

Leader's Guide

Purpose

This session will help the group consider whether belief in miracles, especially the resurrection of Jesus, is rational. The goal is not to answer every philosophical or scientific question about miracles. The goal is to show that Christians do not believe in the resurrection simply because they have ignored reason or evidence.

Christian faith rests on God's action in history and the testimony of those who encountered the risen Christ.

Because your group may include nonbelievers, young Christians, and mature believers, create an atmosphere in which people feel free to express doubts and ask honest questions. Do not pressure anyone to pretend certainty. *Invite everyone to examine both their assumptions and the evidence.*

Main Idea

Belief in the resurrection is rational if God exists and the eyewitness testimony concerning Jesus is credible. The decisive question is not merely whether miracles are possible, but whether Jesus actually rose from the dead and what his resurrection means for us.

Primary Scripture- 1 Corinthians 15:1–20

“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.”

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”

Paul places Christianity's central claim in the public arena. He does not say, “The resurrection may not have happened, but believing it will still make you a better person.” He says that if Christ was not raised, the Christian message is empty and Christian faith is futile.

Opening Question

Begin with the golf illustration:

“Have you ever witnessed or heard about a golf shot that seemed almost impossible? What made you believe or doubt the story?” Allow several people to respond. Then ask: “What usually makes an extraordinary claim believable?”

Possible answers may include: Multiple eyewitnesses; Trustworthy witnesses; Independent confirmation; Physical evidence; Consistent testimony; The absence of a more convincing explanation.

Explain that an event can be highly unusual without belief in it being irrational. The more extraordinary the claim, the more carefully we should examine the evidence.

Premise One: Christians Know Dead People Normally Stay Dead

Ask: “Why do some people assume that ancient people believed in miracles because they did not understand the natural world?” Allow the group to respond.

Point out that first-century people may not have possessed modern medical knowledge, but they certainly understood death. They buried their dead just as we do. The disciples did not expect Jesus to rise because resurrection was an ordinary occurrence. They were astonished because they knew it was not. Consider reading John 20:24–29.

Thomas did not immediately accept the report that Jesus was alive. He wanted evidence. Jesus did not condemn Thomas for understanding that dead people ordinarily remain dead. Instead, Jesus confronted him with the evidence of his wounds and bodily presence.

Follow-Up Questions: Why do you think Thomas found the other disciples’ testimony difficult to believe? What evidence changed Thomas’s mind? Does Thomas’s initial doubt make the resurrection accounts more or less believable to you? Why?

Leader’s Note

Avoid portraying doubt as automatically virtuous or sinful. Doubt may arise from honest questions, painful experiences, resistance to God, or a combination of factors. Encourage honest examination while reminding the group that evidence eventually calls for a response.

Premise Two: Our Starting Assumptions Matter

Ask: “What assumptions might cause someone to reject every miracle before examining the evidence?” The central assumption is that the physical universe is all that exists. If there is no God, then there is no divine person who can act within creation. Under that assumption, miracles are ruled out before the investigation begins. But Christians do not believe that the universe is self-created, self-sustaining, or independent of God.

Read Colossians 1:15–17. Jesus is presented not merely as a religious teacher within creation, but as the eternal Son through whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together. If God created and sustains the universe, he is not imprisoned by the ordinary patterns he established. God may act within his creation according to his sovereign purpose.

Follow-Up Questions: Why would miracles be impossible if the material universe were all that existed? How does the existence of God change the discussion? Is rejecting miracles without considering the existence of God a neutral position? Why or why not?

Leader's Note

Do not suggest that miracles violate laws that are greater than God. The laws of nature describe the ordinary patterns by which God governs his creation. A miracle is an extraordinary act of God within the world he created and continually sustains.

Premise Three: Christianity Invites Examination

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. Ask the group to identify the historical claims Paul makes: Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He was raised on the third day. He appeared to Peter. He appeared to the Twelve. He appeared to more than five hundred people. He appeared to James. He appeared to Paul.

Paul was writing while many of these witnesses were still alive. His claims were not presented as private spiritual feelings that could never be investigated. They concerned events that happened in history. Ask: “Why does Paul emphasize the people who saw the risen Jesus?” The eyewitnesses matter because the Christian claim is not merely that Jesus continued to inspire his followers after his death. The claim is that Jesus truly died and later appeared to them alive in an indestructible body.

Additional Evidence to Discuss

Consider mentioning the following: Jesus’ tomb was found empty. The disciples claimed to have encountered him alive. The disciples’ fear was transformed into public proclamation. Jesus’ skeptical brother James became a believer. Saul/Paul, a persecutor of Christians, claimed to encounter the risen Christ. The resurrection was proclaimed in Jerusalem, where Jesus had been publicly crucified. The earliest Christian message centered on the resurrection rather than allowing it to develop centuries later.

These facts do not force people to believe, but they require serious examination.

Premise Four: The Resurrection Is the Center of Christianity

Return to 1 Corinthians 15:14. Ask: “Why does Paul say that Christian faith is useless if Jesus was not raised?” Christianity does not rest merely on Jesus’ moral teaching. Jesus proclaimed the arrival of God’s kingdom, identified himself as the promised Messiah, forgave sins, accepted worship, and spoke of his unique relationship with the Father.

His resurrection publicly vindicated his identity and mission. Read Romans 1:3–4. The resurrection declares that Jesus is the Son of God in power. It confirms that his sacrificial death accomplished what he claimed it would accomplish.

Without the resurrection: Jesus remains dead. The apostles are false witnesses. Sin has not been conquered. Death still has the final word. Christians have no certain hope beyond the grave.

Because Jesus has risen: His claims are vindicated. His sacrifice for sin has been accepted. Death has been defeated. Believers are united to a living Savior. Everyone who belongs to Christ will also be raised.

Premise Five: Evidence Requires a Personal Response

The resurrection is not merely an interesting subject for debate. If Jesus rose from the dead, he is not simply one religious teacher among many. He is Lord.

Read Acts 17:30–31. Paul says that God commands all people to repent because he has appointed a day of judgment and has given assurance of this by raising Jesus from the dead. The resurrection offers tremendous hope, but it also confronts us with God’s authority. Jesus defeated death, yet we receive the benefits of his victory only through faith in him.

Ask: “What difference should the resurrection make on an ordinary Monday morning?”

Possible responses include: We can face death with hope. We can confess and turn from sin. We can trust Jesus when life is uncertain. We can forgive because we have been forgiven. We can live for something greater than success, comfort, or approval. We can speak about Christ with courage. We can know that suffering and death will not have the final word.

Addressing Common Objections

“Science has proved that miracles cannot happen.”

Possible response: Science studies the regular patterns and processes of the natural world. Christians agree that dead people do not ordinarily rise. The resurrection claim is that God acted in an extraordinary way. Science can describe what normally happens, but the historical question remains: What best explains the evidence concerning Jesus?

“Ancient people were gullible and believed anything.”

Possible response: The Gospel accounts do not present the disciples as gullible. They were initially confused, fearful, skeptical, and slow to believe. Thomas demanded physical evidence. The women went to the tomb expecting to find a dead body, not a risen Savior.

“The disciples hallucinated.”

Possible response: Hallucinations do not adequately explain the variety of appearances, the number of witnesses, the empty tomb, or the bodily nature of the encounters described in the New Testament. Group appearances and repeated encounters over time also require explanation.

“The resurrection story developed as a legend.”

Possible response: The resurrection was part of the earliest Christian proclamation. Paul’s summary in 1 Corinthians 15:3–7 reflects a message he had previously received and passed along. The resurrection was not added centuries after Jesus’ death.

“The disciples invented it.”

Possible response: People may suffer for something false that they mistakenly believe is true. It is much harder to explain why the original witnesses would willingly suffer and die for something they personally knew they had invented. Their proclamation brought opposition and persecution rather than wealth, comfort, or political power.

“I would believe if God gave me undeniable proof.”

Possible response: Evidence matters, but our response is not purely intellectual. The resurrection confronts our desire to remain in control of our own lives. The question is not simply whether we have enough information. It is also whether we are willing to submit to Jesus if the evidence points to him as Lord.

Personal Application

Invite the group to reflect silently on these questions: Have I honestly examined the evidence for the resurrection? Have I rejected Christianity because of the evidence, or because I began by assuming miracles are impossible? If Jesus is alive, what area of my life have I resisted placing under his authority? Am I trusting in the risen Christ, or merely admiring him from a distance? How does the resurrection change the way I view my own death?

Closing Summary

The Christian faith does not ask us to believe that dead people regularly rise from their graves. It announces that one man, Jesus Christ, truly died and was raised through the sovereign power of God.

The resurrection is not presented as a private feeling or inspirational symbol. It is presented as an event in history witnessed by real people.

We should not believe blindly. We should also refuse to disbelieve blindly. We should examine the evidence, recognize the assumptions we bring to it, and consider the explanation that best accounts for what happened.

If Christ has not been raised, Christian faith is empty. But if Christ has been raised, then Jesus is Lord, his sacrifice for sin is sufficient, death has been defeated, and eternal life is offered to everyone who trusts in him.

Optional Passages for Preparation

Consider reading these texts prior to your Links Fellowship: Matthew 28:1–10; Luke 24:36–49; John 20:24–31; Acts 2:22–36; Acts 17:22–31; Romans 1:1–4; Romans 6:4–11; 1 Corinthians 15:1–28; 1 Corinthians 15:50–58; 1 Peter 1:3–9.