



March 15, 2009

John 11–13

“God is Never Late”

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Three times in the Bible we read of Jesus raising someone from the dead: Matthew, Mark and Luke record Jairus’ daughter, Luke records the widow of Nain’s son, and John records the account of Lazarus, the most well-known of the three.

The name Lazarus is the abridged form of Eleazar, which means God helps. Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were long-time friends of Jesus. [Luke 10:38–42](#) describes one of Jesus’ visits to their home in Bethany.¹ It’s obvious from this account that theirs was a very close relationship. This visit is familiar to many because this is the incident when there was conflict between Martha and Mary, because Mary just sat at Jesus’ feet listening to his every word, while Martha was hustling around the house trying to take care of everything that needed to be done. Martha thought Mary was a slacker for just sitting there listening to Jesus while she did all the work, so she said something to Jesus about getting Mary to help her. Jesus settled the matter by telling Martha that in this situation, the best thing she could do was to spend time with him.

We read in [John 11:1](#) that Lazarus was sick and nearing death at their home in Bethany, while Jesus was about 20 miles away, on the other side of the Jordan River. ([John 10:40](#)) Mary and Martha sent a messenger to Jesus with the news of Lazarus’ illness. Jesus gets word that his friend, Lazarus, was sick, as remarkable as it sounds, he did not immediately leave for Bethany. [John 11:6](#) says, “*Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.*” It makes you wonder whether or not his disciples were confused by what appeared to be a rather “unpastoral” response on Jesus’ part? It’s as if Jesus said, “Guys, I know my dear friend Lazarus is sick, but we’re just going to sit here two more days while he dies.”

Jesus assures them that Lazarus will not die, but we know that he was speaking in anticipation of his raising Lazarus from the dead. ([John 11:4, 11–14](#)) The disciples, however, don’t understand what’s going on or what’s going to happen in the next few days. Jesus basically told them, “Lazarus is dead, so now it’s time for us to go to Bethany!” The disciples must have been dumbfounded, because this course of events wouldn’t

¹ The village of Bethany was less than two miles east of Jerusalem, near the Mount of Olives. Bethany (*Bet – ania*) means house of dates.

have fit in anyone's timetable. They will learn once again that Jesus was on a divine timetable, not on any individual's schedule, and incredibly, not on a timetable that was concerned with specific situations and circumstances. (**John 7:6–8**) The Lord Jesus was never in a hurry, never frantic, never rushed and more importantly, never late. One of the things we tend to do is to associate God's "tardiness" with the idea that "God must not love me." The focus in this study will help is to fully know and understand that the God's timing concerning us is perfect too!

The Delay Of God Does Not Mean He Loves Us Less

1. **Ecclesiastes 3:11** says, "*He has made everything beautiful in its time.*"
 - a. The Hebrew literally means "*in his time.*"
2. **John 11:17–37** explains the details of Jesus' arrival in Bethany, and the conversations he had with Martha and Mary.
 - a. Jesus' waited two days on the other side of the Jordan River; then he made the two-day,² twenty-mile trip to Bethany.
 - b. It's likely Martha was a bit sharp-tongued when she spoke to Jesus saying, "*Lord, ...if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" (**John 11:21**)
 - c. Mary echoes her sister's remarks in **John 11:32**.
 - d. Their bottom-line point is, "Jesus, you're too late, and now our brother is dead! What kept you?"
 - e. Jesus' reaction to their misunderstanding of what is really going on is found in **John 11:33**, where we read that he was "*deeply moved in spirit and was troubled.*"
 - i. The Greek word for deeply moved is *embrimaomai*, which means to groan, to have indignation, or to snort with anger as a horse.
 - ii. The Greek word for troubled is *tarasso*, which means agitated, stirred, tossed like the sea.
 - f. Once more, Jesus hears the same refrain from the crowd of mourners in **John 11:38**, when they said, "*Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?*"

The Glory Of God Is Displayed In The Timing Of God

3. In **John 11:4**, Jesus states that Lazarus' illness and death will happen "*for God's glory so God's Son may be glorified through it.*"
4. In **John 11:40**, Jesus tells his hearers that they will "*see the glory of God*" in the miraculous raising of Lazarus from the dead.
5. All of the people in this account, including Martha and Mary, would have preferred that God would do "his thing" in advance of the pain, so that they wouldn't have to suffer the grief, mourning and misery of the moment.

² It was likely that a day's walk was about 10 miles.

- a. The truth of the matter is that if God always “did his thing” that way, they would not see the glory of God operating in this situation, as well as in their lives. It’s only through the trials and difficulties that the glory of God is revealed. His glory is displayed in his timing.
6. Jesus waited four days so that everyone would be assured that Lazarus was really dead and the glory of God will be witnessed first-hand by everyone in Bethany!
 - a. There was a Jewish superstition that a person’s soul would hover around until the third day, hoping to return to the body, so it appears to be the case that Jesus was very intentional about waiting four days to arrive in Bethany.

The Power Of God Brings Dead Things To Life

7. The Bible tells us that Jesus only raised three people from the dead, and he performed he of these miracles in order to display his power over death.
8. Jesus not only revives physical death; he also revives the spiritually dead.
9. The Lord also revives dead marriages, emotions, relationships, calling, dreams, etc.
10. **Romans 4:17** says it is “...*God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.*”
11. Paul, in his letter to the church in Ephesus says, “[b]ecause of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.” (**Ephesians 2:4–5**)

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **John 11:1–44** to provide an overview of today’s study.
3. Read and discuss **John 11:3, 5**, paying particular attention to the word *love*.
 - a. In **John 11:3**, the Greek word for love is *phileo*, which means to have an affection or to like someone.
 - i. Since Jesus didn’t go to Bethany right away, it doesn’t appear as if Jesus *loved* Lazarus like a real friend. How can we be assured that the Lord “likes us” in a way that would resemble a true friend?
 - b. In **John 11:5**, the Greek word for love is *agapao*, which means to love supremely.
 - i. If we’re loved *supremely*, as the Bible tells us, why do you think we sometimes believe that God loves us less when we go through times of hardships, trials, etc.?
4. When you read **John 11:6**, does it cause you to wonder what in the world Jesus is doing?

- a. Doesn't Jesus care for his friend?
 - b. Doesn't his reaction seem to be anything but what we might consider pastoral?
 - c. Weren't the disciples able to convince him to go Bethany to be with Lazarus, and hopefully do something about his sickness?
5. Read and discuss **Mark 14:3–9**.
- a. **John 11:2** indicates that Mary, Lazarus' sister, was the woman "*who poured [expensive] perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.*"
 - i. It's obvious Mary loved the Lord and personally recognized his love for her, considering she spent a year's wages on the anointing perfume. Do you think Mary felt differently toward Jesus after her brother died?
6. **John 11:17** tells us Jesus didn't arrive in Bethany until four days after Lazarus died.
- a. Spend time talking about specific experiences that seem to indicate that God has no idea of what perfect timing looks like.
 - b. Do you think you would have reacted differently than Martha and Mary, when they said, "Jesus, you're too late, and now our brother is dead! What kept you?"
 - c. How do you exercise the kind of believing faith that overcomes the temptation to think God doesn't have any idea what you're going through, or seem to care about the extreme circumstances you're dealing with?
7. Read and discuss **John 11:33**, which describes Jesus' reaction to Mary and Martha's comments about his bad timing.
- a. Refer to the two Greek words that provide a clearer understanding of Jesus' emotions.
8. **John 11:35** is the shortest verse in the Bible: "*Jesus wept.*"
- a. The Greek word for wept is *dakruo*, which means to just shed a tear.
 - b. When they are weeping the Greek word is *klaio*, which means they are sobbing profusely.
 - c. What's the difference between the two forms of weeping?
 - d. Jesus may have shed a tear because he was going to bring Lazarus back from Paradise, or perhaps he shed a tear over the fact that didn't accept him for who he was and all he desired for them to be.
9. In **John 11:40**, Jesus tells his hearers that they will "*see the glory of God*" first-hand when Lazarus is raised from the dead.
- a. Spend time talking about specific examples of times when "*the glory of God*" was clearly evident, even though it was "*in his time.*"
10. Close your time by allowing everyone in your group to: settle the matter in their heart once and for all – the Lord loves me and his timing is perfect for me, no matter what the circumstances; (select someone to read this Scripture) reflect on **Romans 4:17**; think about the "things that are dead in their life" (emotions, marriage, relationships, ministry calling, hopes and dreams, etc.) and ask the Lord to revive that which by all appearances is lifeless; ask the Lord to display his glory through his perfect timing in their life.