**God’s Strength in our weakness: Living with grief**

discussion guide

A close up of a person's face

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

based on **John 11:1-44** (Linked to sermon of 20/06/21)

which can be accessed at www.stjamesbythepark.org/talks

*This was part of a series: God’s strength in weakness*

Intro: When one of Jesus’ closest friends falls ill, his sisters call for Jesus, fully expecting him to come and heal their brother. Instead Jesus delays so long that not only does their brother die but his body is already beginning to decompose when Jesus finally arrives. Where is Jesus when we need him? Why does he not always answer the prayers we pray? Let’s look at this passage together and see if we can find some answers.

*How does this passage speak to our desire to be a God-dependent, grace-filled, Bible-based, mission-focused, authentic community?*

***Up (Go deeper with God):***

*Read together Isaiah 40:12-31 (you might like to split the group in two, one half reading the even numbered verses and one the odd.) This passage is a wonderful reminder of the power and strength of our God, who in turn strengthens us. Spend some time praising God for His majesty and awesome power.*

*Now read through John 11:1-44. You may want to read it a few times through. Perhaps even try to imagine yourself as one of the characters in the story: Mary, Martha, his disciples, or one of the mourners. Try to imagine how you would be feeling, what questions you would have for Jesus. Give yourselves 5-10 minutes to do this individually. You may want to jot down anything that comes to mind. Then spend a little time sharing your insights with one another.*

*Now consider some of these questions (as well as anything else which strikes you):*

1. *How do we know Jesus was close to this family? (look at verse 3, 5, and 36)*
2. *What does Jesus suggest will happen as a result of this illness in verse 4?*
3. *Why is Jesus’ decision to go to Bethany a risky one? (v.8)*
4. *In verses 9-12 there are rather a lot of misunderstandings going on. How do the disciples interpret Jesus’ words? How do you interpret them? Remember we have the gift of knowing the end of the story, the disciples did not.*
5. *What reason does Jesus give for delaying his visit to Lazarus in verse 15?*
6. *What do you make of Martha’s statement in verse 21-22?*
7. *There is more confusion in verses 23-27. What is Martha’s assumption and what does Jesus really mean here?*
8. *When Mary arrives with many of the mourners, Jesus is deeply moved and weeps. He knows everything will be alright so why do you think he is so upset?*
9. *We discover in verse 39 that the body is already decomposing. Why do you think Jesus waits so long before raising Lazarus? (hint: verse 40-42)*

***In (Grow closer to each other):***

Many of us have faced the illness or death of loved ones during this pandemic. How can we bring God’s comfort to one another in such times? You might like as a group to meditate on some of the verses of Scripture that you have found helpful recently or use the following to encourage one another and meditate on:

Isaiah 49: 14-16

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Psalm 23: :4

Psalm 139: 7-12

***Out (Reach further with the good news):***

Finally spend some time praying for friends and family who have suffered loss or been bereaved. Think about how you can support them. If you feel that it might help, have a look at the Thrive material on the church website which you could use to signpost people to who you feel would benefit from further support.

“When living with unanswered prayer, we need a big God; an awesome, unspeakably amazing God; a death-defying, eternal God; a God who dies in Siberian concentration camps and senseless car crashes in order to destroy death and release an indestructible life” Pete Greig.