



# CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE JESUS KIND

*Studies in Luke*

TOGETHER IN FAITH SERIES  
Leader Session Guide

Brent Christianson

 AUGSBURG FORTRESS

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE JESUS KIND: STUDIES IN LUKE  
Leader Session Guide

Together in Faith Series  
Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

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# Introduction

## Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

Welcome to the conversation! The Bible study resources you are using are created to support the bold vision of the Book of Faith initiative that calls “the whole church to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered, and sent by the Word.”

Simply put, this initiative and these resources invite you to “Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.”

We enter into this conversation based on the promise that exploring the Bible deeply with others opens us to God working in and through us. God’s Word is life changing, church changing, and world changing. Lutheran approaches to Scripture provide a fruitful foundation for connecting Bible, life, and faith.

## A Session Overview

Each session is divided into the following four key sections. The amount of time spent in each section may vary based on choices you make. The core Learner Session Guide is designed for 50 minutes. A session can be expanded to as much as 90 minutes by using the Bonus Activities that appear in the Leader Session Guide.

### • Gather (10-15 minutes)

Time to check in, make introductions, review homework assignments, share an opening prayer, and use the Focus Activity to introduce learners to the Session Focus.

### • Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

The session Scripture text is read using a variety of methods and activities. Learners are asked to respond to a few general questions. As leader, you may want to capture initial thoughts or questions on paper for later review.

### • Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

Learners explore the session Scripture text through core questions and activities that cover each of the four perspectives (see diagram on p. 6). The core Learner Session Guide material may be expanded through use of the Bonus Activities provided in the Leader Session Guide. Each session ends with a brief Wrap-up and prayer.

### • Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)

Lists homework assignments, including next week’s session Scripture text. The leader may choose one or more items to assign for all. Each session also includes additional Enrichment options and may include For Further Reading suggestions.

## A Method to Guide the Conversation

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies has three primary goals:

- To increase biblical fluency;
- To encourage and facilitate informed small group conversation based on God’s Word; and
- To renew and empower us to carry out God’s mission for the sake of the world.

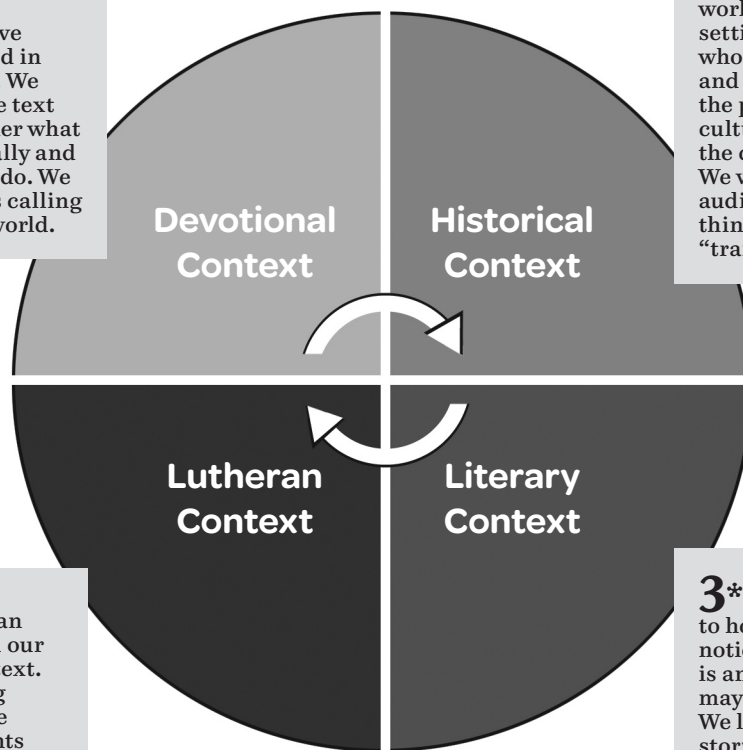
To accomplish these goals, each session will explore one or more primary Bible texts from four different angles and contexts—historical, literary, Lutheran, and devotional. These particular ways of exploring a text are not new, but used in combination they provide a full understanding of and experience with the text.

Complementing this approach is a commitment to engaging participants in active, learner-orientated Bible conversations. The resources call for prepared leaders to facilitate learner discovery, discussion, and activity. Active learning and frequent engagement with Scripture will lead to greater biblical fluency and encourage active faith.

**1** We begin by reading the Bible text and reflecting on its meaning. We ask questions and identify items that are unclear. We bring our unique background and experience to the Bible, and the Bible meets us where we are.

**5** We return to where we started, but now we have explored and experienced the Bible text from four different dimensions. We are ready to move into the “for” dimension. We have opened Scripture and joined in conversation for a purpose. We consider the meaning of the text for faithful living. We wonder what God is calling us (individually and as communities of faith) to do. We consider how God’s Word is calling us to do God’s work in the world.

**2\*** We seek to understand the world of the Bible and locate the setting of the text. We explore who may have written the text and why. We seek to understand the particular social and cultural contexts that influenced the content and the message. We wonder who the original audience may have been. We think about how these things “translate” to our world today.



**4** We consider the Lutheran principles that help ground our interpretation of the Bible text. We ask questions that bring those principles and unique Lutheran theological insights into conversation with the text. We discover how our Lutheran insights can ground and focus our understanding and shape our faithful response to the text.

**3\*** We pay close attention to how the text is written. We notice what kind of literature it is and how this type of literature may function or may be used. We look at the characters, the story line, and the themes. We compare and contrast these with our own understanding and experience of life. In this interchange, we discover meaning.

**\* Sessions may begin with either Historical Context or Literary Context.**

The diagram on p. 6 summarizes the general way this method is intended to work. A more detailed introduction to the method used in Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies is available in *Opening the Book of Faith* (Augsburg Fortress, 2008).

## The Learner Session Guide

The Learner Session Guide content is built on the four sections (see p. 5). The content included in the main “Join the Conversation” section is considered to be the core material needed to explore the session Scripture text. Each session includes a Focus Image that is used as part of an activity or question somewhere within the core session. Other visuals (maps, charts, photographs, and illustrations) may be included to help enhance the learner’s experience with the text and its key concepts.

## The Leader Session Guide

For easy reference, the Leader Session Guide contains all the content included in the Learner Session Guide and more. The elements that are unique to the Leader Session Guide are the following:

- **Before You Begin**—Helpful tips to use as you prepare to lead the session.
- **Session Overview**—Contains detailed description of key themes and content covered in each of the four contexts (Historical, Literary, Lutheran, Devotional). Core questions and activities in the Learner Session Guide are intended to emerge directly from this Session Overview. Highlighted parts of the Session Overview provide a kind of “quick prep” for those wanting to do an initial scan of the key session themes and content.
- **Key Definitions**—Key terms or concepts that appear in the Session Overview may be illustrated or defined.
- **Facilitator’s Prayer**—To help the leader center on the session theme and leadership task.
- **Bonus Activities**—Optional activities included in each of the four sections of “Join the

Conversation” used by the leader to expand the core session.

- **Tips**—A variety of helpful hints, instructions, or background content to aid leadership facilitation.
- **Looking Ahead**—Reminders to the leader about preparation for the upcoming session.

## Session Prep Video

(Available on the DVD that accompanies this unit.)

To help you prepare to lead the session, Session Prep Video segments have been created. A guide will walk with you through a session overview and the key parts of the session flow. These segments can provide helpful hints, but they are not meant to replace your own deeper preparation.

## Leader and Learner

In Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies, the leader’s primary task is facilitating small group conversation and activity. These conversations are built around structured learning tasks. What is a structured learning task? It is an open question or activity that engages learners with new content and the resources they need to respond. Underlying this structured dialog approach are three primary assumptions about adult learners:

- Adult learners bring with them varied experiences and the capability to do active learning tasks;
- Adult learners learn best when they are invited to be actively involved in learning; and
- Adults are more accountable and engaged when active learning tasks are used.

Simply put, the goal is fluency in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture. How does one become fluent in a new language, proficient in building houses, or skilled at hitting a baseball? By practicing and doing in a hands-on way. Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies provides the kind of hands-on Bible exploration that will produce Bible-fluent learners equipped to do God’s work in the world.



## Together in Faith Series

Throughout its history, the church has established lists of Scripture readings appropriate for each Sunday and festival day of the church year calendar. These lists, called lectionaries, identify the Scripture readings used for worship in many congregations. While a lectionary-guided connection with the Bible typically occurs in the context of corporate worship, the thematic approach of Together in Faith can link the gathering of small groups around the Book of Faith with the congregation's gathering around the Word in worship. Online worship helps are provided so that preachers and worship planners can create congregation-wide experiences around each of the Together in Faith units. The flexibility of the Together in Faith online helps makes the units useful for any time of the year. The small group session materials are also designed to serve as stand-alone studies for anytime use.

## Close Encounters of the Jesus Kind: Studies in Luke Unit Overview

All of the Gospel writers—indeed, all of Scripture—tell how God chooses to break the power of what separates us from God in order to bring us into a relationship of faith. Faith is trust built on love. Luke, more than the other evangelists, emphasizes God's loving choice in Christ to befriend those who are estranged and considered outsiders. His close encounters with sinners, foreigners, those who were unclean, those who were young, women, tax collectors, prostitutes, those who were poor, and others reveal the inclusivity of grace.

We can all become strangers and, as the 1960s song by The Doors, "People are Strange," reminds us, everything gets distorted in our alienation. Estrangement distorts life for all involved. God's desire in Christ is to free us from those things that keep us from seeing God and God's creation in clear and hopeful ways. These close encounters in Luke's Gospel tell of how Christ engaged the estranged of Luke's time and speak to us of how he does the same for us now.

Session 1: Jesus Is Close to Those Estranged by Grief (Luke 7:11-17)

How many ways do we experience death? How many ways can we enter life? Jesus says "no" to death and "yes" to life.

Session 2: Jesus Is Close to Those Estranged by Resentment (Luke 7:36—8:3)

Who are people we might resent? Who might resent us? Both main characters here are alienated—the woman by her reputation and the Pharisee by his need to preserve a reputation. Jesus says "no" to the separation of sin and "yes" to the healing of forgiveness.

Session 3: Jesus Is Close to Those Estranged by Fear (Luke 8:26-39)

How can fear make us crazy? The legion of demons in the Gerasene feared Jesus; his people feared him in his insanity and in his sanity, and they feared Jesus' power. Jesus says "no" to fear and "yes" to freedom.

Session 4: Jesus Is Close to Those Estranged by God's Distance (Luke 9:51-62)

How do we experience the distance or nearness of God? Here, strangely, Jesus is revealed as the outsider, choosing to move with determination to Jerusalem and reveal a God who is not distant but always present. Jesus says "no" to an excluded God and has become the "yes" of God with us.

Session 5: Jesus Is Close to Those Seeking the Estranged (Luke 10:1-11, 16-20)

What are the important invitations we have received and given? In this text, Jesus sends out his followers to call all people to enter into the new day of God. Jesus says "no" to in-groups and "yes" to community.

Session 6: Jesus Is Close to Those Learning from the Estranged (Luke 10:25-37)

How have painful experiences actually helped you become a more gracious person? This famous parable tells how it may be our recognition of our own experience of alienation and exclusion, when touched by God's mercy, which helps us reach out to others.

Luke 7:11-17

Leader  
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

Focus Image



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

# Jesus Is Close to Those Estranged by Grief

## Session Preparation

### Before You Begin . . .

This session deals with death and resurrection. You or learners in your group may have had recent encounters with the death of a loved one. Be sensitive to the tendency to say Jesus takes away the pain of death. Christians do and should grieve, Paul says, but we are not without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

### Session Instructions

1. Read this Session Guide completely and highlight or underline any portions you wish to emphasize with the group. Note any Bonus Activities you wish to do.
2. If you plan to do any special activities, check to see what materials you'll need, if any.
3. Have extra Bibles on hand in case a member of the group forgets to bring one.
4. Please note that one of the devotional options for initial reading of the session text requires the use of a candle. Before lighting candles, check your local fire codes and your congregation's fire policies regarding the use of open flames.

### Session Overview

In conversations about Jesus raising the dead son of the widow of Nain, you will help each other understand that beyond God's promise of resurrection at the last day, Christians have God's presence to touch us by grace in all those ways we encounter death in our daily lives. God does this in order to keep restoring us to life and community, where our presence and service are needed by others.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Jesus breaks a couple of formal and informal rules here. First, he interrupts a funeral procession. How would we feel about that? Then he touches a dead man—only the closest of relatives could do so without becoming ritually unclean (Leviticus 21:1-3; Numbers 19:11). Jesus shows that no barriers—not ritual laws, or societal norms, or even death—will stand in the way of God's **compassion**. Jesus also shows how God regards our concepts of purity and impurity.



### ? Compassion:

“He had compassion on her” (Luke 7:13). The original Greek word is not only interesting, but is very significant in Luke and it’s fun to say! *Splangchnizomai* (*splangk-NIZ-o-mai*—you’ll have to practice that!) comes from the word *splangchnon*, which means, well, guts. It describes a feeling of compassion that is incarnational and physical. In addition to the session text, it is used to describe the feeling of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:34) and the father of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20). God’s compassion for the lost is described in physical and human terms. God in Christ would have it no other way.

People who lived in the time of Christ’s ministry might look at the modern treatment of death and funeral practices and ask why dying is so private and emotionally sanitized (in hospitals, away from family and community). They might wonder why we try to make the dead person look not dead. There is much about our society that is “death denying” in an unhealthy way. Your group may want to talk about the differences in funeral practices between that time and our own and see how their public mourning and community acknowledgement of grief might be healthier than our own practices.

In Jesus’ day, the death of a widow’s only son meant complete poverty and helplessness. Jesus’ compassion certainly was for the widow—but the dead man certainly benefited as well! Jesus’ compassion touched all who were there, but in ways particular to the needs of each person.

#### LITERARY CONTEXT

The style here is straightforward prose—no poetry, no metaphor, no hidden meanings. The significance of who Jesus is and what God is doing through him are the underlying themes of this account. The Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49) gives a plain view of Jesus’ emphasis on seeking and including the outsider and the excluded. Immediately before our session text in Luke 7, we encounter the story of a Roman centurion who intercedes for his slave, and Jesus grants healing. In the session text, Jesus finds people who are “outsiders”—the dead man, outside life; the widow, outside hope; the crowds, outside the city. There is drama in the action—the procession stops; the Lord reaches out to touch the dead body; the dead man is no longer dead but alive and given by Jesus back to his mother. The words from Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain about the mourners’ tears turning to laughter come true in our session text.

This account of resurrection is also a way of looking forward to the resurrection of another “only son”—Jesus. The hearers in the early church would have made the connection. Participants might be asked if the language here reminds them of other accounts in the Bible—you may need to prod them with the words *only son* and *resurrection*.

#### LUTHERAN CONTEXT

The Lutheran understanding of law and gospel is very helpful at this point in the session. You will be dealing with elements that might challenge, accuse, and even condemn us, which is

the function of the law as we are reminded in passages such as Romans 7:21-25 and 1 Corinthians 15:56-58. We are reminded by Luke 7:11-17 that life itself can address us as “law.” There are events in our lives that are “deaths”—endings, sorrows, terminations, failures, and so on—that can also speak words of accusation and condemnation. However, Jesus speaks a different word. The gospel speaks to us in our “deaths” with words of hope and divine presence.

With this in mind, learners are asked to consider those aspects of their life that strike them as “law”—accusation and condemnation. Keep in mind that sometimes these are needed. An alcoholic, for instance, might hear the admonishment not to drink as accusation, but it is needed nonetheless. Luther’s advice is to hear Christ’s action or word in Luke as an invitation to positively consider the accusing voice of the law. To feel Christ’s touch is to be freed from that condemnation, to correct the error (stop drinking!), and to move on to live in community.

Lutheran theology proclaims that we are freed from the requirements of the law not simply to go our own way but that our work might be not for our salvation but for the good of our neighbor. God has looked with **favor** upon us and on others through us! Passages like 2 Corinthians 3:1-6 remind us that God has made us “letters of Christ” who have both the calling and the competence to be a “word of life” (1 John 1:1-4) to others.

#### DEVOTIONAL CONTEXT

This text is full of the deep “stuff” of human life: community, separation, family units and family disintegration, the needs of culture, and the requirements of living as human beings. It presents the ultimate themes of Christian faith: life and death, God’s presence in sorrow, the promised resurrection, and the reality of fear and wonder.

The challenge of the devotional reading is to move these deep things into the experienced reality of the participants’ lives. The theme of this session is looking for how God restores us to life. In this story, Jesus not only restores the dead youth to life but restores a family, touches a community of mourners, and, perhaps, changes how all look at the connections we have with each other.

“Death” has many meanings. Of course, at the end of our life, we die. But we all know the pain or ambiguity of endings and



#### Favor:

“God has looked favorably on his people!” (Luke 7:16b). The verb used here also can mean “visit”—God is not simply watching but is a part of the activity of God’s people—here the mourners.

failures and disappointments. A devotional reading of this text allows us to acknowledge the reality of death in all its dimensions and to ask Christ to touch us in those places to restore us to life and community. Learners are encouraged to think about the ways we experience death and how God touches us there.

### Facilitator's Prayer

*Dear God, you have entrusted me to be part of a people journeying through your word. Guide me as I seek to guide; lead me as I seek to lead; be gracious to me that I might be gracious and hold all of us in your merciful compassion. Amen.*

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## Gather (10-15 minutes)

### 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?



### Tip:

The photograph of a fresh grave may bring up memories of graves learners have encountered and, perhaps, grief or the fear of dying. It may be that some recognize an open grave not merely as one waiting to receive a body, but one that has, on the last day, been opened for entry into a life that will not end. You may want to suggest that neither option robs the other of its emotional and life-changing power. Death still hurts, but it does not deny resurrection.

## Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

After reading the scripture once, have learners break into the characters of the reading. Have the youngest “play” Jesus and the oldest play the dead youth.

OR

Turn out the lights. Take time for silence. Light a candle and read the text. Leave time for silence before turning the lights back on.

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 (25-55 minutes)

### 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?

### Bonus Activity:

“Fear seized all of them” (Luke 7:16a). The “fear” mentioned here appears to be a good thing. In what ways might this be so? Why is fear often thought of as a bad thing in our time?

## SESSION ONE



### Tip:

Use whiteboard or chart paper to have learners list as many modern funeral practices as they can. Discuss what practices we consider to be the most important and which would disturb us if they were interrupted or stopped. Compare these feelings to Jesus' "interruption" of this funeral procession in Luke 7.



### Bonus Activity:

Are participants familiar with burial practices in other cultures and religions? Discuss why these rituals might be important.



### Tip:

Have the group briefly scan Luke 7 for evidence of Jesus' compassion for the estranged—those trapped and struggling on the outskirts of acceptance.



### Tip:

There is drama in this story—the pathos of a death, the confrontation of Jesus with death, and the restoration of life. Help participants sense the drama by recording all the learners' sets of five words—in order, verse by verse—and then have them read/act out just those words in a reader's theater fashion. Take note of ways to share what you are discussing and doing in your small group in the congregational worship setting.



### Bonus Activity:

Identify the various characters in the text. Place them along a line on the floor, and invite participants to stand near the characters they most closely relate to.



### Bonus Activity:

If someone you loved were to be given back to you from death, what are some things you would say to or do with him or her?

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* 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.

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.



#### Tip:

Remember that law does not mean “bad” to the gospel’s “good.” We often need the corrective voice of the law. It becomes “bad” when it controls our life. The Lutheran emphasis is not to free us from works but rather to free our works from being for our salvation emphasizing instead that they’re for the



#### Bonus Activity:

Make a list of ways daily life can address us as “law.” Discuss how or whether these are corrective or how the voice of the law can be controlling.



#### Bonus Activity:

Read 1 John 1:1-4. The writer was clearly “touched” by the “word of life” that Jesus offered. What blessings of this “word of life” are evident in this passage? Make a list of how we need community (“fellowship”) and how our various communities need us.



#### Tip:

Challenge the group to think of death in other forms besides the physical passing away. What other kinds of death do we experience in life?



#### Bonus Activity:

Invite participants to write a prayer for God’s restoration into life for their week ahead, and encourage them to pray it daily.





### Tip:

You may wish to read the following from Nikos Kazantzakis's book, *Report to Greco*. Writing about a monk showing young tourists the tomb he has carved out for himself, he says: "Look at what I've carved on it," he shouted at us, 'Bend down, then, don't be afraid, I tell you, and read it.' He knelt down, brushed the dirt off the carved letters, and read out: 'Hey, I'm not afraid of you, Death!' He looked at us, and even his ears shook with laughter. 'Why should I be afraid of the rascal? He's just a mule, I'll climb on his back and he will take me to God.'" (Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965)



### Tip:

You may want to ask participants to name those whom they loved who have died and with whom they will share in resurrection.

### Wrap-up

1. If there are any questions to explore further, write them on a whiteboard or chart paper. Ask for volunteers to do research to share with the group at the next session.
2. Learners may wish to discuss whether it is easy or difficult for us to talk about death today. Should our Christian faith make a difference in such discussion?
3. Where have participants witnessed God's activity of restoring someone to life?
4. Encourage group members to go online to [www.bookoffaith.org](http://www.bookoffaith.org) to learn more about this Bible fluency initiative.

### 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 (5 minutes)

### 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.

**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 [augsburgfortress.org/store](http://augsburgfortress.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.

*Grievers 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.

**Looking Ahead**

1. Read the next session’s Bible text: Luke 7:36—8:3.
2. Read through the Leader Guide for the next session and mark portions you wish to highlight for the group.
3. Make a checklist of any materials you’ll need to do the Bonus Activities.
4. Pray for members of your group during the week.