



## Weekly Devotional

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*This guide pairs with Mark 16: 9-20 and the sermon preached at Chapel Hill April 27-28.*



### **Written by Serena Blair**

Worship leader at Chapel Hill. Jesus is the King of my heart. I love being John's wife, proud to get the title "Mama" to twin girls, and have been a hairdresser my entire adult life. I have a passion to live out my faith and not hoard it. I love God's Word. It is the plumb bob, the vertical reference line written straight from the loving heart of Father God to our hearts and the depth of our souls. For fun: I love family, people, yummy coffee, vacation, fashion (yes!), and all things salty.

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## **LifeGroup Guide**

### **Head**

Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene. What else do we know about her? Why is it significant that Jesus would appear first to someone like her?

The disbelief of the disciples is highlighted in verses 11, 13, and 14. Yet Jesus' commission is to believe and see his power at work in and through the disciples. How do we see the ability of God to transform even the most unbelieving and the hardest of hearts in the contrast between disbelief and belief in these verses?

Verse 17 contains a promise that believers will do many of the same signs and wonders that Jesus did. How does verse 20 help us understand the purpose of these signs and wonders?

### **Heart**

The disciples were mourning and weeping when they received the good news of the resurrection. How can you identify with the feeling of receiving good news from a place of grief?

The disciples' first reaction to the news was disbelief. How have you experienced faith as a gradual process?

### **Hands**

This passage contains the Markan version of the great commission. What is your part to play in proclaiming the gospel in your current season of life?

The disciples' response to Jesus' ascension to heaven was to go out and preach everywhere. The passage says "the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message with accompanying signs". We have varying levels of comfort and experience with these signs. Pray boldly as a group for the Lord to speak powerfully through you and to confirm his message in people's lives through you this week.

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**DAY 1 – Monday**  
**Daily devotional**

**Read**

John 20:11-18; Mark 16

**Ask**

What do we know about Mary Magdalene and what can we learn from her?

**Reflect**

Mary Magdalene. There is so much conjecture surrounding her in popular culture. The movie *The Da Vinci Code* alleges that she and Jesus were married. In the movie *The Passion of the Christ* she was associated with the woman caught in the act of adultery and awaiting stoning. She has also been associated with the “woman in the city who was a sinner” who might have washed Jesus’ feet in Luke 7:37.

Today we’ll hone in on what the Bible actually says about her; let’s get our facts straight! She was a woman who had seven demons cast out of her by Jesus (Luke 8:2). She witnessed most of the events surrounding Jesus’ crucifixion. She was present at the mock trial of Jesus; she heard Pontius Pilate pronounce the death sentence, and she saw Jesus beaten and humiliated by the crowd. She was one of the women who stood near Jesus trying to comfort him as he was being crucified. She was the earliest witness to the resurrection of Jesus and was sent by Jesus to tell the others of the news. We can’t know why she was a first responder to so many events at the end of Jesus’ life, but we can know she knew who Jesus was, and she knew who she was in him. She was brave, and her faith was ignited the moment she met Jesus and he healed her. The most striking role Mary played in Jesus’ life was to simply be there. She was present.

Have you ever thought about your role in someone’s life as simply being present? Recently we had to put our cat to sleep. As the date loomed, I had quite a few clients ask me if we would be present when he was put down. They asked if my kids would be there, because “Surely you aren’t going to have your children present” ...and so on. I simply said we would all be there. The day arrived and the tension in the room was palpable. My kids openly sobbed, and John and I stuffed our sorrow in silent tears. We loved our kitty and we were simply there with him until he died. This wasn’t Jesus, of course, but I can relate to the fact that there is something very uncomfortable about being present in a moment of death.

Thinking about Jesus on the day he died, and how it must have felt to not hold anything back, to let the tears flow, to show the deep gratitude for all that he did on our behalf—no words give it justice. Mary was brave and she was present. Can you risk being uncomfortable and simply be present in someone’s life when you would rather run for it?

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**DAY 2 – Tuesday**  
**Daily devotional**

**Read**

Mark 16:9-11, John 20:11-18

**Ask**

Today I am using John's gospel to give another eyewitness approach to what you are reading in Mark 16. What did it feel like when Jesus called your name? Did you recognize him? Do you know God created you for something profoundly remarkable?

**Reflect**

On the morning after the Sabbath, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. Mary was bent over with grief. She had followed Jesus and his disciples from city to city, watched him heal the sick and free the captives, turn ashes to beauty, and mourning to gladness. She looked on as Jesus was taken and beaten and bound to a cross, and she watched as they buried him in a tomb, death having silenced the very life that changed her own. Like many women in Scripture, Mary's tears were perhaps the last desperate words to the God she hoped was listening. The body she had come to anoint and care for was now missing, and she thought the gardener had something to do with it. In devastated affection, she pled for the body of the one she loved: "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him" (John 20:15b).

"Mary", was all Jesus said. He called her name and she turned and recognized him. What did it feel like when Jesus called your name? Did you recognize him?

I love that Jesus used a woman as the first eyewitness to the resurrection. Not because I am a woman, but because people in the first century did not consider women's testimony to be credible. You can research the Talmud and discover all kinds of information on this. Given the lack of credibility of a woman's testimony it causes you to wonder why these women were written in at the telling of each account of Jesus' life and death and they are the first witnesses to Jesus resurrection. Wouldn't it had made more sense to have a more credible witness?

God chooses those whom we least expect in ways that are profoundly remarkable! God chooses those in whom we would more than likely overlook...those considered last and least to bear witness to the mighty works of God!

Have you considered yourself a person like this? You were created for something profoundly remarkable! Do you know that? You get to bear witness to the mighty works of God! This should be amazing news, even if it is mixed with fear.

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**DAY 3 – Wednesday**  
**Daily devotional**

**Read**

Mark 16:11-14

**Ask**

Do you struggle with disbelief?

**Reflect**

Mary goes to tell the other disciples what she has seen, and they don't believe her—even though they might have recalled Jesus telling them three different times that he would die, and on the third day, rise up.

Many of us have witnessed miracles by God...we have heard countless stories of restoration and healings...but we still lack belief. Some of us are skeptics by temperament. The truth is, every Christian will deal with doubt and disbelief. "Faith needs to wrestle at times," I like to say. Christians who struggle with periods of doubt and disbelief are often afraid to share their thoughts with others. Though they want and need to process their thoughts and theology, their doubt quickly compounds into guilt, keeping them silent.

If you are one of those people and you are currently in a place of doubt, would you consider asking yourself some questions?

Are you letting God speak to you, or are you constantly questioning him? At times I can find myself chattering away at God and not allowing him to speak into my life. I have to practice quietly listening to him and reading his word to know how he speaks.

Are your desires clouding your judgment? This is a hard one, because if you're human, you have had moments like this. As we read the passage in Mark, we note that the disciples were mourning and weeping. So why did they refuse to believe? Maybe they were thinking, "This is too good to be true!" Or "Pinch me, I'm dreaming!" We don't know, we weren't there—but grief can be powerful.

Have you asked God to help you believe him, to help your unbelief? He will! Faith is solid confidence built on convincing evidence. We don't believe because we simply want to believe. We believe because there are good solid reasons to believe. The foundation of strong personal faith comes together brick by brick. But it won't necessarily be easy and it won't happen overnight. Finally, we believe because Jesus enables us to believe. Faith ultimately is a gift from God (1 Cor. 12:9, Gal. 5:22).

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**DAY 4 – Thursday**  
**Daily devotional**

**Read**

Mark 16:15, Act 1:8

**Ask**

The great command! How do we feel about sharing the Gospel? Do we trust him?

**Reflect**

The idea that faith should go to the ends of the earth was a revolutionary idea. This wasn't part of Jewish thinking in the days of Jesus. They had worked so hard at separating themselves from the rest of the world, now the great commission—how would it play out? If we read Acts, we can see how the early church was born. All who believed gathered in Jerusalem growing in number by the day. That is until they were under persecution and ran for their lives. Who knew that the gospel would spread in such a way?

At the Alpha Conference this year, we got to hear from a woman called Emmy Wilson who works for the church Holy Trinity Brompton in London. She told us about taking Alpha into the prison in Exeter. She watched the Holy Spirit work on these hardened criminals and soon they were transformed. In the UK, prisoners are often moved around because the prisons are worried about uprisings. So these men took the Holy Spirit with them as they were moved around. Each time they got the prison chaplain to have Emmy lead Alpha, and she did at each of the prisons in the UK. She watched hundreds of lives change because of the glorious gospel.

How do we feel about sharing the gospel? Proverbs 16:9 says the mind of a man plans his ways, but the Lord directs his steps. To his disciples Jesus says "Follow me". He always leads. Do we trust him even though we have literally all of our days planned out? (I say this lovingly.) My friend Kjersten prays over her daily calendar and asks God where she should leave space for what he has planned for her that day. Wow. I want to learn from her!

I have many moments at work to share the love of Christ. It is almost always after I have invested in my clients and there is a relationship. Investing in people makes you credible. Respecting them is essential. Sharing the Gospel should always be a conversation, not a WWF smackdown. Jesus lovingly and compassionately meets people right where they are at. He always has.

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## **DAY 5 – Friday**

### **Daily devotional**

#### **Read**

Baptism: Mark 16:16, Luke 23:40-43, Luke 3:16, Matt. 28:18-20

#### **Ask**

What is baptism? Why do we do it?

#### **Reflect**

How many times in verse 16 does it say “believe”? Two times. We can glance at this scripture with a casual eye and think it’s saying “sinners must be baptized to be saved”. This is not true. This misinterpretation disappears when you note the emphasis on believing. In this passage, Jesus is saying condemnation is on the person who does not believe. So even though someone has been baptized, if they don’t believe in their heart, baptism doesn’t save. Salvation rests on belief!

When asking someone about their faith, I have heard: “well, I was baptized...”. Sometimes the implication of that comment is that a person was baptized but never believed (and doesn’t really want to!). But remember the thief on the cross? (Read the Luke passage above.) His heart believed in Jesus and that’s what led to salvation. The thief was never baptized. Do you see my point? Baptism doesn’t save; believing does. (Read Romans for a complete analysis.) At the same time, baptism is not to be considered a non-essential. It is not essential to salvation, but rather to obedience!

In Matthew 28:18-20, we read: “Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

Let’s break it down. Jesus commands, “make disciples”. Firstly we see that disciples are made, not spontaneously created at conversion. “Of all nations”, no one is left out. Every corner of the earth is to have disciples of Jesus. “Baptize them”, not circumcise them. Circumcision was the old covenant that showed the children of Israel were God’s chosen people. Now it is baptism. “In the name” literally means into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “Name”, not names, indicating the unity of the Trinity. “Teaching them”—disciples are made through teaching with the power of the always present Holy Spirit. “I am with you to the very end of the age”—Jesus sent his disciples out with a mission to fulfill, but he did not send them alone.

In 1 Cor. 3:9, Paul wrote, we are God’s fellow workers. We work with him in all our service. How do you feel about being fellow workers with Christ? How do you see baptism? Have you been baptized? Do you see it as a mark of obedience and love for Christ?

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**DAY 6 – Saturday**  
**Daily devotional**

**Read**

Luke 24:27-53

**Ask**

Jesus left a legacy. What does that mean to you?

**Reflect**

I was asked to sing at a memorial of a person I didn't know. At one point in the service, they played a voice recording of the woman who had died. It was a message she had left them—a parting word she wanted them to know. It was pretty powerful; there wasn't a dry eye. It was a gift to hear one more time how much she loved them and watch their faces reveal how they received it. They hung on every word.

Inserting myself into these last moments, Jesus spent on earth with the ones closest to him, I can only imagine the looks on their faces. Read the passage above in Luke. The scripture was a familiar book to these listeners. Jesus explained to them the things concerning himself in all the scriptures. He spoke to them, he ate with them, and he showed them his hands and feet. He told them they were his witnesses to all things pertaining to him. He sent forth the promise of the Father on them. While he blessed them, he was carried up to heaven. In the end of John's gospel, it says "...and there were also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written".

I write in my Bible, and in the margin, I write notes to my kids. Those notes are for when I am gone someday as I am counting on them outliving me. I want them to know what scriptures I have dedicated to them and prayed over them. I want them to know how much I loved Jesus in my time on earth. I want them (more than anything) to know that God's Word deep in their hearts is more comforting than anything and the Holy Spirit is their teacher.

Jesus gave us his Word so we would know how to love and how to live. He left a legacy in scripture. He left us little notes literally everywhere—hints of who he is, why he came and how he loved. Jesus gave us his Word because he wanted us to be comforted; to have hope and know the truth. This isn't a story passed down by word of mouth; it was carefully written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it is infallible, and you either believe all of it by faith or you don't. Just like my little notes in the margin don't tell the whole of who I am, there are things we have to wait until heaven to know (Deut. 29:29). But what we do know from the Word is the character of God. While we may have some questions, all we need to know now has been written down for our benefit.

What will your legacy look like? Are there words that need to be spoken now, before another day passes to loved ones that need to hear it? I can think of three people I need to speak to today. What about you?



**DAY 7 – Sunday**  
**Daily devotional**

**Read**

Acts 1- 2:4

**Ask**

How is the Lord working in you by his Holy Spirit?

**Reflect**

So what happened after he ascended? Imagine if there wasn't a sequel? What if the gospels ended and that was it or you read through the gospel of John and then turn the page to Paul writing to the followers of Jesus in Rome? You would wonder—wait what? Who is Paul and how did the gospel get from Jerusalem to Rome?

The book of Acts is key! At the time Jesus ascended to heaven the apostles whom Jesus appointed faced enormous obstacles. They were going to have to exercise faith with each step they took. The story of Jesus and all the remarkable things he had done was still hot off the press news. If the Pharisees had wanted Jesus dead, then anyone proclaiming his name was targeted as well. Acts is a book that's full of "what happened next"!

Jesus promised them that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, which was a promise from the Father. The gift that would keep giving for generations of sons and daughters. The Spirit of Truth, the Comforter to the saints. God with us, literally. Jesus went on to tell them they would receive power from the Spirit and they would be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. These words had to be comforting to them. After Jesus ascended to heaven they waited for what was promised and committed themselves to continuous prayer.

If you read the scriptures above you know how the story plays out. What does this mean for us? The Holy Spirit will reside in every believer (the temple not made with hands). He will teach us in all things concerning Christ. He will comfort us, correct us, convict us, love us. He is the third person of the Trinity.

I have learned a lot this week studying! I hope you have too. The work of the Holy Spirit is gradual and if we trust Him we can know for certain that He changes us from the inside out and into the image of Christ. We have to desire to be with Jesus each day. How do you see his work in your life right now?

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