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Luke 7:11-17

Learner  
Session  
Guide

Focus Statement

Death takes many forms, but God in Christ restores us to live joyfully and hopefully in communion with God, creation, and the human family.

Key Verse

The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.  
Luke 7:15

# Jesus Is Close to Those Estranged by Grief

Focus Image



A very fresh grave. © Javier Kohen. Used under Creative Commons 3.0 License.

## Gather

### Check-in

Take this time to connect or reconnect with the others in your group. Talk about a time when you felt you “really belonged” to a group or community. What was the community and what did belonging to it feel like?

### Pray

*Dear God, so often we find ourselves outside of community, lifeless, grieving our losses, and confronting death. In Christ you faced death. You returned in resurrection. Bless us with the promise of resurrection and help that promise to form our daily lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

### Focus Activity

Take time to look at and talk about the Focus Image. Share what you think might be the story behind the fresh grave. Share similar sights you have seen in person. How does looking at the picture make you feel? The picture is of something literal and “real,” but are there also some symbolic meanings of the picture? What else might the picture symbolize?



Notes

### Open Scripture

Read Luke 7:11-17.

- Talk about the characters in the text. Which ones can you most and least relate to?
- What emotions stand out in this text for you? Who is feeling them? Which ones make the most sense to you?
- What changes at the end of the text and what remains the same?

### Join the Conversation

#### Historical Context

To this day in the Middle East, burial on the same day of death is the norm. In Jesus' day, burials were always outside of populated areas—cities, towns, villages. Friends of the deceased participated in the funeral, as well as official mourners who accompanied the body. Contact with a dead body made the one who touched it ritually unclean. There were no “safety nets” for the poor in Jesus' time. Both the mourners present and those who heard the story would know that a childless widow faced absolute poverty.

1. The raising of a widow's son is only found in Luke's Gospel. In this brief but significant passage, Jesus breaks a number of formal and informal rules.

- Informally speaking, what about this story might be considered to be rude or even cruel?
- Formally speaking, how do Jesus' actions compare with Leviticus 21:1-3 and Numbers 19:11?

2. Why do you think Jesus was so willing to break these social and theological rules? Compare Jesus' actions in Luke 7:11-17 with Luke 9:59-60. How does this comparison enhance our understanding of Jesus' motivations?

3. As a group, make a list of the five most significant rituals or acts that take place in the context of Christian funerals. Discuss how disruption of each would make us feel. Can you imagine Jesus interrupting those rituals or acts in some way? What might be his intention for doing so?

### Literary Context

Jesus has been opening the word of God through his ministry in Galilee. In the previous chapter (Luke 6), he preaches the Sermon on the Plain, which is much like and much different from Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5). Especially in Luke's version of the Beatitudes, the emphasis is on blessing for those who are outcast and weak and woe for those who are "insiders" and strong (Luke 6:20-26). Immediately after this sermon, Jesus heals the servant of a Roman centurion (sort of a double-outsider!), and then Jesus meets this funeral procession—outside the city, outside society, outside hope.

1. How do the events of Luke 7 fulfill Jesus' words of blessing in Luke 6:20-21?

2. Reread Luke 7:11-17 silently. Chose *no more than* five words—consecutive or standing alone—that convey the drama of this moment to you. What sorts of events have similar drama in modern times?

In the raising of the widow's son, Jesus is moved deeply by the scene. The Greek word for *compassion* used in the original text means literally to "feel in one's gut." Jesus' reaction is prompted by the widow's loss of family and support.

3. Write a list of 10 possessions and relationships you consider most important. Begin crossing them out one by one. At what point do you "feel in your gut" the pain of loss? Share your findings. How do the words *only son* (Luke 7:12) connect to the great pain described in Luke 23:44-48 and 1 John 4:9-11? What is the even greater blessing that came out of these moments?

### Lutheran Context

When Lutherans speak of the law, we are not only speaking of specific words that accuse and condemn us, but also of the events of life that can trap and imprison us. The reality of death is painful, and the revelation of God's love in Christ's willingness to die on the cross shows us that in those places where the accusing voice of the law imprisons us, Christ is active.



Notes



Notes

1. Read Romans 7:21-25. As a group, develop a list of the ways the accusing voice of the law is heard in our daily life. How can this be understood as a struggle with a “body of death”?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 15:56-58. What functions as gospel both here and in our session text, giving life and freeing from sin and death?

Luther’s advice is that when we read of Christ saying or doing anything in the Gospels, we should know that he is saying or doing these things to us. He touches people living the real effects of the law and brings life. As Jesus gives the man back to his mother and back into community to live life, we believe that we are freed from the accusation of the law so that we might live for our neighbor.

3. Share specific ways you have seen Christ “touch” those who were previously touched by sin, death, or the accusing voice of the law. How does 2 Corinthians 3:1-6 relate to our role in this ministry of life?

### Devotional Context

As you read and listen to this story of Jesus, what are the feelings and thoughts and memories that come to you? There are many in the text—sorrow and mourning, anxiety about the future, compassion felt in the “gut,” perhaps the offense of some in the crowd at Jesus’ stopping the rite, the utter amazement of the witnesses of the resurrection, awe and fear and glory.

1. Look at the text and underline those feelings that speak to you most.

2. Think about the ways that death in all its dimensions has touched you and people you know. As you hear of Jesus touching the dead man, share the ways he is touching you to restore you to life. Also share the words that you believe describe this life in Christ—include physical and non-physical aspects (such as emotions and spirituality) as well as individual and community aspects.

3. Take time for meditative prayer. Don’t be afraid to acknowledge where grief and death are touching you. Ask Jesus to touch you and return you to life.

**Wrap-up**

Be ready to look back over the work your group has done in this session.

**Pray**

*Gracious God, in Christ, you bring us out of death and into life. Be with us in the days ahead and give us faith to hear your voice and grace to share your life. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

**Extending the Conversation****Homework**

1. Read the next session's Bible text: Luke 7:36—8:3.
2. In our day, it is easy for most of us to think that the time for mourning is done once the funeral is over. But any of us who have lost one to death knows that isn't true. Do you know of someone who has lost a loved one to death within the last year? Renew your concern for that person. Pray for and then call this person to let him or her know of your love and concern.
3. Think of the ways God has restored you to life. Make a list and thank God for God's mercy.
4. What are ways you sense you need restoring to life and community? It might be a wounded friendship or a decrease in a favorite activity with others. Seek God's help to restore those things or relationships.
5. Reach out and touch someone with an invitation to join your Book of Faith conversation with the Gospel of Luke. It's never too late to share the word of life!

**Enrichment**

1. There are reasons for the kinds of mourning rituals people have. If you have access to the Internet, look up the practices of various religions and societies. Sites like [www.myfunkyfuneral.com](http://www.myfunkyfuneral.com) can offer some unique stories. Bring some of your findings to share with the group.
2. Look at the funeral liturgy in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (pp. 279–285). Why is the service structured as it is and why are elements included? You may want to speak to your pastor about this.
3. Check out [www.bookoffaith.org](http://www.bookoffaith.org) to learn more about this Bible fluency initiative. Start a group homepage or get involved with the other social networking you can find there.



Notes

 A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a blue border, intended for taking notes. The box has a slight shadow and a rounded bottom-right corner.

## SESSION ONE



Notes

### For Further Reading

*The Stewardship of Life in the Kingdom of Death* by Douglas John Hall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988). Powerful and simple meditations on the ways Christians can respond to a world that has made a “covenant with death” by proclaiming God’s covenant of life.

Available from [augsburghfortress.org/store](http://augsburghfortress.org/store):

*Good Grief* by Granger Westberg (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2004). A classic and easily read work on the necessity of facing and working through the grief we experience in the course of human life.

*Grievors Ask: Answers to Questions about Death and Loss* by Harold Ivan Smith (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2004). Smith compiles more than 150 common questions, explores the emotions behind them, and provides clear and forthright responses.