

# Pursue the Hurting (Lazarus)

*March 20, 2022*

## PURSUE

BUILDING FOR PEOPLE. BELIEVING FOR MORE.

### Lesson Summary

#### ***Main Passages***

John 11:1-27

#### ***Session Outline***

1. The Love of Jesus Christ (John 11:1-10)
2. The Wisdom of Jesus Christ (John 11:11-16)
3. The Power of Jesus Christ (John 11:17-27)

#### ***Theological Theme***

Jesus was fully man, but He was also fully God. It is easy to see His human attributes throughout the Gospels. His divine attributes, however, are sometimes veiled. During His ministry on earth, Jesus had all the divine attributes one would assign to God the Father.



## Leader Guide

# Lazarus

### Introduction

- ❓ When was a time God used difficulty or even a tragedy to accomplish His purpose in your life and bring glory to Himself?
- ❓ What happened? How did it change your relationship with God?

One of the greatest hymn writers in history was William Cowper. He composed hymns such as “There is a Fountain Filled with Blood” and “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.” What many people don’t know is that when Cowper was 28 years old, he had a mental breakdown and attempted three different ways to commit suicide. He became convinced that he was condemned beyond any hope of salvation. In December 1763, he was committed to St. Alban’s Insane Asylum in Hertfordshire, England. There, Dr. Nathaniel Cotton tended to Cowper. By God’s wonderful providence, Cotton was a strong Christian and a lover of the gospel. Cotton showed Christian love to Cowper and repeatedly held out hope to him despite Cowper’s insistence that he was damned and beyond hope.

After about six months, Cowper found a Bible lying on a bench in the garden. First, he looked at John 11, our text for today, and saw “so much benevolence, mercy, goodness, and sympathy with miserable men, in our Saviour’s conduct” that he felt a spark of hope.<sup>1</sup> Then, he turned to Romans 3:25. Here God met him. He said: “Immediately I received the strength to believe it, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fullness and completeness of His justification. In a moment I believed and received the gospel.”<sup>2</sup>

In June 1765, Cowper left St. Alban’s and lived and ministered 35 more years. Many of those years we served alongside John Newton in Olney. He still battled depression, but he also rested and rejoiced in his Savior.<sup>3</sup>

Could it be that God meant Cowper's depression and affliction for His purposes? In God's providence, it was Cowper's affliction that led him to the testimony of Dr. Cotton and John 11 and Romans 3 that day. Today, we will see that God meant for Lazarus's death to be used for His purposes as well.

## Session Summary

The story of Lazarus's sickness, death, and resurrection is a compelling example of God using difficulty for His glory. Christians observe and rejoice in the ways God provides for their physical and spiritual well-being. Furthermore, they recognize that God's provision is always good, even when life is difficult. The doctrine of divine providence must be informed by the Scriptures. In other words, if people assume that God must provide them with what they desire, then they have twisted what God's Word says and made for themselves a false gospel (prosperity gospel).

The story of Lazarus is proof that bad things do happen to God's children, and even those bad things are a part of His plan and purpose for them. In the story of Lazarus, we see God working directly in the situation. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, both explained the situation to His disciples and intervened. We see the attributes of God on full display in this account. God's benevolence, His omniscience, and His might are brightly portrayed in this account.

### 1. The Love of Jesus Christ (John 11:1-10)


God's love is boundless and free. God's love toward His own is most clearly seen in His sending of God the Son to atone for sins. The love of God is clearly seen in Christ's life. This should not surprise us because Jesus is God.

In verse three, Lazarus's sister sent a message to Jesus saying, "Lord, the one you love is sick." And, then again in verse five, John reported, "Now Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus." Jesus did not love this family because they had earned His love in some way. They weren't perfectly righteous, for no one is. Yet, Christ loved them in a special way. From the very beginning, we see that God is the initiator of a relationship with people by expressions of love. For example, God created Adam and Eve and they responded to that act of love by loving Him back. Also, when Adam and Eve sinned, God sought them out even though they were hiding. Then we see God coming to Cain to warn him against sin. God is the initiator. John wrote, "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Christ first loved this family, and they loved Him back.


## The Miracles of Jesus

As we have studied the Gospel of John, we have seen how John chose to record at least seven miracles that prove that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. Seven miracles that produce faith in readers. In the first six, we have seen his power over the physical aspects of life, including the human body, the natural elements, time and space, and even food and drink. But in each case Jesus also demonstrated that his purposes went beyond the physical to the spiritual. Now the Lord revealed his power by reaching beyond this life and touching death and the afterlife—territory that belongs only to God.

God first loved us, and as a Christian grows in Christ, they will see more and more that any acts of devotion they offer up to God are always preceded by God's lovingkindness. Of course, the Bible commands Christians to love God and one another, but they should never take those commands to eclipse the fundamental reality that God's love is the prime motivation in all of their demonstrations of godly love.


 What is God's love like? How might we describe the love of Christ?

Paul gave the Ephesians an excellent definition of love: "Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God" (Ephesians 5:1–2). Christ gave Himself up for poor sinners at Golgotha. On the wooden cross, He bore the wrath of God the Father so that sinners would not have to. Love led Him to the cross! The divine love of God is sacrificial and selfless.

 How is God's love different from what some people may call love today?


Biblical love isn't simply good feelings toward someone; it's unconditionally giving oneself for the good of another. As John said, "This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters" (1 John 3:16).

Our culture's definition of love rarely matches the biblical definition. It is a far cry from the love of God because it is conditional and often manipulative. Have you ever known someone who would withhold their love from others until their desires were met? Contrast this with the coming of Jesus Christ. All people on earth stood condemned as sinners before God. Every person had fallen short of God's glorious standard. They were all rebels. Not only that, but everyone who would live afterward would also be depraved, corrupted, and sinful. Despite this fact, God the Son took on flesh to save sinners because of the great love of God toward His people.

 Application: How can you love others the way Christ loves you? How do you know if someone truly loves you? How can you show this to others?

## 2. The Wisdom of Jesus Christ (John 11:11-16)

God is all-knowing. Nothing is hidden from His sight. He sees all His creation from top to bottom and from beginning to end.

 What aspects of this narrative point to Jesus's divine knowledge?

Lazarus's sister had sent a message to Jesus telling Him Lazarus was ill (v. 3), but there is no record that He received any more messages from them. Yet somehow Jesus knew Lazarus had passed away from the illness. He knew this because, though His divinity was often veiled, He was still fully God. He knew it because He was (and is) all-knowing.

Examples are recorded that Jesus Christ knew what people were thinking (Luke 5:22). He saw Nathanael when he was under the fig tree (John 1:48). He knew exactly what suffering awaited Him (Matthew 16:21). Consider that when the Roman soldiers put a crown of thorns upon the head of Christ, blindfolded Him, struck Him, and then said, "Prophecy to us, Messiah! Who was it that hit you?" (Matthew 26:68), He knew exactly who hit Him. He knew that soldier's name, his favorite food, his secret fears, the ages of his children. He created that soldier.

 What does Jesus's wisdom have to do with the purposes and plans of God the Father?

Because Jesus Christ is God in flesh, He was omniscient (though that was often veiled) during His earthly ministry. Furthermore, all He did in concert with all He knew perfectly aligned with the purposes of God the Father. In other words, Christ wasn't only all-knowing, He was perfectly wise. He always did the right thing, in the right way, at the right time.

If Jesus knew Lazarus's illness would lead to death, why didn't Jesus arrive sooner to prevent it? That was Martha thought when she said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died" (v. 21). But Jesus wasn't late. He made no mistake. He had come to do the will of the Father and we can be sure that every step, every word, every breath was perfectly aligned with the will of the Father (John 4:34). Jesus told His disciples the purpose for His actions, saying, "I'm glad for you that I wasn't there so that you may believe" (v. 15).

It's true that Christians are commanded to follow in Christ's footsteps (1 Peter 2:21) and imitate Him (1 Corinthians 11:1). But we must be careful not to think that this means a Christian can reach perfection on

this earth. They cannot. The point of those commands is two-fold. First, Christians ought to seek to be loving and wise. Second, upon realizing that our love and wisdom fall woefully short of Christ's, we ought to be reminded of our need of a Savior and be humble and contrite.

- ❓ Application: If Jesus Christ is governing our lives and circumstances with perfect wisdom, how should this change the way we respond to difficult circumstances?

### 3. The Power of Jesus Christ (John 11:17-27)

Often God accomplishes His purposes through secondary causes or ordinary means. For example, God may bring about healing in a person's life through doctors and medicine. He often provides for families through hard work. Sometimes, however, God miraculously intervenes and directly acts to bring something to pass. This happened at the crossing of the Red Sea and at the wedding in Cana. It also happened in this story. (See John 11:38-44.)

- ❓ How was the power of Christ demonstrated in this passage? What other events in the life of Jesus demonstrate His power?


It is astounding that Jesus had the power to raise Lazarus from the dead four days after he passed away. But this miracle is small compared to the resurrection of a sin-dead soul.

Jesus undoes death. Just as He raised Lazarus from the dead, so He redeems from death those souls that look to Him in faith. He did this through His own death on the cross: "And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:13-14).

- ❓ What does it mean that death is undone in the lives of Christians? How should this change the way we live?




While God's people were under the curse of death and enslaved to sin in the past, now they are blessed with spiritual life and are servants of Christ. Christ, their Master, works on their behalf so that they are being preserved and conformed to the image of Christ more and more. Christ intercedes for them and unites them to Himself by His Spirit. He persuades Christians to believe and obey, and He governs their hearts by His Word and by His Spirit. Jesus overcomes all their enemies by His power and His wisdom.

These truths are profoundly important for the health of the church. The church consists of its members, and if its members are spiritually healthy, then the church will enjoy unity, vibrancy, and joy among the membership. But a church can't be healthy if its membership doesn't recognize and rejoice in its spiritual inability, the gospel of grace, and the work of Christ on their behalf.

-  Application: What are some ways you have seen God's power in your own life?

## Conclusion

Jesus of Nazareth is God incarnate, the second person of the Trinity, and Lord of all. When the eternal Son of God took on flesh in Nazareth, He suffered a great humiliation. He was born in a stable with animals, part of a poor family, ridiculed and rejected, brutally attacked and killed, and buried in a borrowed tomb. Yet, Jesus of Nazareth was fully God, though His attributes were veiled. He loved with a pure and limitless love. He was perfectly wise, seeing the beginning and the end. And He was almighty, commanding even death to flee. The account of Lazarus should cause Christians to increase in their faith in Christ for He is a glorious Savior! It should also compel them to increase in their repentance of sin for they could never live up to His perfect standard.

-  What are some differences between the world's conception of love and the biblical definition of love? How was God's love displayed in today's passage?
-  How should the fact that all Christians have been spiritually dead to the same degree as Lazarus change the way we interact with one another?
-  Who do you need to have a gospel conversation with? How might you use the story of Lazarus to share Jesus with them?

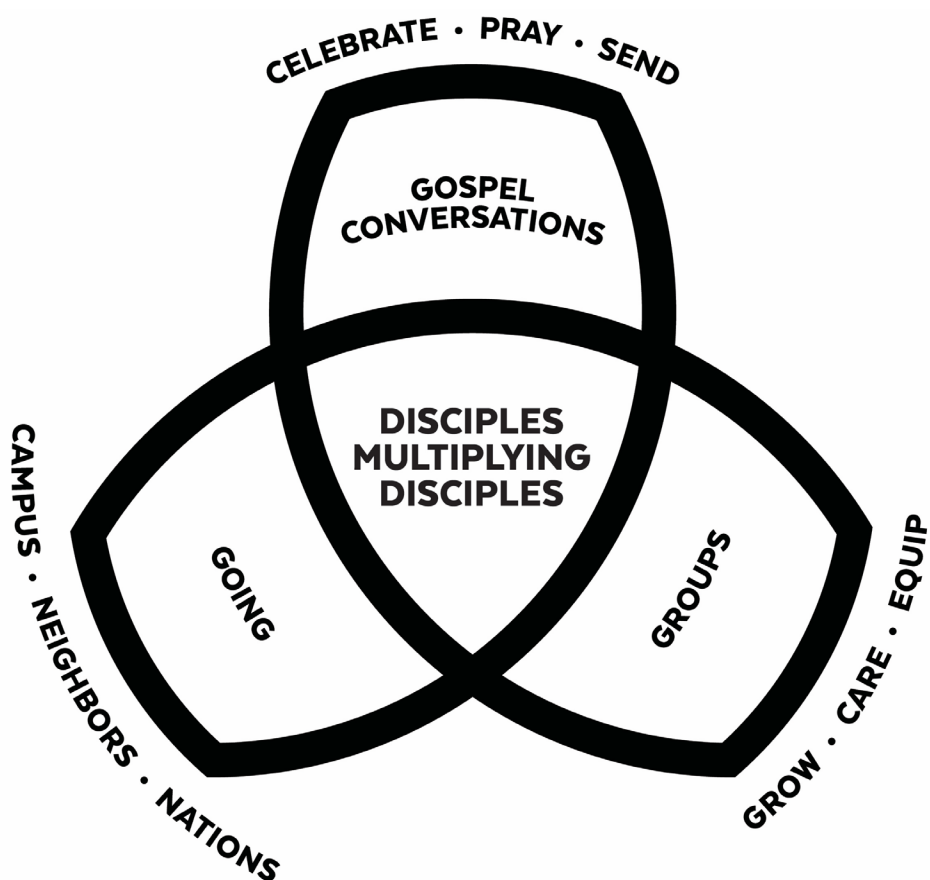
## Prayer of Response

*Ask the Lord to increase your faith as you consider the story of Lazarus's resurrection from the dead. Pray that the truth of Scripture would cause you to worship more ardently and joyfully. Ask the Lord to help you to love as Christ loves. Also, pray that the Lord would give you the wisdom to be able to see life's circumstances from God's perspective and rest in His sovereignty.*

## Additional Resources

- *John* by Grant Osborne
- *The Gospel of John* by David Ford
- *John* by Colin Kruse

## Disciples Multiplying Disciples



### DxD This Week

#### ***Group Emphasis***

If your Group is over 10 people in attendance, break into groups of 2-4 and have a special prayer time about our “blindness.” You might consider a DXD sub-group like this on a more regular basis. Adult Groups office has suggested studies designed just for these smaller, sub-groups.

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## For Next Week

### Session Title

- The Way, Truth, and Life

### Main Passages

- John 14:1-6

### Session Outline

1. Believe Also in Me (John 14:1-2)
2. You Know the Way (John 14:3-5)
3. I Am the Way (John 14:6)

### Memorize

*<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. <sup>26</sup> Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

- John 11:25-26

# Historical Context of John

## Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God’s people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

## Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve (“the disciple Jesus loved,” 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24–25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple Jesus loved” with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John’s Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1–4).

## Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John’s lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter’s martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 20:28).

## Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John’s Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

## Extended Commentary

### John 11:1-37

11:1 The introduction of Lazarus is similar to 5:5. Lazarus (which means “whom God helps”) was a common name. Bethany, called a village (Gk *kome*) as is Bethlehem (7:42), was not the Bethany mentioned in 1:28 and alluded to in 10:40–42. Bethany, where Lazarus lived, was located east of the Mount of Olives less than two miles from Jerusalem (11:18; cp. Mt 21:17; 26:6). The village of Mary and her sister Martha and the reference to Mary’s anointing of Jesus anticipates chap. 12 and seems to presuppose that readers knew these women, perhaps from Luke’s Gospel (Lk 10:38–42).

11:2–5 The narrator makes sure the reader knows how much Lazarus meant to Jesus.

11:6 Jesus stayed two more days ... where he was. Puzzling as this delay seems, it served to reveal God’s glory (v. 4) since it enabled Jesus to perform an even “harder” miracle (v. 17).

11:7–8 Jesus’s disciples assumed that Jesus would desire to stay alive.

11:9–10 Most people worked as long as there was daylight; once it was dark, work was over.

11:11 Fallen asleep means “died,” as the following interchange makes clear (vv. 12–14). The OT equivalent is “slept with his fathers.” Occasionally, death is depicted as a deep sleep from which we will be awakened (Dn 12:2).

11:12–15 In view of Jesus’s relationship with Lazarus and his family, the statement that I’m glad ... that I wasn’t there shows how important the faith of the disciples was.

11:17 By comforting Martha and Mary after Lazarus’s death, Jesus fulfilled one of the most essential obligations in the Jewish culture of his day—mourning with those who mourn. Burial usually followed shortly after death, so Lazarus had been dead four days.

11:19 If the many Jews who had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them were from Jerusalem, this would indicate that their family had considerable social standing.

11:20 Seated in the house was the customary posture for those mourning a deceased loved one (Jb 2:8, 13; Ezk 8:14).

11:21–22 Martha’s statement, whatever you ask from God, could be taken to mean she was suggesting Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. But her other statements indicate this was not the case.

11:23–24 Martha’s belief in end-time resurrection agreed with Pharisaic beliefs (Ac 23:8), popular Jewish opinion, and Jesus’s teaching (Jn 5:21, 25–29; 6:39–44, 54).

11:26 Eternal life begins the moment that a person puts faith in Jesus.

11:27 Martha’s reference to the one who comes into the world took up the messianic expression derived from Ps 118:26 (cp. Jn 12:13).<sup>4</sup>

## References

1. William Cowper, *The Works of William Cowper: His Life and Letters* (Volume 6) 1835, vol. 6 (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1817).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).

## Author Bio

### William Cowper (The Works of William Cowper: His Life and Letters)

William Cowper was an English poet and hymnodist. One of the most popular poets of his time, Cowper changed the direction of 18th century nature poetry by writing of everyday life and scenes of the English countryside.

### Grant Osborne (John)

Grant R. Osborne (1942-2018; PhD, University of Aberdeen) was professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He wrote a number of books, including *The Hermeneutical Spiral*.

### David Ford (The Gospel of John)

David F. Ford (PhD, University of Cambridge) is Regius Professor of Divinity Emeritus at the University of Cambridge, England, and a Fellow of Selwyn College. His publications include *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (with Frances Young), *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*, and *The Shape of Living*.

### Colin Kruse (John)

Colin G. Kruse (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is senior lecturer of New Testament at Melbourne School of Theology. In the twenty years following his ordination into the Anglican ministry, Kruse gained practical experience in parishes in Australia and the U.S. along with five years of missionary service as a theological lecturer in Indonesia. Besides journal articles on the New Testament, Old Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls, Kruse has authored several books including *Paul, the Law and Justification* and *New Testament Models for Ministry: Jesus and Paul*. He has also written the Tyndale New Testament Commentary on 2 Corinthians and the Pillar New Testament Commentary titles *The Letters of John* and *Paul's Letter to the Romans*.