters 12-20) begins with calls for his death, and ends with the ultimate sign—Jesus’ own crucifixion and resurrection. “The Lord of Life demonstrates that he is victor over death and in the end, he has death pronounced on himself. He dispenses life while his enemies try to take it away.”¹

An understanding of Jewish customs regarding death and mourning is helpful for interpreting Jesus’ words and actions in John 11. The Jewish rabbis of Jesus’ time taught that the soul hovers over the newly dead body for the first three days. It is not until decomposition sets in does it depart.² Also, Jews observed a seven-day mourning period (called *shiva*). The family was expected to hire flute players and professional mourners.³

Finally, there are powerful connections between the raising of Lazarus and the raising of Jesus.⁴ Both involve women at the tomb, a stone rolled away, and the removal of grave clothes. The great difference is that Jesus—unlike Lazarus—was raised to never die again! In Jesus’ resurrection all believers have confidence that death has been defeated. Lazarus’ empty tomb anticipates Jesus’ empty tomb.

c. Interactive Bible Study:

- i. Read 11:1-6 (From *The Message*): **1** A man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. **2** This was the same Mary who massaged the Lord's feet with aromatic oils and then wiped them with her hair. It was her brother Lazarus who was sick. **3** So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Master, the one you love so very much is sick." **4** When Jesus got the message, he said, "This sickness is not fatal. It will become an occasion to show God's glory by glorifying God's Son." **5** Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, **6** but oddly, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed on where he was for two more days

- 1. Describe Jesus’ relationship with this family.**

- 2. Jesus does the unexpected—he delays responding to their urgent request to come. Why do you think Jesus deliberately delayed when his close friends were in such need?**

- ii. Summarize 11:7-16: Jesus’ conversation with his disciples about the risks of returning to Judea. Note another example of John’s “misunderstanding” dialogue pattern.

¹ Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 322.

² D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Apollos, 1991), 411.

³ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary Vol II* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 842.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 848.

iii. Read 11:17-27. **17** When Jesus finally got there, he found Lazarus already four days dead. **18** Bethany was near Jerusalem, only a couple of miles away, **19** and many of the Jews were visiting Martha and Mary, sympathizing with them over their brother. **20** Martha heard Jesus was coming and went out to meet him. Mary remained in the house. **21** Martha said, "Master, if you'd been here, my brother wouldn't have died. **22** Even now, I know that whatever you ask God he will give you." **23** Jesus said, "Your brother will be raised up." **24** Martha replied, "I know that he will be raised up in the resurrection at the end of time." **25** "You don't have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. **26** And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all. Do you believe this?" **27** "Yes, Master. All along I have believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who comes into the world."

1. What is Martha communicating emotionally when she says to Jesus, "If you had been here...?"
2. What do we learn about Martha's faith in her statements in vv. 21-22?
3. When Jesus said "your brother will be raised up," how do you think Martha understood this statement? Is this what Jesus meant?
4. How did Jesus turn the conversation in vv. 25-26? Compare this turn with his previous conversations (see 4:25-26 and 6:34-35).

iv. Read 11:28-39: **28** After saying this, she went to her sister Mary and whispered in her ear, "The Teacher is here and is asking for you." **29** The moment she heard that, she jumped up and ran out to him. **30** Jesus had not yet entered the town but was still at the place where Martha had met him. **31** When her sympathizing Jewish friends saw Mary run off, they followed her, thinking she was on her way to the tomb to weep there. **32** Mary came to where Jesus was waiting and fell at his feet, saying, "Master, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died." **33** When Jesus saw her sobbing and the Jews with her sobbing, a deep anger welled up within him. **34** He said, "Where did you put him?" **35** Now Jesus wept. **36** The Jews said, "Look how deeply he loved him." **37** Others among them said,

"Well, if he loved him so much, why didn't he do something to keep him from dying? After all, he opened the eyes of a blind man." **38** Then Jesus, the anger again welling up within him, arrived at the tomb. It was a simple cave in the hillside with a slab of stone laid against it. **39** Jesus said, "Remove the stone."

1. **Compare Mary's greeting (vv. 32-33) with Martha's greeting (vv. 20-21). What do you learn about Mary?**
 2. **The literal reading of v. 33b is "he was outraged in spirit (GK: *embrimaomai*) and troubled." What about this situation do you think might have caused Jesus to be "outraged in spirit"?**
 3. **What do you think caused Jesus to weep?**
 4. **How are the emotions expressed by Jesus an example of John's statement in the Prologue, "the Word became flesh" (1:14)?**
 5. **Listen to these quotes on the reality and complexity of loss:**
 - a. "Those who follow Jesus do well to learn the same tension – that grief and compassion without outrage can reduce to mere sentimentality; and outrage without grief and compassion can harden into self-righteous arrogance."⁵
 - b. "In some Christian circles Jesus' power over the grave is embraced with such conviction that there is no permission to mourn the tragedy of death. It is believed that to grieve is to show a lack of faith. One obvious thing about John's story is a thing we may pass over quickly: Mary and Martha were crying. Jesus did not say to Martha: "If you believe in the resurrection, why are you wasting your time and your tears?" ...No, Jesus did not impede this family's grieving; instead, by joining with them, he gives generous permission. It is right to describe death as terrible and painful and horrible without compromising the quality of our faith. Jesus himself cried in anger at the wreckage that death brought to one family. Death is a foe that in Christ is being defeated."⁶
- v. Read 11:39b-48, 53-57; 12:1-3, 9-11 The sister of the dead man, Martha, said, "Master, by this time there's a stench. He's been dead four days!" **40** Jesus looked her in the eye. "Didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" **41** Then, to the others, "Go ahead, take away the stone." Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and prayed, **42** Father, I know you always do listen, but on account of this crowd standing here I've spoken so that they might believe that you sent me." **43** Then he shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" **44** And he came out, a cadaver, wrapped from head to toe, and with a kerchief over his face. Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him loose." **45** That was a turnaround for many of the Jews who were with Mary. They saw what Jesus did, and believed in him. **46** But some went back to the Pharisees and told on Jesus. **47** The high priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the Jewish ruling body. "What do we do now?" they asked. "This man keeps on doing things, creating God-signs. **48** If we let him go on, pretty soon everyone will be believing in him and the Romans will come and remove what little power and privilege we still have." ... **53** From that day on, they plotted to kill him. **54** So Jesus no longer went out in public among the Jews. He withdrew into the country bordering the desert to a town called Ephraim and secluded himself there with his disciples. **55** The Jewish Passover was coming up. Crowds of

⁵ Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, 416.

⁶ Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John*, 331.

people were making their way from the country up to Jerusalem to get themselves ready for the Feast. **56** They were curious about Jesus. There was a lot of talk of him among those standing around in the Temple: "What do you think? Do you think he'll show up at the Feast or not?" **57** Meanwhile, the high priests and Pharisees gave out the word that anyone getting wind of him should inform them. They were all set to arrest him. Six days before Passover, Jesus entered Bethany where Lazarus, so recently raised from the dead, was living. **2** Lazarus and his sisters invited Jesus to dinner at their home. Martha served. Lazarus was one of those sitting at the table with them. **3** Mary came in with a jar of very expensive aromatic oils, anointed and massaged Jesus' feet, and then wiped them with her hair. The fragrance of the oils filled the house... **9** Word got out among the Jews that he was back in town. The people came to take a look, not only at Jesus but also at Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead. **10** So the high priests plotted to kill Lazarus **11** because so many of the Jews were going over and believing in Jesus on account of him.

1. From Jesus' prayer to the Father (vv. 41-42), what does he reveal about his intentions?

2. List the different reactions to the raising of Lazarus.

III. LIVING INTO THE STORY

a. Form subgroups of 3-4 and discuss the following:

- i. **Being human inevitably involves the experience of loss. What are some common forms of loss in the human experience?**
- ii. **What are some ways people respond when God seems absent in their time of crisis or loss? How might they identify with Martha and Mary's statement, "if you would have been here...?"**
- iii. **What is one way you have experienced loss in your life? Did God seem absent or present to you in your loss? As you grieved your loss, what actions by others did you find helpful? ...unhelpful? How did you find hope in the midst of your loss?**

b. Call subgroups together and have them summarize their responses to questions i and ii above.

c. **The difference between compassion and over-identification. Please turn to *The Mud Hole* diagram (SESSION SEVEN APPENDIX 1).⁷ The sufferer is in the mud, second from the right (add tears!). She could be facing any of the losses discussed above. The person on the hilltop on the left is the friend who feels sorry for the sufferer, but not enough to get involved. The person in the mud on the left is the "overidentifier." This person has become so involved in the sufferer's pain that she too is beginning to also sink into the mud. The caregiver on the far right is reaching out to the sufferer but not letting go of the "tree of life" (Christ himself, who bore our sins and infirmities on the tree: 1 Peter 2:24). This person is able to feel another person's pain without losing herself in the problems. This is a powerful picture of Jesus at Lazarus' tomb. He entered into the pain of the human situation, yet was not paralyzed by "over-identification" with his friend's loss. He was still able to maintain objectivity and bring hope to the hurting.**

⁷ Stephen Ministry Training Session T-2—*Feelings: Yours, Mine, Ours* (Overhead K)

d. Session review:

1. **What is one new insight or skill you have gleaned from Jesus' conversation with Martha and Mary that can help you in your conversations with pre-Christians in your world?**
2. **Summary:**
 - a. **The human experience inevitably involves loss.**
 - b. **Jesus—in his encounter with Martha and Mary following their brother's death—demonstrates a full range of human emotions even as he gives resurrection hope.**
 - c. **As we engage pre-Christians in spiritual conversation, we seek to identify with the human condition while at the same time pointing the way to hope in Jesus.**

Session Seven Appendix

APPENDIX 1

The Mud Hole

The Mud Hole



Source: Stephen Ministry Training- T-2 *Feelings: Yours, Mine, Ours* (Overhead K)