

The Empty Tomb: Whom Are You Seeking?

JOHN 20:1-18 (BSB) · TEACHER GUIDE · DIGDEEPER.AI

THE BIG IDEA · SAY IT AT LEAST FIVE TIMES

Whom are you seeking? The risen Jesus comes and calls you by name.

Open with it, bring it back after every section, close with it. By the end they should be able to finish the sentence for you.

- Before this passage (day 26): John 19:16-30, It Is Finished. Its big idea: The crucified King finished his work; nothing is left undone.
- After this passage (day 28): John 20:24-31, My Lord and My God. Its big idea: The risen Jesus is Lord and God, written down so you may believe.

Open

Recall last time (John 19): Jesus said “It is finished,” died, and was laid in a tomb. Ask: “Has anyone ever said your name and you knew instantly who it was, before you even turned around?” Take two or three answers. Read John 20:15-16 aloud. Then say the big idea: Whom are you seeking? The risen Jesus comes and calls you by name. Ask one person what stuck from last time.

Run Sheet

1. The Stone Removed, the Cloths Left Behind (John 20:1-10, about 12 min)

The one thing: The tomb is empty, but not the way a robbery would leave it.

Ask: Why would folded grave cloths point to something other than a stolen body?

2. Whom Are You Seeking? (John 20:11-16, about 15 min)

The one thing: Mary is searching for a body. Jesus finds her and calls her by name.

Ask: Why do you think Mary recognized Jesus by hearing her name, not by seeing his face?

3. Go and Tell My Brothers (John 20:17-18, about 10 min)

The one thing: The risen Jesus makes his Father theirs and sends Mary to say so.

Ask: What changes for the disciples when Jesus calls them “My brothers” and his Father “your Father”?

Close (never cut it)

Land on who Jesus is, not on a task. He is alive, he came to the one weeping in the dark, and he called her by name. Read v.15 again, “Whom are you seeking?”, then let a moment of quiet sit before you pray.

PROTECT THE ENDING

If section 3 starts late, skip its optional points and discussion, read v.17-18, and go straight to the close.

KIDS SIDE ANSWERS

Story order: 1, 4, 2, 5, 3 (top to bottom) · Feelings: Mary at the tomb sad, Peter running to the tomb worried, Mary hearing Jesus say her name happy, The disciples before Mary came worried · Code: I HAVE SEEN THE LORD

Act it out: One child is Mary, eyes covered and sad. The teacher, as Jesus, asks, “Whom are you seeking?” and then says the child’s name. The child uncovers their eyes and shouts, “Teacher!” Swap so others get a turn.

1. The Stone Removed, the Cloths Left Behind

JOHN 20:1-10 · ABOUT 12 MIN · SECTION 1 OF 3

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- Mary comes in the dark and finds the stone moved.
- Two disciples run and find the grave cloths left behind.
- One disciple sees and believes, but he doesn't yet understand.

Mary went to the tomb while it was still DARK.

The other disciple went in, and he saw and BELIEVED.

Discuss: Why would folded grave cloths point to something other than a stolen body?

The tomb is empty, but not the way a robbery would leave it.

MUST COVER

- v.1-2: Mary assumes theft: "They have taken the Lord." Nobody expects a resurrection.
- v.6-8: Cloths lie there, the head cloth "rolled up, lying separate." Robbers don't unwrap a body.

IF THERE'S TIME

- v.9: "They still did not understand from the Scripture." Faith began before full understanding.
- The "other disciple" is traditionally John, who wrote this book, telling on himself as a first-hand witness.

Illustration idea: A burglary leaves drawers dumped and doors open. A tidy room with only one thing missing tells a different story.

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: "A thief would have grabbed the body and run."
- Listen for: "It looks like the body just left the cloths."

If it drifts: If talk turns to theories about the body, bring it back to v.2 and v.7: what did Mary assume, and what did the men actually see?

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

They came looking for a body. What they found says he isn't missing. He's risen.

Short on time? Skip v.9-10 and the note on who the other disciple is.

Bridge → The men go home, but Mary stays by the tomb, still weeping.

2. Whom Are You Seeking?

JOHN 20:11-16 · ABOUT 15 MIN · SECTION 2 OF 3

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- Mary stays and weeps, even with angels in front of her.
- Jesus asks her two questions, and she doesn't know him.
- One word changes everything: her name.

Mary thought He was the GARDENER.

Jesus said to her, "MARY."

Discuss: Why do you think Mary recognized Jesus by hearing her name, not by seeing his face?

Mary is searching for a body. Jesus finds her and calls her by name.

MUST COVER

- v.15: "Whom are you seeking?" He asks gently. He already knows the answer is standing there.
- v.16: "Mary." ... "Rabboni!" He is known by his voice speaking her name.

IF THERE'S TIME

- John 10:3 (Jesus earlier called himself the Good Shepherd): "he calls his own sheep by name." Here it happens.
- Mary gets everything wrong: the body, the gardener, the plan. Jesus comes to her anyway.

Illustration idea: In a crowded airport you can't pick out a face, then someone calls your name and you know that voice at once.

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: "Grief was clouding her eyes."
- Listen for: "Your name, in a voice you love, is personal. It cuts through."

If it drifts: If it becomes stories about grief in general, return to v.16: what one word did Jesus say, and what did Mary do?

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

She came looking for a dead teacher. The living one found her and said her name.

Short on time? Drop the angels (v.12-13) and go straight to v.15-16.

Bridge → Now that she knows him, Jesus gives her something to carry.

3. Go and Tell My Brothers

JOHN 20:17-18 · ABOUT 10 MIN · SECTION 3 OF 3

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- Jesus says, “Do not cling to Me,” and sends her on.
- His Father is now called “your Father.”
- Mary becomes the first to announce the risen Lord.

“I am ascending to My Father and YOUR FATHER.”

Mary announced, “I have SEEN THE LORD!”

Discuss: What changes for the disciples when Jesus calls them “My brothers” and his Father “your Father”?

The risen Jesus makes his Father theirs and sends Mary to say so.

MUST COVER

- v.17: “My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.” The resurrection makes them family.
- v.18: Mary’s report is short: “I have seen the Lord!” and what he said.

IF THERE'S TIME

- In that day a woman’s testimony counted for little. Inventors of a story would not pick Mary as first witness.
- “Do not cling”: not coldness. He isn’t leaving yet, and there is news to take.

Illustration idea: A child adopted into a family hears, for the first time, “This is your dad too.”

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: “They’re not just followers now, they’re family.”
- Listen for: “Even after they ran away, he calls them brothers.”

If it drifts: If it turns into a debate about ascension, point back to the words “your Father” and ask what Mary had to tell.

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

He called her name, and then he called them family. That’s who the risen Jesus is.

Short on time? Skip the note on women as witnesses.

Bridge → Mary has seen him, so let’s end where she did: with who he is.

With One Friend, Over Coffee

ABOUT 30 MINUTES · FOR A FRIEND WHO IS CURIOUS, OR NOT SURE

1. Set the scene. Briefly: Jesus was crucified and buried (John 19). Friends were crushed. Then read John 20:1-18 together.
2. Look at the tomb. Ask what they notice in v.6-7. The cloths were left, the head cloth rolled up apart. What would a thief have done?
3. Look at Mary. She expected nothing but a missing body. Read v.15-16 slowly. Ask why one word, her name, changed everything.
4. Name the claim. John isn't offering a nice feeling. He says the man who died is alive and calls God "your Father." It is fine for them to find that hard.
5. Leave his question. Say: "Jesus asked her, 'Whom are you seeking?' I'll leave that question with you." Then stop. No pressure, no push to decide.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY HEAR

"Grieving people see what they want. Why trust Mary?"

Fair worry. But Mary wasn't hoping for this. She assumed theft and took him for the gardener. And the men saw the empty tomb before anyone saw Jesus.

"Isn't it simpler to think someone moved the body?"

That was Mary's first thought too. But a mover wouldn't unwrap the body and leave the cloths set aside. John tells it as someone who was there.

"Why did no one recognize him at first?"

John doesn't fully explain. Tears, dim light, and not expecting him all may be part of it. The point is that he made himself known.

"Why would it matter to me if it happened?"

If he is alive, he isn't just a teacher from the past. He calls God "your Father" and still knows people by name.

Evergreen Principles

Four standards every week. The rest rotate: each lesson brings the few that fit its passage best.

EVERY LESSON

1. Pray before you prepare

Teaching the Bible is spiritual work first (John 15:5).

If you're new: Pray for your class by name during the week.

If you've taught for years: Pray for the one person you find hardest to reach.

2. Study the text first

Understand the passage yourself before any help.

If you're new: Read it in two translations; write your own questions first.

If you've taught for years: Don't lean on old notes. What did you miss last time?

3. Teach one big idea

People remember one sentence, not four points.

If you're new: Write it in 12 words or fewer before anything else.

If you've taught for years: Test every story against it. If it doesn't serve it, cut it.

4. Point to Christ

All of Scripture points to him (Luke 24:27).

If you're new: Ask: what does this show about Jesus?

If you've taught for years: Show grace as the reason for obedience, not just the rule.

FOR THIS LESSON

1. Plan for the skeptic and the grieving

This passage speaks to doubters (did it happen?) and mourners (Mary weeping).

If you're new: Have one sentence ready on the grave cloths and one gentle word for anyone in tears.

If you've taught for years: Let the doubter's question and the mourner's tears both lead back to v.15-16.

2. Let silence do its work

The turning point is one quiet word: "Mary."

If you're new: After reading v.16, pause five seconds before saying anything.

If you've taught for years: Read v.15 in the close and hold the silence longer than feels comfortable.

3. Let the passage land the way it lands

John is showing who Jesus is, not assigning homework.

If you're new: End on Jesus alive and calling her name, not on a task.

If you've taught for years: Resist turning "go and tell" into a class assignment. It was Mary's commission. Keep the focus on him.

BEFORE CLASS

- ☐ Read the passage three times
- ☐ Big idea in one sentence
- ☐ Opening and close chosen
- ☐ Know what you'll cut
- ☐ Handouts, pens, extra Bibles
- ☐ Prayed for the class by name

Openings, Closings & Hard Moments

Pick one opening and one close; rotate so class doesn't get predictable.

OPENINGS

- ask a real-life question: “When has someone said your name and you knew the voice instantly?”
- use an object: Fold a small cloth and set it apart on a table. Ask what a neat, folded cloth says about how someone left.
- start in the text: Read v.1 alone: “while it was still dark.” Ask what Mary thought she would find.

CLOSINGS

- restate the big idea: “Whom are you seeking? The risen Jesus came to Mary and called her name.”
- allow quiet reflection: Read v.15 aloud, then give thirty seconds of silence with Jesus’ question.
- call back to the opening: “We started with a voice that says your name. That is how Mary knew her Lord was alive.”

WHEN CLASS GETS HARD

- Someone recently bereaved is moved to tears at Mary weeping by the tomb.: Don’t rush past it. Point out that Jesus asked “why are you weeping?” gently and never scolded her. Offer to talk afterward.
- A skeptic says, “This is just a story grieving followers told.”: Thank them. Point to v.2 (Mary assumed theft) and v.7 (the cloths). Admit faith is still involved, and move on without debating.
- Silence after a question: Wait. Then rephrase simpler, or ask them to talk to a neighbor first.
- One person dominates: “Thanks. Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t spoken yet.” Talk privately if it continues.
- A question you can’t answer: Say so, write it down, bring an answer next week.
- A tangent takes over: “Great question. Let’s catch it after class so we can finish the passage.”

READ THIS WEEK

- John 10:1-15
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-8
- Romans 8:14-17

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/john/20-1-18/lesson

The Empty Tomb: Whom Are You Seeking?

JOHN 20:1-18 (BSB) · WHO DO YOU SAY I AM? · DIGDEEPER.AI

Key verse: “Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).” John 20:16

THE BIG IDEA

Whom are you seeking? The risen Jesus comes and calls you by name.

1. THE STONE REMOVED, THE CLOTHS LEFT BEHIND · JOHN 20:1-10

- Mary comes in the dark and finds the stone moved.
- Two disciples run and find the grave cloths left behind.
- One disciple sees and believes, but he doesn’t yet understand.

Mary went to the tomb while it was still _____.

The other disciple went in, and he saw and _____.

Discuss: Why would folded grave cloths point to something other than a stolen body?

2. WHOM ARE YOU SEEKING? · JOHN 20:11-16

- Mary stays and weeps, even with angels in front of her.
- Jesus asks her two questions, and she doesn’t know him.
- One word changes everything: her name.

Mary thought He was the _____.

Jesus said to her, “_____.”

Discuss: Why do you think Mary recognized Jesus by hearing her name, not by seeing his face?

3. GO AND TELL MY BROTHERS · JOHN 20:17-18

- Jesus says, “Do not cling to Me,” and sends her on.
- His Father is now called “your Father.”
- Mary becomes the first to announce the risen Lord.

“I am ascending to My Father and _____.”

Mary announced, “I have _____!”

Discuss: What changes for the disciples when Jesus calls them “My brothers” and his Father “your Father”?

Read this week: John 10:1-15 · 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 · Romans 8:14-17

For Kids: The Empty Tomb: Whom Are You Seeking?

JOHN 20:1-18 · NAME: _____

Big idea: Jesus is alive, and he knows my name.

1. PUT THE STORY IN ORDER! NUMBER THE BOXES.

- ☐ Mary finds the stone rolled away.
- ☐ Jesus says her name: "Mary!"
- ☐ Two friends run to the tomb.
- ☐ Mary tells the disciples the news.
- ☐ Mary cries and sees two angels.

2. HOW DID THEY FEEL? CIRCLE ONE.

Mary at the tomb: happy · sad · worried

Peter running to the tomb: happy · sad · worried

Mary hearing Jesus say her name: happy · sad · worried

The disciples before Mary came: happy · sad · worried

3. WORD SEARCH

F S T E A C H E R
R T V L R A F G G
V O D I P N U A Y
P N K N P G O R Y
O E S E C E Y D P
U B C N M L C E E
S D O V A S C N T
T O M B R Y D E E
C N B D Y D N R R

TOMB · STONE · MARY · PETER · ANGELS · GARDENER · LINEN · TEACHER

4. SECRET CODE

1=A 2=D 3=E 4=H 5=I 6=L 7=N 8=O 9=R 10=S 11=T 12=V

5 4 1 12 3 10 3 3 7 11 4 3 6 8 9 2

5. DRAW IT!

Draw Mary in the garden turning around when Jesus says her name.

6. MEMORY VERSE

"I have seen the Lord!" John 20:18 Say it to a grown-up: ☐ ☐ ☐

Jesus knows my name, and my name is _____. _____