



# THE RADIX PROJECT

*small groups / deep roots*

**FALL 2021:**  
**ENCOUNTERS WITH GOD**  
**IN TIMES OF TRANSITION**



SAINT MARK'S  
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL



# ABOUT THE RADIX PROJECT

*The Radix Project: Small Groups/Deep Roots* is an opportunity to be part of a small group that meets over the course of six weeks to share stories, study scripture, and pray for one another. This is the sixth iteration since the project was launched in early 2020. The pandemic has not slowed us down, and, in some ways, connecting via Zoom has afforded an opportunity for some to participate who otherwise would not have. This fall we will offer both Zoom and in-person options as part of these new learnings and adaptations in gathering together.

A small group is a cohort of people who gather to get to know one another against the backdrop of shared stories, scripture, and prayer. This is not a working group; there is no task to be accomplished. It is about knowing one another, and being known, as we are known by God. And that is the root of spiritual transformation.

The name for this communal effort—The Radix Project—draws on the Latin word for “root,” which is *radix*. Jesus modeled small group relationships in his life and ministry, and the early Church was structured on small groups who worshipped, prayed, and cared for one another. Those are our roots, and in our time, when so many pressures of modern life leave us feeling alone and isolated, Christian community offers us a tangible way of entering into relationships rooted in trust and mutuality.

The root word, *radix*, also gives rise to the oft-touted word we hear a lot these days—radical. A radical is not one who goes their separate way, doing their own thing. A radical is one who is so well-grounded with deep roots that they are able to stretch out to the fringes of existence and offer us all a different way of being in the world. We speak of radical hospitality or radical welcome because we claim our deep roots of this life in Christ, and we are willing to claim a radical vision for our lives and for the world.

We don't always agree—politically, theologically, and we have different life experiences—but we care for one another, we pray for one another, and the blush of life is more full because of those relationships. It is our hope that as you reflect on these stories, you might discover how God's graceful activity is revealed in your own life as well, and in those of your group members. ♦

# THE RADIX PROJECT PLANNING COMMITTEE

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## OVERVIEW FOR SMALL GROUPS

Small groups are designed to gather people of faith in settings that foster trust so that our relationships with God and one another are strengthened. When we meet each other for earnest conversation, sharing, and prayer, we deepen the bonds of affection by which we learn how to love ourselves, each other, and God more fully. In this way, small groups are intentional about providing space for prayerful support and accountability, guided by the One we know as Jesus the Christ.

For our purposes in the Radix Project, we have designed a process for guiding 6–10 people in their season together, designed as six 90-minute sessions, with a plenary gathering before the first session. Each small group gathering is structured to open with prayer, to have time for check-in, scripture reading and reflection, sharing of stories, and check-out with prayer.

# SMALL GROUP SESSIONS

In addition to the six small group meetings (which will convene at various times), there is a plenary gathering to which all are invited. So, the flow of the season looks like this:

## **OPENING PLENARY**

### **ENCOUNTERS WITH GOD IN TIMES OF TRANSITION**

Sunday, September 19, 2021  
7–8:30 p.m., via Zoom

*The Opening Plenary will begin with a presentation by members of the Radix Project planning committee. This presentation is open to anyone, whether or not they are participating in the small groups. Following this presentation, the groups will meet individually for the first time in break-out sessions.*

## **SESSION 1:**

**THE BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION OF CHRIST.** . . . . . week of September 19, 2021

## **SESSION 2:**

**JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD** . . . . . week of September 26, 2021

## **SESSION 3:**

**THE HEALING OF THE HEMORRHAGING WOMAN** . . . . . week of October 3, 2021

## **SESSION 4:**

**ELIJAH TAKEN UP TO HEAVEN** . . . . . week of October 10, 2021

## **SESSION 5:**

**THE CONVERSION OF SAUL.** . . . . . week of October 17, 2021

## **SESSION 6:**

**THE WOMEN ENCOUNTER THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS** . . . week of October 24, 2021

# WHY FOCUS ON ENCOUNTERS WITH GOD IN TIMES OF TRANSITION?

The pandemic continues to require much of us, and we are each navigating “before” and “after” moments. Some have come abruptly -- homeschooling kids, losing a job, receiving a COVID diagnosis -- and others, over time -- developing a prayer practice, committing to a new exercise routine, supporting a friend with cancer, or discerning another vocation. And in the “in between,” in the process of change, we are changed.

That’s true of Scripture, too. The Bible is replete with stories of turning points that lead to transformation. The same is true when we are willing to open to encountering God even in the challenging times. The six biblical stories selected each have their own unique beginnings and endings, but all connect to the promise that God is continually calling us into something new and is with us in the time in between.

It will be quite difficult to emerge from the pandemic unchanged. As we order in restaurants, pass the peace, go to the library, we may sense the familiar and unfamiliar not just in the places around us but even more deeply, within ourselves. For some, these changes may feel welcomed and for others, more challenging to embody or perhaps not yet realized. In sharing our own encounters and observations, we can help find our way together, trusting that the Spirit is guiding even in the shifting.

# ESTABLISH GROUP NORMS

In order to grow in trust, it is important for groups to agree to norms for their time together and revisit them periodically as needed. It is important that everyone agree to abide by the same expectations for their time together. Here are some aspects of relational group culture that all groups will want to discuss as they begin their work.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

- ◆ What is allowed to be shared outside the group?
- ◆ What may be shared on social media?

## **RESPECT AND MUTUALITY**

- ◆ Let others finish without being interrupted.
- ◆ Resist the temptation to problem-solve.
- ◆ Mutual respect is essential.
- ◆ Give everyone a chance to speak.

## **LOGISTICS**

- ◆ What are expectations about beginning and ending on time?
- ◆ ...about informing others of an expected absence?

## **ATTENDANCE**

- ◆ Be punctual.
- ◆ Commit to regular attendance and participation.

## **PREPARATION**

- ◆ What, if anything, are group members expected to do to prepare for their meetings?

## **COMMITMENT TO PRAYER**

- ◆ What are expectations that each group member commits to pray for the others daily during this time as a small group?

# ZOOM ETIQUETTE

Keep your microphone on mute when not speaking.

Take responsibility to practice using the technology ahead of the meeting, and ask for help as needed.

## FLOW OF THE SMALL GROUP MEETINGS

A key to the flourishing of small groups is some consistency week to week so folks will know what to expect. A group facilitator will encourage the group to stay on track, but everyone has a part in making that happen. Here is the suggested format for all Radix Project groups which are designed to meet for 90 minutes each week:

<b>GATHERING</b> . . . . .	5 minutes
<b>OPEN IN PRAYER</b> . . . . .	5 minutes
<b>CHECK-IN QUESTION</b> . . . . .	10 minutes
<b>SCRIPTURE REFLECTION</b> . . . . .	20 minutes
<b>GROUP DISCUSSION</b> . . . . .	30 minutes
<b>CHECK-OUT INCLUDING PRAYER REQUESTS</b> . . . . .	10 minutes
<b>CLOSING PRAYER/WORSHIP</b> . . . . .	10 minutes

# IDEAS FOR CHECK-IN QUESTIONS

*Pick one for each week.*

- ◆ What is your earliest memory or most formative memory of church?
- ◆ What comes to mind when you think about autumn?
- ◆ What is a prayer practice you use or would like to develop?
- ◆ What is one important thing you've learned about yourself in the past year?
- ◆ What is bringing you joy lately?
- ◆ What is something about yourself that others may be surprised to know?
- ◆ What time of day do you feel the most energized or focused?
- ◆ If you could be anywhere today, where would you be and why? Who would be with you?
- ◆ What advice would you give to your younger self?

# OPENING AND CLOSING PRAYERS/CHECK-OUT

Leading one another in prayer is a responsibility that is meant to be shared among the group. At the close of each week, invite a group member to find and share a brief opening prayer, and another to bring a closing for the following week. These may be extemporaneous, or sourced from the rich variety of resources, some of which are listed below:

- ◆ Daily Devotions, BCP, p. 137–140
- ◆ Compline, BCP, p. 127
- ◆ A brief hymn, chant, or Taizé prayer
- ◆ Lectionary-based Prayers from Vanderbilt Divinity School  
<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayers.php?id=154>
- ◆ The Book of Common Prayer Online  
<https://www.bcponline.org/>
- ◆ The New Zealand Prayer Book Online  
<https://anglicanprayerbook.nz/>  
Here are three that might work well:  
<https://anglicanprayerbook.nz/138.html>
- ◆ The Work of the People  
<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/visual-liturgy>  
<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/be-still>  
(Some resources on this site will require a password, available from Greg, [gbloch@saintmarks.org](mailto:gbloch@saintmarks.org).)

Closing prayer is an opportunity for each member of the group to reflect on the time together, articulating what they learned, and to ask the group to hold them in prayer with special intention. That intention may have arisen in the context of the meeting, or it could be that you are asking for prayers for some prevailing part of your life (e.g., my child has surgery next week, or I am retiring from work, etc.). The important thing is that the prayers of the group gather all those intentions up as the meeting comes to an end, AND that each person commits to holding those prayers through the week, until you meet again.

In addition to including a prayer from one of the above resources, consider the following:

- ◆ The group may choose to go around and allow each person to pray for the person sitting to their right, with the facilitator opening and closing.
- ◆ Alternatively, after the intentions are named, sit in silent prayer, centered on God's mercy and presence.



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# SCRIPTURE STUDY GUIDES

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# WEEK 1: THE BAPTISM & TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

**SCRIPTURE** *Luke 3:21-22 & 4:4-15*

**N**ow when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test. When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. ♦

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What word or phrase stands out to you or strikes you? What questions do you have about this passage?
2. When Jesus is baptized, he is filled with the Holy Spirit, which Luke mentions three more times in this passage. How is Jesus changed by his new understanding of his evolving relationship with the divine?
3. What is the significance of Satan's three tests and Jesus' response to them?

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Jesus experiences the divine as something external that "descended upon him" and then became a part of him. How did you first become aware of the divine at work in your life?
2. Which of the three tests Jesus encounters resonates with you? Or have your tests taken a very different form? How do you experience the presence of the Holy Spirit during difficult times?
3. Jesus emerges from the desert empowered by the Holy Spirit and is emboldened to begin his ministry. What do you feel the Holy Spirit is emboldening you to do?



*Christ in the Desert* (1872)

Ivan Nikolayevich Kramskoy (1837–1887)

Ivan Kramskoi was a Russian painter renowned for his portraits of peasants, women, nobility, and the leading artists and scientists of his day. He led a revolt against the restrictions of his art school and later established a collective (the Wanderers) who sought to make contemporary Russian art accessible to all.

1. What part of Christ's time in the desert is portrayed here?
2. How does Kramskoy portray Christ's tension?
3. Where do you feel stress in your body? Do you sit with it or search for a way to let it go?

## NOTES

## WEEK 2: JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

**SCRIPTURE** *Genesis 28:10–22; Genesis 32:22–31*

**J**ACOB left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the LORD stood beside him and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!” And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you.”

**T**HE same night [Jacob] got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw

that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. ♦

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. In both of these passages, Jacob encounters the Divine. What word or phrase stands out to you? What questions do you have?
2. How do these two encounters differ from each other? What similarities can you find between them?
3. How does Jacob respond to his encounters with God? What do his responses tell you about Jacob as a person?

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. The author of Genesis mentions that both stories occur at night. Are there times of the day when the Divine feels closest to you? How would you describe that?
2. In the second encounter, Jacob refuses to release the unknown man, until he receives a blessing from him. Have you ever had to wrestle with an event or a happening in your own life, to find its blessing? What gifts and challenges did that experience bring you?
3. Although this is not specifically called out in the reading, Jacob is at very different places in his life when each of these encounters take place. How has your own experience of the Holy changed, based on where you were and what was happening to you at the time?



*Jacob's Dream* (1966)  
Marc Chagall (1887–1985)

Marc Chagall was born in 1887 in Russia to a Hasidic Jewish family, and lived in Paris, Berlin, Russia, and the United States as his identity, faith, and politics intersected with WWI, the Communist Revolution, and the rise and fall of the 3rd Reich.

1. Look closely at the painting, and note how many different figures you see.
2. Is there a time where you almost missed a divine encounter? What made you look twice?
3. How many kinds of ways have you encountered Christ? Do any stand out particularly, and if so, what are they?
4. Chagall often used a blue color scheme, with contrasting figures in red or green. Who might the large blue and yellow figure be on the right? Why do you think so? What characteristics is Chagall giving that figure and why?

**NOTES**

## WEEK 3: THE HEALING OF THE HEMORRHAGING WOMAN

**SCRIPTURE** *Mark 5:25–34*

*This story also appears in Luke 8:43–48 and Matthew 9:20–22.*

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” ♦

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. We learn that the woman has used all of her resources to receive medical care but has still not experienced healing. What might we learn about challenges, uncertainty and faith?
2. When the woman learns that Jesus is near, she believes he can help, even after years of not seeing improvement. Why do you think she thought touching his clothes would help now? What do you think this says about her faith?
3. Jesus affirms that she is healed, but he also tells her to “go in peace.” What connections beyond physical healing could Jesus be sharing? What does it mean to be freed of suffering?

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. We don't know the woman's exact health condition, only that it was ongoing—twelve years. Have you experienced an ongoing challenge that did not seem to have a path forward? What helped you keep going? How could we encourage others who may experience ongoing challenges?
2. “*She felt healing in her body*”—before Jesus even turned to her or declared her healed. Have you had an experience where your body provided intuition to realize something new? Describe how it felt and what you learned. What did it feel like after the change occurred?



*Healing of the Bleeding  
Woman* (4<sup>th</sup> century)  
Catacombs of Marcellinus  
and Peter in Rome, Italy

The catacombs under Rome are a 590-acre maze of burial areas that grew under the city from about the 2<sup>nd</sup> century forward. Early Christians took the opportunity to create art on the walls—depicting the stories and symbols that they felt to be particularly important. Among the depictions of Gospel stories is this one. The minimal line work of the artist gives the two figures clear expressions and dynamic postures.

1. What emotions do you see in the figures' faces?
2. Christ is depicted here looking like a Roman man, probably because the artist was a Roman, and artists often depict religious figures as if they were part of the artists' own culture—just like *West Side Story* translated Romeo and Juliet. How are our struggles now similar to the hemorrhaging woman's struggles? How are they different?

## NOTES

## WEEK 4: ELIJAH TAKEN UP TO HEAVEN

**SCRIPTURE** *2 Kings: 2:1–15*

**N**OW when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?” And he said, “Yes, I know; keep silent.”

Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know; be silent.”

Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha said, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” He responded, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.” As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of

fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

When the company of prophets who were at Jericho saw him at a distance, they declared, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” They came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. ♦

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What word or phrase stands out to you or strikes you? What questions do you have about the passage?
2. What in the passage reminds you of other scripture passages?
3. Elisha takes up Elijah’s mantle—literally and figuratively. How must it have felt to have that responsibility?

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Think of a time when you received something that you asked for. How did it feel ?
2. When have you passed on your “mantle” to someone else, or taken up someone else’s? What was it like?
3. Transitions can be exciting, challenging, scary, sad—sometimes all of these. Describe a transition in your life and how your faith helped you.



*Elijah and the Chariot of Fire Icon (14<sup>th</sup> century)*

In this Russian icon, we see Elijah in white in the center of a red whirl of fire, and Elisha below, swathed in a blue cloak that matches Elijah's cloak. This version of Elijah in the red wheel of fire first appeared in the 1400s. The color white is typically used to convey righteousness, while blue indicates a connection to the spiritual. Red is usually used for earthly connections and to reference the blood of Christ's sacrifice. How do these colors interact to help viewers form connections between their own lives and the God who came and lived with us?

1. A small pair of hands are in the upper right corner. Whose hands might they be? Who has received you after a big transition?
2. Scriptures do not mention the archangel Michael, but icon writers have been including him since the 14th century. Who has helped you during a difficult passage?

**NOTES**

## WEEK 5: THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

**SCRIPTURE** *Acts 9:1–19*

**M**EANWHILE Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 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.’ The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 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, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.’ But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.’ But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself

will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.’ So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. ♦

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What word or phrase stands out to you or strikes you? What questions do you have about the passage?
2. The encounter contains several features often associated with divine appearances (e.g., light, falling to the ground, use of the double vocative—“Saul, Saul”). How do you think Saul made sense of it?
3. Saul is rendered essentially helpless and must rely on the very people he considered his enemies. What must that have felt like for Saul?

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Most of us do not have such stark conversion experiences, but often we can point to a particular moment in life when things changed dramatically for us. Can you recount such a time in your life?
2. Have you had an experience when the person or group you thought was your enemy suddenly becomes the one whom you must trust and go deeper into relationship? What was that like?
3. It takes courage to have faith. Do you agree or disagree, and why?

*Conversion of Paul*  
Hyatt Moore (b. 1943)

Hyatt Moore is a contemporary artist and missionary who has worked both as a draughtsman

on the Cobra sports car, the art director for *Surfer* magazine, and as the Director of Development for the Canada Institute of Linguistics. He aims in his paintings to show Christ in all people.

1. In this painting, Moore dramatically depicts the light surrounding a faceless Saul. Light can both illumine our world and blind us. In what ways was Saul blind before his conversion?
2. Was Saul's conversion complete on the road, or was there more to the process? Have you ever experienced a moment where you felt everything needed to change, and then found that things did not go as you had hoped?
3. Saul's companions recede into the background in this moment. We are not told what they saw and heard. Have you ever experienced a life shift you felt you could not communicate fully to your friends? What did you do?



## NOTES

# WEEK 6: THE WOMEN ENCOUNTER THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

**SCRIPTURE** *Mark 16:1–8 and Matthew 28:1–20*

**S**ATURDAY evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went out and purchased burial spices so they could anoint Jesus' body. Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they went to the tomb. On the way they were asking each other, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" But as they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled aside.

When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. The women were shocked, but the angel said, "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. Now go and tell his disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died."

The women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, and they said nothing to anyone because they were too frightened.



**A**FTER the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go

quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” ♦

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. If you were one of the women at the tomb, which Gospel story feels more like what your reaction would be? Why?
2. The guards will tell the story of this encounter very differently than the women will. What truths about the world we live in would the guards’ story support? What about the women’s?
3. The Scriptures are clear that the women were at the tomb early, and the men were not. Should the men have been there? Why or why not? Would you have been at the tomb early? Why or why not?

### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Can you think of a big moment or occasion or era in your life where your reaction was fear, or holding back? How might you envision how it could have been different?
2. Have you ever been surprised by an encounter with the holy? What was that like? Did it change you?
3. In what ways does fear keep people from drawing close to God? What brings you away from fear and disbelief toward trust and hope?



M. BOCCACCINI 1890

*Holy Women at the Tomb of Jesus Christ* (1890)

William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825–1905)

William-Adolphe Bouguereau was a dedicated artist who approached each painting with painstaking care. He enjoyed great success during his own lifetime, but his wife and four of his five children died of tuberculosis, and his paintings fell out of favor soon after his death.

1. In this depiction, Bouguereau chose to focus on the women, rather than the tomb. What expressions do we see on the two visible faces? What does the body language of the third woman suggest? What emotions have you felt when receiving news that seemed too good to be true?
2. Bouguereau chose to have the viewer looking up at the women—as if we were just outside the painting on the ground. Why might we be on the ground? The perspective might imply that the viewer is one of the guards. What elements of the encounter would have held you back from seeing the divine?
3. The women were at the tomb to perform mourning rituals. How do you make space for loss, even while you look toward the resurrection?

## NOTES

## **CLOSING DISCUSSION**

This is the end of six weeks of study and reflection together. Take time to pray together about next steps, both as individuals and as a group.

**NOTES**



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