

# SESSION TITLE: “Proof of Life: The Sign of Life”

FOCAL PASSAGE: (John 11:1-45)

**REVIEW/REACT:** Last week we discussed how Jesus gives spiritual sight to the blind. Did anyone take the opportunity to share this truth with someone this week? What happened?

Let's review the memory verse from last week:

He therefore answered, “Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.”  
John 9:25

**Central Teaching/Learning Aim:** To help the learner understand and accept the resurrection power of Christ in the account of Lazarus and for all who trust in Him for salvation.

## I. Creating Interest in the Series (Hook)

### A. Ask the following question:

How much hope do you have in eternal life? Why?

Allow time for some to answer.

**Share** the following stats:

In a recent survey (Oct. 2003) 79% of Americans agreed that every person has a soul that will last forever, either in God's presence or absence. “Barna Research”

Recently actress Sharon Stone appeared for the first time on the Oprah Show. She had almost died a few years ago from a brain aneurysm. During the interview she stated that she had, had a near death experience. She stated “...a giant vortex of white light was upon me and I kind...of took off into this glorious, bright, white light...” Stone said that it was an experience that took her places both here and beyond that affected her so profoundly that her life would never be the same.

Many celebrities have expressed similar experiences and many accounts have been recorded. None of these experiences are necessary to prove life after death. The proof is in the empty tomb.

**State** - Today we are going to discuss an account where Jesus conquered death, which foreshadowed His own future giving hope to all who believe.

### B. Optional Method – Movie Clip – “The Road to Perdition”

**Start: 7:15**

**Stop: 8:15**

**Synopsis:**

Sullivan and his son pay their respects at a funeral by kneeling in front of an open casket. Michael opens his eyes and stares at the corpse.

**Share** the following quote:

Dustin Hoffman recently said, what he wanted to see as his epitaph when he dies: “I knew this was going to happen”

*Biography 2002*

Physical death is inevitable.

**Ask** the following questions:

What emotions do you feel at a funeral?

How has death touched you?  
How does your relationship with Christ give you hope in times of death?

**State** - Today we are going to discuss an account where Jesus conquered death, which foreshadowed His own future giving hope to all who believe.

## II. Book

**A. Utilize** the discussion guide to examine the Scripture passages.

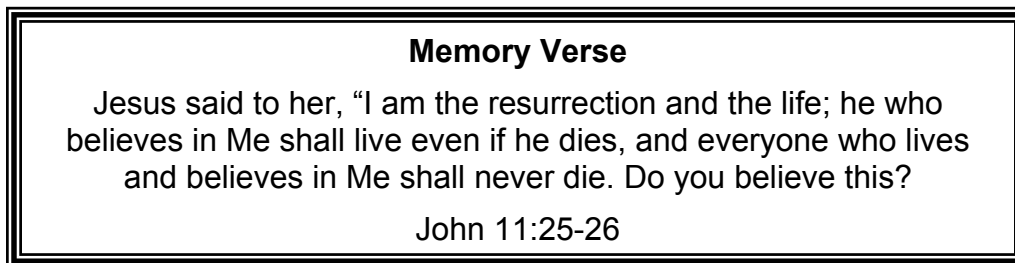
## III. Look

**A. Utilize** the handout "Signs for the Times" and have members complete in groups.

## IV. Took

**A. Keep** members in groups and have them practice sharing their faith incorporating the Signs of Jesus to help prove their belief. Who Jesus was/is is still a huge topic in society. Today we should be prepared with proof to share.

Have members review this week's memory verse:



**Ask** – Do you believe this promise? Let's live like we do this week. Note: Be sure and highlight the next series and distribute the new cards to any who do not have one.

**B. Optional Method – Share** the following humorous story:

A boy was playing with his pet turtle when it suddenly turned pale, fell over on its back, and lay motionless. With tears streaming down his face, the boy ran inside to tell his daddy. The father, a successful salesman, sized up the situation, put the turtle in a box, and then began to talk with his son about the theological implications of death.

In his most convincing sales tone, he described the joys of eternal life that little Albert was experiencing, and the beauty of standing around God's heavenly throne. He also told about the marvelous funeral they would have for the dearly departed pet, and that the boy could invite his friends to the house for cake and ice cream afterwards. As the father painted a brighter and brighter image in his son's mind, the boy's face gradually brightened as well. Seeing this, dad decided to close his litany by inviting the boy outside with him to bury the turtle. Going back outside and opening the box for one last look, there was Albert walking around as if nothing had happened! The boy looked up at his father with a strange look on his face said, "Dad, can we kill him?"

The Bible never suggests that we end our lives prematurely, just to get to the good stuff! But it does say that, for the Christian, there's no reason to fear death; rather, we will immediately find ourselves in the presence of God.

**Next** share this account:

The town of Le Lavandou on the French Riviera recently passed a law barring any more burials in the town cemetery. It's full. The law says, "It is forbidden without a cemetery plot to die on the territory of the commune." The law hasn't stopped people from dying. Nineteen people have died without a plot and are temporarily housed in friends' vaults.

There is only one law against dying that really works—the law of the Resurrection. -from *Chicago Tribune* (9-22-00)

**State** – It is inevitable that our physical bodies will wear out and die but like Paul said "To live is Christ to die is gain." This should be the attitude of Christians.

**Review** the memory verse and then challenge members to live a hope-filled life this week.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE (Teacher's Copy)

1. What was the purpose of Lazarus's sickness and death? (John 11:4)  
**(So that Jesus could be glorified through it.)**
2. How did this "Sign of Life" that Jesus would do, work in His plan of His death and resurrection? (v. 53)  
**(The Pharisees set out to kill Jesus from this sign on.)**
3. What was the second lesson Jesus taught the disciples in (vs. 9-10)?  
**(That they should not even fear death because God could overcome even death. Jesus was not afraid of death because He knew He would defeat it.)**
4. How did the disciples misunderstand Jesus in (v. 11)? (See vs. 12-14)  
**(They thought Jesus meant that Lazarus was only asleep and Jesus made it clear he was dead.)**
5. How is the death of Jesus misunderstood?
6. How did Martha and Mary display their lack of faith in the resurrection power of Christ? (vs. 21, 32)
7. Why did Jesus weep? (vs. 33-37)  
**(He was no doubt moved at the sisters and others grief, but the terms indicate that He was more angered at their unbelief that He could still redeem the situation.)**
8. What doubts do you struggle with as it relates to the power of Christ?
9. Did all believe who witnessed the miracle of Lazarus? (vs. 45-46)  
**(Many believed but some did not understand and went and reported what they had seen to the Pharisees.)**
10. What are some of the most common misunderstandings about Jesus today?

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# Signs for the Times

Work through the following review sheet to overview the Signs of Jesus. Then discuss a strategy of how this Proof of Life can be used to help your lost friends see.

What are the key principles that prove who Jesus is in the Signs of Jesus?

a. The Sign of Wine (2:1-11) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. The Sign of Healing (4:46-54) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

c. The Sign of Strength (5:1-18) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

d. The Sign of Bread (6:1-14) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

e. The Sign of Deliverance (6:16-21) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

f. The Sign of Sight (9:1-7) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

g. The Sign of Life (11:1-45) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Next practice sharing your faith utilizing these signs to prove who Jesus is.

**Daily Devotionals for Next Week**  
**Spiritual Fitness Training *Spiritual Makeover***  
**1 Corinthians 9:24-27 / 1 Timothy 4:8-10**

**MONDAY -- *Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 / 1 Timothy 4:8-10***

- “Makeovers” seem to be pretty popular these days. From television shows to Shrek 2, the idea of the makeover seems to be everywhere.
- Why do you think makeovers are so attractive right now?
- In your walk with Christ, what area of your life would you want to have made over?
- Paul talks here of the importance of running to win and training ourselves spiritually being more important than our physical health.
- Why do you think he would make the distinction to his readers?

**TUESDAY -- *Read 1 Corinthians 9:24***

- When Paul makes the distinction that only one receives the prize, how do you receive this verse?
- What type of preparation would need to take place to even enter the race? Hang with the lead pack? Even to win the race?
- Running to win, what are the runners trying to win? Is the Christian life a competition?
- The competition we are in and running to win is the competition for control. Self-Control. For the next 11 weeks we are looking at disciplines of abstinence. Then the following 7 weeks on disciplines of engagement. We as believers tend too often to **try** harder instead of **train** harder. In order to compete, we need to enter into training. What types of hindrances are holding you back from participating in the race spiritually?
- Read 1 Peter 2:11
- Resolve to enter into training to grow through and “retrain” your spiritual muscles for fitness.

**WEDNESDAY – *Read and journal in silence the following paragraph***

- If we feel that any habit or pursuit, harmless in itself, is keeping us from God and sinking us deeper in the things of the earth; if we find that things which others can do with impunity are for the occasion of falling, than abstinence is our only course. Abstinence alone can recover for us the real value of what should have been for our help but which has been an occasion of falling...it is necessary that we should steadily resolve to give up anything that comes between ourselves and God. W.R Inge, Goodness and Truth
- Resolve to spend time in solitude today at lunch or at a park on the way home or on an after dinner walk with your thoughts and a journal. What have you been doing to bring pleasure to your life instead of waiting on God to provide in the context of his will?

**THURSDAY – *Read 1 Corinthians 9:25***

- What areas of self-control are you doing well with, maybe even setting a new pace in your spiritual life?
- In what areas are you lacking?
- What is your plan to develop those areas?
- Read 9:26-27, ask God for his plan, pray for his wisdom, come up with a plan and meditate on it. Kick it off on Monday!

**FRIDAY – *Read 1 Timothy 4:7, then 8-10***

- Why do we enter into a time of not trying harder but training?
- What is the appeal to Paul’s question in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27
- Set your hope on the living God, catch His wind in the sails of the disciplines and give Him permission to lead you into working hard and struggling, and even into suffering if that is what it takes to know Him, the living God...He is the very best thing we could ever know, taste, see, receive.

# PROOF OF LIFE

## “The Sign of Life”

### John 11:1-45

(Exegetical . . . What it meant to the World back THEN)  
**JESUS’ “SIGN” OF LIFE  
RESULTED IN GOD BEING GLORIFIED  
AS MANY JEWS BELIEVED  
[THAT JESUS HAD POWER NOT ONLY TO HEAL,  
BUT ALSO TO GIVE LIFE].**

NOTE: The sign of life was the last of the seven signs (miracles that signified who Jesus was and what He was accomplishing according to the Father’s will) that John recorded in order to evoke belief in his readers (20:30-31). Of course, some had not believed and as a result had opposed Jesus (see 11:47-53). John constantly kept these two opposite responses before his readers.

In the sign of life narrative John recounted the sickness, death, and resurrection of Lazarus. Much of the story revolved around the misunderstandings of the disciples, Mary and Martha, and their Jewish friends. “Death” and “life” had both physical and spiritual meanings. Those who misunderstood were thinking of physical life, life on earth, as they knew it. But Jesus was constantly referring to spiritual life, eternal life. Then too, Martha expressed belief in a future resurrection, while Jesus wanted her to consider His power to resurrect Lazarus then and there! Jesus was on a different wavelength, living in yet another dimension. He was doing Heaven’s work. If only He could get His followers on track with Him! The sign of life would help their insight into Jesus’ person and strengthen their faith in Him.

In this sign Jesus was signifying that He WAS the Resurrection and the Life (1:4). He had the power to bring people back to life . . . whether to earthly physical life, as in Lazarus’ case, or to eternal life. And eternal life was not just some future hope, it was a present reality, a state of living into which Jesus was urging His followers. The question was whether they would, by believing, enter into the full experience of living that quality of life while still on earth (see 3:36; 10:10; 20:31). It was a quality of life that guarded them from fear of death in the service of God.

- I. The CONTEXT of the Sign of Life was the message Mary (who Anointed the Lord – see chapter 12) and Martha, her sister, Send to the Lord, telling Him that their brother Lazarus, the one Jesus Loved, was Sick, (1-3).
- II. Jesus’ verbal RESPOSE to the news that Lazarus was sick was to affirm that . . . A. . . . the sickness would not end in death,  
Note: The disciples misunderstood the statement. They thought that Lazarus would not die as a result of being sick. What Jesus meant was that even though Lazarus would die, the end result would not be death, but life.  
B. . . . but that it was for the glory of God [His reputation’s sake], and  
C. . . . for the purpose of the Son of God being Glorified through it [the sickness and it’s resolution, the sign of life], (4).  
Note: This “larger perspective” was the first major lesson for the disciples coming out of the Lazarus story, though it was not an easy message to catch. Jesus said that the sickness [and death and resurrection] was for the purpose of getting God glory. God did get glory when Lazarus was brought back to life and many believed (vs. 45). But there was more to it; the Son of God [Jesus] would be glorified as a result of the sign miracle.  
How so? Jesus was ultimately glorified not merely because He performed the miracle, but because, as a result of this climatic sign miracle, the Jewish authorities conspired to crucify Jesus (see 46-53, 57), and after the crucifixion Jesus was resurrected and exalted on high (see 20:17)! Jesus envisioned the whole plan, not merely the immediate delays and distractions.
- III. Jesus’ delayed RESPONSE to Hearing the news that Lazarus, whom Jesus Loved along with Martha and Mary, was Sick was, after Remaining where He was for two days, to invite the disciples to Go into Judea again, (5-7).
- IV. Jesus’ DIALOGUE with the disciples . . .  
A. . . . heard their resistance to returning to Judea since the Jewish authorities were Seeking to Stone Him to death [cf. 8:59, 10:39], (8);  
B. . . . explained that those who followed God [walked in the day] need not fear disaster [would not stumble] since they followed God’s leading/ timing [walked in the illumination God’s gives], but that those who did not follow God [walk in the night] would encounter disaster [stumble] since they did not have God’s illumination [the light was not in them], (9-10);  
Note: This statement was a second major lesson for the disciples as a result of Lazarus’ sickness and death. Jesus was saying that they need not fear even death if they followed the leading/timing of God. For God had ultimate power over every outcome, even death. Jesus had witnessed that He was not afraid of being killed. In fact, He would be killed. But God had the power to bring Him back to life (2:19-21).  
C. . . . informed the disciples that since Lazarus had [by now] Fallen Asleep [died], He was Going [to Judea] in order to Awaken [resurrect] him, (11);

- D. . . . revealed the disciples' misunderstanding in so far as they thought that Jesus was speaking literally and that if Lazarus was now Sleeping, his body was in the process of Healing, (12-13);
- E. . . . instructed the disciples in plain language that Lazarus was Dead [not merely "sleeping," a metaphor they should have recognized] and that He Rejoiced that He had not been there [to heal him of his sickness] since his death would provide the disciples an opportunity to Believe, (14-15);
- Note: Of course, the disciples had already believed in Jesus (1:41, 45, 49). But the content of their faith [who Jesus was and what He was about] continued to grow as they saw "greater things," (cf. 1:50-51).
- F. . . . resulted in Thomas' loyal declaration that they [the disciples] should Go up to Judea with Him and Die with Him [if that was the cost of following Him], (16).
- V. Jesus' DIALOGUE with Martha after Lazarus had Been in the tomb for four days and Jesus had come near to Bethany, less than two miles from Jerusalem [a place of danger for Jesus who was being sought by the authorities] . . .
- A. . . . instructed [challenged? rebuked?] Jesus that if He had been present, Lazarus would not have died, (17-21);
- B. . . . affirmed her faith that God was still at work in and through Him, (22);
- Note: This statement should not be taken to indicate that Martha expected Jesus to resurrect her brother. Verse 39b suggests otherwise. Martha was simply saying that she had not lost faith in Jesus as a friend and a healer.
- C. . . . promised Martha that her brother would be Resurrected, (23);
- D. . . . affirmed her faith in her brother's resurrection "in the last days," (24);
- Note: See Job 19:25-27; Psalm 49:15; and Daniel 12:2 for statements that affirmed the end times resurrection of Old Testament believers.
- E. . . . challenged Martha to Believe that Jesus was [I am] "the Resurrection and the Life" with the result that those who Believed in Him, even though they Died [physically], would Live [again in a physical body] and that those who Lived [spiritually] and Believed in Him would "not never" [double negative for emphasis] Die [spiritually], (25-26);
- F. . . . evoked Martha's profession that she Believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, the One Coming [from God] into the world, (27).
- Note: This confession (cp. John 20:28) was the goal of Jesus' dialogue with Martha. She was still moving through the process of understanding fully Jesus' identity. Like the disciples, her faith was growing as she saw more clearly. John purposed that his readers share that same growing realization along with faithful followers like Martha.
- VI. Jesus' DIALOGUE with the prostrate [not worshipping, but grieving], weeping Mary, who had come to Jesus as Martha had encouraged her and who was accompanied by those Consoling her in her grief . . .
- A. . . . instructed [challenged? rebuked?] Jesus that if He had been present, Lazarus would not have died (cp. 17-21), (28-32);
- B. . . . provoked Jesus to Groan within His spirit and to be Troubled, (33);
- Note: The terms used here speak more of Jesus' anger or indignation than grief. Jesus was angered, no doubt, because of the effect of sin that resulted in death. But more immediately, Jesus was angered over the lack of faith that resulted in the weeping, both of Mary and the consolers. Even though they stood in the presence of "The Resurrection and The Life" they had no hope for Lazarus' immediate condition. They thought that Jesus might have been able to heal Lazarus, but not now resurrect him. Jesus was outraged over their limited view of His capability. Their sin-darkened hearts were clouded!
- C. . . . exposed the limited faith of the Jewish crowd of consolers who expressed faith in the compassionate Jesus to heal [but not in His power over death; power to give life, both physical/temporal and spiritual/ eternal to those who believe, see chapter 3, especially vs. 16], (34-37).
- VII. Jesus' COMMAND to Lazarus to "Come Out," (43) . . .
- A. . . . after again Groaning over the consolers' [and sisters'] lack of insight and faith (38a);
- B. . . . after Coming to the tomb and commanding the people to Lift away the stone [cover] (38b-39a);
- C. . . . after challenging the doubting Martha (39b) to believe what He had Told her [that if she Believed she would See the glory of God] (40);
- D. . . . and after Praying to the Father, Thanking Him for Hearing, and not because He doubted that the Father would Hear, but so that the people might Believe that He [the Father] had Sent Him [the Son] (41-42);
- E. . . . resulted in Lazarus' Coming Out [having been raised from the dead] and Being Loosened from his grave clothes, (44).
- VIII. The RESULT of Jesus' Sign of giving resurrection Life to Lazarus was that many of the Jews, who had been there to console Mary and had Seen what Jesus had Done, Believed in Him, (45).
- Note: Once again their response of belief was the very response John was seeking from his readers. John's theme was, "See who Jesus is and believe," (cf. 20:30-31).

(Theological . . . What it means to believers **ALWAYS**)  
**GOD'S POWER OVER DEATH**  
**(TO GIVE LIFE – PHYSICAL AND ETERNAL)**  
**ELIMINATES THE TRUE BELIEVER'S FEAR OF DEATH.**

**(Pedagogical . . . What it means to us NOW)  
LIVE AN “ETERNAL” LIFE.**

- I. Physical death, which threatens every living person, evokes fear and grief.
  - A. Death threatened Lazarus by sickness, (1); Jesus by stoning, (8); and the disciples by identification with Jesus, (16).
  - B. Physical death threatens every living person, (cf. Romans 5:12).
  - C. The threat of death evokes paralyzing fear and hopeless grief in many.
    - 1. Top child fears: AIDS, war, abuse, early death, lack of education.
    - 2. Top adult fears: Public speaking, heights, snakes, spiders, needles, enclosed spaces flying, open spaces, failure, pain.
- II. Jesus’ power over death (physical and spiritual) gives comfort in life.
  - A. Jesus’ claims of glory promised His power over death, (4, 14-15, 25-26, 40).
  - B. Jesus’ power over death promises life to believers, (cf. Romans 5:21).
  - C. Jesus’ promise of resurrection life should be our comfort.
    - 1. Jesus’ promise of resurrection life should rule out the perspective: “This life is all there is; preserve it *at all costs*.” – see B. Witherington (p. 210) who warns against elaborate denials of death, excessive prolongation of life, and a failure to risk one’s life for the good of others.
    - 2. Jesus’ promise of resurrection life should motivate our service:  
“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” - Jim Elliot
- III. Believing in Jesus (that He Is and gives life) eliminates Paralyzing Fear and Hopeless Grief, (33-44).
  - A. Jesus sought the belief of the disciples who feared [8, 16], (14-15); Martha (and Mary) who grieved without hope [21, 32, 39], (25-27, 40); and the crowd which grieved [33] and doubted [37], (42, 45).
  - B. Believing in Jesus results in eternal life, (25-26; cf. 3:16; 20:31).
  - C. Believing will eliminate your fear and hopelessness.
- IV. LIVE AN “ETERNAL” LIFE.
  - A. Get God’s perspective on death and life.
  - B. Give your life to serve God and others.
  - C. Rather than fear death . . . trust Jesus.
  - D. Rather than grieve without hope . . . anticipate the resurrection.