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## Day 1

**Learn:** Prayerfully read John 20.19-20. Some of the disciples locked the doors because they feared the Jewish religious leaders might come after them, after the successful crucifixion of Jesus. If your Bible says “Jews” in 20.19, remember John sometimes refers to the religious leaders that way. It is uncertain how many disciples were in the room, perhaps just the ten apostles [since Thomas was absent, as we learn in 20.24]. Most scholars think John mentioned the locked doors to emphasize the miraculous appearance of Jesus in the room. This could mean Jesus in his resurrected body could pass through the doors, but perhaps instead it means he could open the doors miraculously or he miraculously could appear in the room without bothering with doors. Anyway, somehow he miraculously appeared and said “Peace to you,” probably שלום [shah-LOME] in Hebrew [take a look at John 14.27-28; 16.32-33]. Jesus not only appeared, he was able to show them the scars from his crucifixion; this raises interesting questions about the resurrection: Jesus can miraculously appear, but his body still bears the scars of his earthly life! The disciples responded with joy at seeing the resurrected Jesus [take a look at John 16.20-22].

**Reflect:** List all the reasons you can for the disciples to feel joy or peace at seeing Jesus. Which apply to you?

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## Day 2

**Learn:** Prayerfully read John 20.19-23. The Son of God came to earth on a mission: his life, sacrifice on the cross, and resurrection were all to fulfill that gospel mission. Part of that mission was to bring the original disciples to saving faith, and thus into transcendent peace and joy at knowing of Christ’s victory and their deliverance. But the mission did not end there: rather the mission continued with Christ sending out those disciples [see John 15.26-27; 17.18] to “make more disciples” [see Matthew 28.18-20], to bring others to faith in Jesus. As the Son of God, Jesus was perfectly submitted to the will of God the Father, so now the disciples were to be fully submitted to the will of Jesus, following his example of living for the gospel mission. He gave them salvation to eternal life and freedom from the power of sin, and now he wanted to give those blessings to others through their ministry and testimony.

Understanding this context helps us interpret 20.23. These verses, 20.21-23, are a mission statement; Jesus is sending them out, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to continue his gospel mission. So the implication in 20.23 is that if they share the gospel and someone believes, that person is forgiven by God and the disciples can tell him/her so. Rather than suggesting the apostles had some authority to forgive or to judge people, it suggests that they had empowerment to proclaim the truth about the gospel of Jesus, about forgiveness from God, and those who came to faith really would receive that forgiveness from God.

**Reflect:** If we follow the example of Jesus, will we participate in his gospel mission? If we obey the commands of Jesus, will we participate in his gospel mission? If we follow Jesus as head of the church and anointed king, will we participate in his gospel mission? If we respect Jesus as the Son of God and are thankful for his work as the Christ [the Messiah-savior], will we participate in his gospel mission and tell everyone about him? In what ways are you pursuing this gospel mission now? Pray about being more intentional and more involved in it.

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## Day 3

**Learn:** Prayerfully read John 20.19-23 again. As part of sending the disciples to continue his gospel mission, Jesus breathed and told them to receive the Holy Spirit. The verb for breathing, ἐμφυσάω [em-foo-SAH-oh], is the same as is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament [the Septuagint] in Genesis 2.7, for when God breathed life into Adam; it symbolizes here that Jesus is re-creating, that he is giving the disciples new life, new spiritual life now and eventually resurrected physical life. The same verb also appears in Ezekiel 37.9 for the Holy Spirit breathing life into dry bones as a metaphor for breathing spiritual life back into the people of Israel [take a look at Ezekiel 37.1-14]. In Greek and Hebrew, the word for the [Holy] Spirit is the same as for breath, wind, the human spirit, or other spirits. This provides for meaningful wordplay in both the Old and New Testaments. What Jesus does with the original disciples [and by extension with believers today] is a partial fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy, though ultimately that prophecy is about the restoration of Israel prior to the establishment of the messianic kingdom.

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There is some scholarly debate about 20.22. Everyone agrees there is some good symbolism here when Jesus makes a point of breathing, because of the connection between God's breath and life in the Old Testament, the connection between breath and the Spirit in the biblical languages, and the connection of the coming of the Spirit to empower believers with the glorification of Jesus [John 7.37-39; 16.7]. The question is what exactly the symbolism means. Did Jesus impart the actual Holy Spirit to the disciples at this time? In that case, how does this relate to the experience of the Holy Spirit coming in Acts 2.1-4? And since Thomas was not there in 20.22, why is there no mention of giving him the Spirit when Jesus did appear to him? And why don't we see any visible change in the disciples after this verse [as suggested in Acts 1.8], until what happens in Acts 2? Alternatively, is it possible that Jesus is symbolizing that the coming of the Spirit is imminent, which we see actually occur in Acts 2? Remember, Jesus kept saying his hour had arrived for his glorification, but what he meant was not that he would face crucifixion / resurrection / ascension in that instant, but that this complex event was imminent [in fact, less than a week away; 12.23-31; 13.31; 17.1-5]. Perhaps Jesus acted out this parable about the Holy Spirit to point forward to what is to come in Acts 2, just as he acted out with the foot washing [John 13] what he would be offering imminently though his crucifixion.

**Reflect:** In 20.21-22, there are four concepts mentioned: having inner peace, being part of Christ's missions team, being born again spiritually, and having the indwelling Holy Spirit to empower you; what relationships would you say exist between these four concepts?

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#### **Day 4**

**Learn:** Prayerfully read John 20.24-28 [see Thomas in 11.16; 14.5; Didymus meant "twin"]. Despite being faithful to Jesus before the crucifixion, Thomas struggled to believe in the resurrection. He needed to see physical evidence that the Jesus who was crucified was indeed resurrected. Again the disciples were locked in a room, still afraid for their lives, and again Jesus made a miraculous appearance into their midst and said, "Peace to you." Notice Jesus did not chastise Thomas; after all, the other disciples also struggled to believe in the resurrection until Jesus appeared to them. Jesus instead offered to let Thomas see and feel for himself that he really was the crucified Jesus brought back to life, and exhorted Thomas to not become unbelieving, but to be faithful. Thomas' response was all Jesus could have wanted, one of the best confessions of faith in scripture: confronted with the resurrected Christ, Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" Sometimes people called Jesus "Lord," meaning "master" [mentor] or "sir"; the Greek word κύριος [KOO-ree-oss] can mean any of these, but in the Greek Old Testament it also was used for Yahweh. Paired here with "God," it is obvious Thomas was acknowledging the identity of Jesus as the divine Son of God and his lordship over all. As scholar D.A. Carson says, Thomas not only displayed faith in the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, he understood that the resurrection reveals who Jesus is. Thomas also shows us how to honor the Son as we honor the Father [John 5.23]; believers today need to articulate the same confession.

**Reflect:** Do you accept Jesus as God, identified with Yahweh, the God of the Old and New Testaments? Do you have any remaining questions or doubts about the identity of Jesus? Pray, then find someone to discuss them with you.

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#### **Day 5**

**Learn:** Prayerfully read John 20.24-31. There is no punctuation in the old Greek manuscripts. Some English translations make the first part of 20.29 a rhetorical question [NASB, NET, ESV], while others make it a statement [HCSB, NIV, NLT, NKJV], which sounds less critical. In any case, this part about Thomas serves to introduce the second statement, which is a beatitude [a "blessing statement"; see 13.17 for another example]. The word translated as "blessed" [μακάριος (mah-KAH-ree-oss)] can mean "happy," but in Jesus' beatitudes it means more, it means being favored by God. Thomas took a step of faith, as evidenced by his unrestrained confession; that led Jesus to mention the next phase of the mission, in which those who will come to faith and be welcomed by God will do so without seeing the physically resurrected Christ. With Jesus about to ascend to Heaven to be with God the Father, all the people who would come to faith in the future would do so through the testimony of these original disciples [17.20]. That is why John has written this gospel filled with eye witness testimony about who Jesus is, what he taught, how he lived, and how he gave miraculous signs of his identity and mission, the greatest of which was his resurrection back from the dead [20.30-31].

**Reflect:** In what ways has God favored you or blessed you? List not only the big spiritual manifestations of his grace, but also those related to daily life. Pray some thanksgiving today!