

ALIVE

Leaders' Guide

WELCOME TO ALIVE

This five-part series invites people to ask the big questions:

How can you and I experience a better, fuller life right now?

Did Jesus Christ come alive again after death and is he still alive and able to transform our lives both now and forever?

A recent survey (the 2022 Talking Jesus Research) discovered that an incredible 45 per cent of people in the UK believe in the resurrection of Jesus (29 per cent of these aren't sure of the literal biblical record of this), while 14 per cent said that they don't know. We are convinced that he truly is alive and wants to offer us all transformation in our own lives.

In this tumultuous time, post-Covid and with the ongoing cost of living and climate crises as well as wars, people are looking for answers and aren't sure who or what they can trust. This course is designed to be a safe space for people to explore the resurrection for themselves, and to find out its relevance for their own lives.

By looking closely at Jesus' encounters with his disciples after the resurrection, and including testimonies from people whose lives have been transformed by him today, we hope that those on your course will, ultimately, have their own life-changing encounter with Jesus.

As you unpack the biblical encounters, such as Mary by Jesus' tomb, the friends on the road to Emmaus and doubting Thomas, the group will see how each one had their own journey to fully believing and embracing Jesus' resurrection. Every encounter reveals how Jesus reaches out to people at their place of need. Each video follows a different individual as they unravel insights relevant today across five diverse topics that reflect our inbuilt needs as humans: love, hope, peace, freedom and purpose.

Join with us to take your group on a journey of discovery to see that Jesus being alive has a profound impact on us today – it changes everything!

RUNNING YOUR GROUP

You will need to handle the group sessions sensitively for your own particular context, depending on the people who have gathered with you. Hopefully you will have many in your group who aren't yet Christians, so don't assume Christian knowledge or background, and take time to explain anything that may be unclear. Leave plenty of time for any questions they may have too.

Do decide on how many helpers you would like for the group – it may be that you ask those who bring guests with them the first week to stay for the duration of the course.

What has been provided in this guide is a basic outline for each weekly session, timed to around an hour to an hour and a half. This includes: an (optional) starter question, a video to watch together, discussion questions, the relevant Bible passage (with further discussion questions) and final thoughts for you as leader (including questions you may want group members to ponder over the subsequent week). Do feel free to use as much or little of this (in whatever order) as fits into the length of time you have, and the make-up of your group too. [NB If you feel you would like more content, there is an accompanying book available – *Alive* by Dave Smith – although you do not need to purchase it in order to engage with this course.]

Depending on the size of your group, you may want to stay altogether for your discussion times or may want to suggest getting into smaller groups to give everyone a chance to speak. You might need to mix things up a bit week by week. Do be aware that it may take time for some people to feel comfortable enough to speak out – never try to force someone to answer a question.

It may be that you feel following up with some of the group in-between sessions would be helpful. Before you start, it is worth considering whether you will do that yourself, will ask a few helpers to do so or will liaise with the person who brought a particular guest.

SESSION ONE: TRANSFORMED BY LOVE

Introduction

The focus of this session is love, so in week one's video you will be following Gareth as he explores what love means, and looks at the impact that Jesus' love had on Mary Magdalene.

Starter question

As this is your first meeting together, take some time to go round the room and ask each person to introduce themselves. As people may not know each other, it could be helpful to get them to reveal an interesting or unusual fact about themselves. Alternatively, you could ask people to express what they are hoping to get from your times together.

Discussion questions

- Discuss together the question that Gareth posed to some of those he spoke with: What would you say love is?
- As you look at your life, what has your experience of love been like? Has it been broadly positive or negative?
- Gareth described the love of Jesus as having 'the power to redefine destinies and mend the deepest of scars.' Do you believe that love is this powerful?
- Amy spoke about a confidence that we can have in Mary's account of the resurrection, and the power of his love that can be encountered – and that belief is the first step to experiencing God's love and his power in our lives today. Have you ever considered that faith is a necessary ingredient to knowing God's love?
- Galia, who had the scientific approach towards deciding if God is real or not, was undone by an experience of God – how do you respond to that? (Note for leader: it may be that you encourage those in the room who you know have also had a personal experience of encountering God to give their own account of that.)
- Aaron talked about ways that we can connect with Jesus today: through prayer, the word of God (the Bible), through creation, through his Spirit – which have these have you got experience of and how would you describe them? (Note for leader: there is space for more discussion about the Holy Spirit in the final week, but if questions are raised at this point you may want to take time to talk about people's experiences now.)

Bible passage

You may like to read the passage through together (and may wish to start from v1). If you have time, take a look at some of the suggested questions specific to the passage. (Note for leader: you may decide that the more personal questions would be better asked in twos or threes rather than a larger group.)

JOHN 20:11-16 NIVUK

¹¹Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹²and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?'

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

¹⁵He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?'

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'

¹⁶Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher').

- Amy spoke about a resurrection fact that scholars – Christian or not – agree on: Jesus' tomb was found empty. Why was it so significant that it was Mary who discovered this and who first met with Jesus after his resurrection?
- Why do you think Mary didn't recognise Jesus to begin with?
- Were there any aspects of Jesus' appearance to Mary that particularly spoke to you? If so, why?
- How do you feel about Amy's assertion that we can hear God call our name today? That he is a personal God who longs for relationship with us?

Final thoughts

You might like to pose these questions to people towards the end of the session, so that they take them away to think about more during the week to come:

- Do you recognise the search to find validation, to be truly known and loved?
- How do you respond to the thought that there is a God who loves you unconditionally, and that he sent his Son, Jesus Christ to reveal that love to you and set you free?
- How has this session increased your expectancy about the possibility of meeting Jesus right now, as he met with Mary back then?
- How might your life be different if you were to experience God's perfect love, either for the first time or in a deeper way?

You might like to end the session praying with and for the group if appropriate.

SESSION TWO: SURPRISED BY HOPE

In this session you will be following Michael as he unpacks what hope really is.

Before you start, check in with your group to see how they are, in order to build relationship with one another. You might like to see if anyone has any questions from the previous week.

Starter question

What is it that you hope for most?

Discussion questions

- How does disappointment, pain, loss, hurt – a lack of hope – impact our lives?
- Rachel said that the resurrected Jesus wants to come alongside us, journey with us and offer us hope even in our losses and disappointments – how do you respond to that?
- Rachel commented that many people today fear death. What would the notion that Jesus has now defeated death mean for us in our lives if true?
- What's your current view of what happens after death? How does the biblical hope of a future resurrection as part of God's big story for eternity, when all things will be made new, make you feel?
- Discuss the different types of hope that the psychiatrist Chi-Chi unpacked: vague, superficial hope; optimism (positive mindset); realistic (accepting) hope – and living hope (in the resurrected Jesus, in eternal life but also bringing hope in the moment). Ask: which of these do you have the tendency to gravitate towards?
- Joanna shared how her personal loss impacted her faith, bringing up lots of questions, but Easter Sunday was a real reminder of the eternal hope she has in Jesus and the transitory nature of our lives. She also believes that the wrestling has made her faith stronger. She commented that it didn't take the grief and sense of loss away – what are others' experiences of living with sorrow and joy alongside one another?
- Michael spoke about how his dad caught Covid and died. He said it led him to a place of prayer but also thinking about life after death. Take time to discuss his story and give people space if they would like to share how their own times of loss have affected them.
- Joanna said she got to a point of asking herself: Do I believe that there is a resurrection and what does that mean for me? She concluded that it changes everything – do you agree?
- Towards the end of the video Michael says: 'I've learned that life's journey weaves through both joys and sorrows. However, in the midst of these passing experiences, the enduring hope found in the resurrection of Jesus shines as a steadfast light, always leading the way.' How do you respond to that?

Bible passage

You may like to read the passage through together. If you have time, take a look at some of the suggested questions specific to the passage.

LUKE 24:13-27 THE MESSAGE

That same day two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem...In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

He asked, 'What's this you're discussing so intently as you walk along?'

They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend. Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, 'Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn't heard what's happened during the last few days?'

He said, 'What has happened?'

They said, 'The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word...Then our high priests and leaders betrayed him, got him sentenced to death, and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn't find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn't see Jesus.'

Then he said to them, 'So thick-headed! So slow-hearted!...Don't you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?' Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him.

- The two disciples initially didn't realise that Jesus was with them – how can we miss God at work in our everyday? (Note for leader: you may want to ask those who are Christians if they have a simple story of God working in their daily lives. It could be helpful to consider that we can often have a fixed idea of how God will work, and yet he does things very differently – the Bible is full of examples of this and says that his ways are higher than ours.)
- The disciples had lost hope – they were grieving and unable to accept the reports that Jesus was alive – but the encounter with Jesus brought not only immediate hope but future hope to them. How did Jesus bring this hope to them? (By revealing and explaining scripture to them – the Bible helps us to grow in faith and hope.)
- As Rachel describes, later in the passage they invited Jesus into their home – discuss how there is a choice for each of us to invite Jesus in, as Revelation 3:20 says: 'Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.' (Note for leader: you may decide that it is an appropriate moment to give people space if they would like to respond.)

Final thoughts

You might like to pose these questions to people towards the end of the session, so that they take them away to think about more during the week to come:

- How do you respond to the idea of Jesus walking alongside you?
- Jesus continued to walk with the two disciples even after they failed to recognise him and were open about their despair and bewilderment. How do you respond to the invitation to be honest with him too?
- What's your attitude towards the Bible? Have you ever read it? If not, it can be helpful to start with the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke or John – to gain an understanding of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, before dipping into the wider biblical story.

You might like to end the session praying with and for the group if appropriate.

SESSION THREE: FILLED WITH PEACE

In this session you will be following Lauren, as she investigates whether peace can be long-lasting, and something we can hold on to as an anchor in life.

You might want to start your discussion by touching on the increasing felt need for peace, in a world so full of uncertainty. (For instance, in the UK in 2023, *The Workplace Health Report* indicated that 53 per cent of men and 65 per cent of women were experiencing symptoms of anxiety and that 50 per cent of men and 60 per cent of women were suffering from some form of depression.)

Before you start, check in with your group to see how they are, in order to build relationship with one another. You might like to see if anyone has any questions from the previous week.

Starter question

Can you recall a time when you felt really peaceful – could you describe it to the group? (Note for leader: as Will comments in the video, it may be that many describe a holiday destination, where they are alone and in a calm environment – you might want to point out that common thread if it occurs.)

Discussion questions

- Early on in the video Lauren wonders whether peace is just a brief respite, or if it is a foundational strength that can weather any storm – how would you describe peace?
- Will explains that there is a difference between being at peace and having peace within. What do you think of this?
- Lauren revealed that she is in recovery from being a drug and alcohol addict, and spoke with Will about how we may not have the language to express our deeper desire for peace, but often we turn to unhelpful habits to numb us or distract us to cope with daily life – can you relate to that? (Note for leader: you might want to bring in Lauren's own comment when talking to her friend Jo, that when she first turned to drugs and alcohol she felt like she had found peace, but it was in fact a 'very short-term access to a kind of numbing that felt as close to peace as I was familiar with'.)
- Will spoke about peace being something that gives us a sense of being attached that will hold us fast no matter what happens on the surface – do you agree with that description?
- Will said that there are many schools of thought, including religion, that say we can look into ourselves to find peace, but Lauren commented that if she had more of herself she would have ended up back with a drug addiction. Do you believe you can find peace within yourself? Or do you recognise the need to be rooted to something bigger than yourself?
- Jo described God as a rock of peace, who we can stand on even when everything goes wrong, and towards the end of the video Lauren describes peace as emerging 'not from perfection or having all the answers but from a profound assurance that amidst our imperfections and uncertainties we are deeply loved and sustained'. How do you respond to those images of peace?

- How can peace be manifest in our day-to-day lives? (Note for leader: you might want to discuss Nkiru's story of mental-health struggles and how faith impacted her, including the experience of sensing the words of the Bible reaching her heart.)

Bible passage

You may like to read the passage through together. If you have time, take a look at some of the suggested questions specific to the passage.

JOHN 20:26-29 CSB

A week later his disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don't be faithless, but believe."

Thomas responded to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

- John filled in some of the context of what was going on before Jesus appeared to Thomas. He talked about how the usual greeting 'Shalom' or 'peace be with you' meant so much more from the resurrected Jesus. Discuss this together.
- Jesus talks about all those believers who have come to faith since biblical times in this story – those who have not seen but still believe. How do you respond to that? (Note for leader: you might want to look at how we believe without seeing – not with 'blind' faith, but by examining the evidence of those witnesses who did see Jesus, like Thomas. You could also look at how some will probably identify more with Thomas than others because they are people who like to ask a lot of questions. It is important to consider whether our questions come from a true desire to discover the truth, or a means of deflecting it. Thomas was a genuine questioner – John said he'd call him honest Thomas rather than doubting Thomas. And Jesus, who loved Thomas, graciously gave him the answers he sought.)
- John explained that Jesus simply wants us to start on the journey with him and that even though we won't understand everything, and life won't always be easy, we can trust him and receive peace from him through what he has done on the cross and the resurrection. How do you feel about that now, having heard from various people about their experiences? (Note for leader: you might want to unpack this, asking those who have experienced journeying with Jesus to describe what it has been like for them. You could also give people the opportunity to respond to Jesus, if appropriate.)

Final thoughts

You might like to pose these questions to people towards the end of the session, so that they take them away to think about more during the week to come:

- How does the evidence of Jesus' appearances to his disciples strengthen your confidence in his resurrection? Do you have any questions or doubts?
- Jesus turned up and basically said to Thomas: 'You have doubts, which I have heard and acknowledge – here I am – what do you want from me?' Thomas' response was to turn from doubt to faith and acknowledge that Jesus is God. Imagine Jesus asking you the same question: 'What do you want from me?' How would you answer?
- Spend some time this week pondering the idea that Jesus offers a peace that is not just a concept, but can be a lived reality in our everyday lives. It isn't based on perfection or complete answers but is about recognising a constant love that persists – a calm that resonates in the soul.

You might like to end the session praying with and for the group if appropriate.

SESSION FOUR: LIVING IN FREEDOM

In this session, you will be following Carine as she unpacks what failure and freedom truly are.

Check in with your group to see how they are. You might like to see if anyone has any questions from the previous week, particularly surrounding Jesus' resurrection.

Starter question

If you were free to do whatever you wanted for a day, what would you choose to do?

Discussion questions

- Carine asks: if Jesus could extend forgiveness to Peter despite his failure, can I approach him with my own? How do you feel about that question?
- Rocky said that he now defines success in terms of proximity to God rather than in relation to material possessions, career, in comparison to others. Do you think that would be a freeing way to live?
- How does the idea that our 'failings' do not cause him to turn away from us, change your view of who God actually is?
- How do you respond to Justyn's dramatic story of finding freedom?
- Take some time to think about what has been said regarding failure and freedom. As our culture tells us we should be free to do and be whatever we like, does this different perspective feel restrictive or can you see the wisdom in it? (Note for leader: again, perhaps ask for people to share if they have stories of how they have become freer since becoming Christians.)
- Do you recognise the need for forgiveness?
- How do you respond to Carine's final words: 'Love doesn't keep a tally of wrongs, but welcomes us into healing arms saying: "You're more than your mistakes." That is what it means to live free – truly free.'

Bible passage

You may like to read the passage through together (and may want to start at v1). If you have time, take a look at some of the suggested questions specific to the passage.

JOHN 21:10-17 *ESV UK*

Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them...

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' He said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'

- In his encounter with Peter, Jesus is once again showing he is alive and all-powerful once again – how does he do that? (Note for leader: as it says earlier in the passage, and Dave points out, Jesus appeared by the shore, and he called out to the disciples – rather than the other way round – he performed a miracle, then he invited them to breakfast!)
- Why did Jesus ask Peter whether he loved him three times, rather than just once?
- What was the impact of Jesus calling out the buried shame and pain that Peter had? What does this reveal to you about Jesus?

Final thoughts

You might like to pose these questions to people towards the end of the session, so that they take them away to think about more during the week to come:

- How do you feel about the fact that Jesus can restore things that we never thought we could move past?
- Take some time this week to reflect on Carine's comment: 'Our failures don't disqualify us, and it takes honesty to meet with Jesus.'
- Are you still living in the grip of past failure and/or are there areas of brokenness in your life? This week, could you invite the risen Jesus to forgive you, free you and restore you?

You might like to end the session praying with and for the group if appropriate.

SESSION FIVE: FULFILLING OUR PURPOSE

In this session you will be following Justin as he ponders what the meaning of life is and whether we each have a life purpose.

Check in with your group to see how they are. You might like to see if anyone has any questions from the previous week. Do remind people that this is the final session.

Starter question

What gives you a sense of purpose?

Discussion questions

- At the start of the video, Justin comments that we each have moments that cause us to stop and ask ourselves what really motivates us. And these instances can prompt a deeper consideration of our actions and their alignment with our over-arching purpose. Are these things that you ever think about? If not, can you see how considering them could be helpful?
- Reflecting on Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus, and how it changed his purpose completely, how would you describe your own experience of encountering Jesus in your life up to this point?
- Andrew posed the question: 'What if it's not just that we're looking for God, but he is searching for us? That if we will make little steps he will come to us' – how do you respond to this?
- Discuss Rachel's explanation of the two aspects of our purpose: primary purpose – our invitation to know Jesus – and secondary purpose – outworking or fulfilling that purpose; what I can accomplish for him and how I can use my gifts to reach out to others. (The second needs to stay grounded in the first.)
- Why do you think having a sense of purpose is so important? What did you think of James' line: 'Where purpose is not known, misuse is unavoidable'?
- Discuss this quote from James: 'We will not discover the fullness of our purpose without discovering God.' (Note for leader: he talks about how Paul was doing things he was passionate about, but didn't step into his full purpose until he encountered God personally.)
- How do you respond to T'ai's story; a successful footballer who came to understand his need of God and says that his life stopped being about himself – that he now views things with an eternal perspective as football will end, but God never will?
- The Holy Spirit is mentioned a few times in the video: Andrew comments that Paul was convinced that it is through the Holy Spirit that each one of us can encounter Jesus for ourselves – and Justin said that it is the Spirit/presence of Jesus who nudges him daily, providing guidance and moulding his actions and choices. What do you know about the Spirit of Jesus, and what more would you like to find out?
- Discuss what Justin says towards the end of the video: 'my purpose, guided by the path Jesus has shown, goes beyond simple fulfilment; it's a journey towards a life of meaning, where I can truly live in the now and look forward to a future in his everlasting presence'.

Bible passage

You may like to read the passage through together. If you have time, take a look at some of the suggested questions specific to the passage. (Note for leader: you may decide that the more personal question would be better asked in twos or threes rather than a larger group.)

ACTS 9:3-11 NRSV

Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do'... Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying.'

- Discuss Saul's background – as a devout Jew and a Roman citizen he had studied under a famous rabbi and was quite passionate about a misguided purpose – stamping out the new church that had started since Jesus' resurrection. Unlike all the other biblical encounters we've looked at previously, Saul was not already a follower of Jesus who had known him closely before his death. So why do you think Jesus appeared to him and changed his purpose so dramatically?
- Saul is known later as Paul – discuss the fact that name changes are often significant in the Bible, as they represent radical change. You could go on to discuss how Paul went from a persecutor of Christians to an incredible communicator of Christianity.
- While Saul had this incredible encounter with Jesus, he was rendered blind so had to accept help from someone else. Why do you think that was, and what can that teach us today?

Final thoughts

You could spend some time asking how people have found the course, what they found helpful and if there is anything they would like to follow up on.

Here are some questions to share with people towards the end of the session, which they can then take away to think about more during the weeks to come:

- How do you feel now about the assertion that the resurrected Jesus can transform your life to make you fully alive both now and in the future?
- Can you take some time to say to God: you created me – what am I here on earth for?

- Why not read one of the accounts of Jesus' life to be found in the Gospels and ask yourself: who do I think this truly is? Could you then take the next step of praying and perhaps reaching out to a Christian friend too?

You might like to end the session praying with and for the group if appropriate.

You could also find out if people would like to know more about the Christian faith and, if it would be helpful, can direct them to the resources and information found at thealiveseries.com/faith

