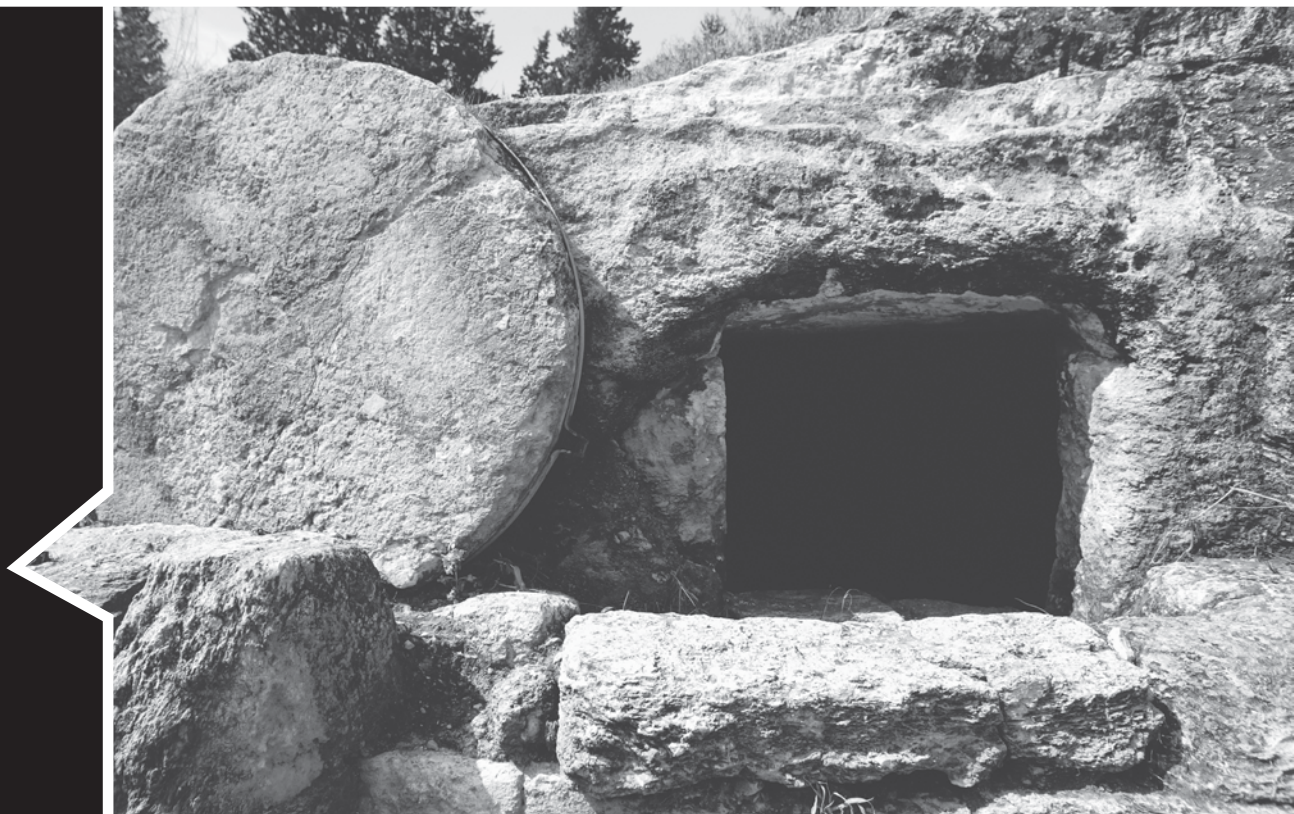


HE IS RISEN



Look at the facts. Jesus is alive!

In the courtroom, only two things matter: the evidence and the testimony of witnesses. Hearsay doesn't count. Opinions don't count. Just the evidence and eyewitness testimony.

On the surface, the resurrection of Jesus—a dead man coming to life after three days—sounds just as outlandish as some of the tabloid headlines we read at the supermarket. Yet untold millions of people have believed that story and grounded their lives and hope in it.

Why?

The answer is as simple as it is profound: evidence and eyewitness testimony.

Jesus has risen from death, and He is alive. Massive evidence points to the reality of this event, including hundreds of people who saw Jesus after He came out of the tomb. We're only going to scratch the surface of this evidence as we study Luke 24 together. Even so, it will be clear that—yes, as sensational as it sounds—Jesus is alive!



DERWIN L. GRAY

Derwin L. Gray is the founding and lead pastor of Transformation Church, a multi-ethnic community with two campuses in South Carolina. Previously, Derwin played for the NFL, and it was during his time with the Indianapolis Colts that he encountered the risen Christ. He and his wife, Vicki, have two children. He is the author of *Crazy Grace for Crazy Times*.





SPECIAL FOCUS

HE IS RISEN

▶ ***The Point***

The resurrection of Jesus is a fact you can build your life on.

▶ ***The Passage***

Luke 24:1-8,36-40

▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

Pain, doubt, and disappointment. We've all struggled with these at one time or another. I'm sure we've all faced those moments when the world just seemed to go dark—when we had no idea what would happen next or what we should do to help the situation.

In Luke's gospel, we read an account of a group of women who felt just such doubt and disappointment. They trudged on to do what needed to be done in spite of their feelings—but they were caught off guard and joyfully surprised by what happened next. Jesus was alive, and that changed everything.

Jesus is still alive, and that changes everything for us, too. In those moments when despair and doubt arise, we can respond with hope and rise up with the risen Christ. The resurrection of Jesus is solidly grounded in fact. In the midst of your pain, doubt, and disappointment, His resurrection meets your life in surprising ways. Are you ready to discover how?

▶ ***The Setting***

The women who observed Jesus' burial went to the tomb on Sunday to anoint His body with spices. They discovered the tomb empty and were informed that Jesus was not there. Later that night, Jesus appeared to His disciples, showing them His hands and His feet. His resurrection affirmed that He was and is the Son of God. The disciples witnessed His resurrected body and came to believe, though it took convincing for some of them.

What does the Bible say?

The Spices (v. 1)—The Greek noun *aroma* refers to any kind of fragrant substance, fragrant spice, salve, oil, or perfume; here, the term specifically reflects those substances used in burying the dead.

Luke 24:1-8,36-40

¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:

⁷ ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ”

⁸ Then they remembered his words.

³⁶ While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

³⁷ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.

³⁸ He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?”

³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 67 of the PSG: **“When have you been completely surprised?”**

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Supplement your group’s discussion of Question #1 (and add an element of fun) by leading an impromptu celebration for the member of your group who has the closest birthday. Give that person a birthday hat, offer a cupcake or other treat, and lead your group in singing “Happy Birthday.”

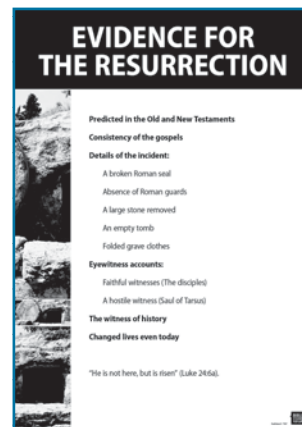
Note: If you don’t have access to your group members’ birth dates, you could simply choose a “surprise guest” at random. Or, you could ask group members to pick a number between 1-100 and award the celebration to whomever gets closest to the number you choose.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 68 of the PSG. Introduce the topic of Jesus’ resurrection by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 68 of the PSG: **“The resurrection of Jesus is a fact you can build your life on.”**

LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 7, “Evidence,” in a prominent place at your meeting space. Use the poster as a source of information throughout your group’s discussion of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

PRAY: Transition into the study by stating your belief in the historical reality of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Pray that your group would have wisdom and clarity as you engage the Gospel of Luke.



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STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Luke 24:1-6a

¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ^{6a} He is not here; he has risen!

GUIDE: Encourage group members to read or skim through page 69 of the PSG in order to gain some background on the Easter story.

READ: Luke 24:1-6a on page 69 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 69 of the PSG: **"What are some ways our culture tries to explain away Jesus' resurrection?"**

RECAP: Read aloud the second and third paragraphs on page 70 of the PSG:

How do we know Jesus is alive? His tomb is empty! People have tried to explain away the resurrection, but we can't explain away an empty tomb. Had Jesus' body been stolen, or if the women had simply gone to the wrong tomb, the idea of a resurrection would have been rejected by going to the right tomb or by producing Jesus' dead body. That didn't happen.

Similarly, if Luke was trying to invent something that didn't happen, he most likely would have identified some of Jesus' apostles as the first witnesses to the empty tomb—some of the men. Why? At that time, a women's testimony wasn't valid in court, which made them less than ideal as witnesses. But Luke stuck to the facts: Jesus' tomb was empty, and the women were the first witnesses to it.

TRANSITION: As we continue exploring the story of Easter, we'll find a reminder of why Jesus' followers should not have been surprised at His resurrection.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What emotions would you have experienced on the way to the tomb?

Luke 24:1-6a Commentary

The empty tomb points to the resurrection of Jesus.

[Verse 1] Jesus was crucified and laid in a borrowed tomb on Friday; He rose to life victoriously on Sunday, **the first day of the week**. No one knows the exact time Jesus arose from the dead, but it must have been extremely early on Sunday, for the women went to the tomb **very early in the morning**, a descriptive term that means “deep dawn.” Interestingly, in an era when women were less than second-class citizens, these women were the first people to whom Jesus’ resurrection was revealed.

The women **went to the tomb**. Tombs were often carved into existing caves, with several chambers for bodies. After burial preparations, for which the women had come, were completed, the bodies were laid on shelves in the rock. **The spices** were used to prepare the body for burial and offset the odor of decay. The additional spices brought on Sunday show proper respect for the dead. Evidently, the women felt it was necessary to apply extra spices and ointment to the body, either as an additional show of honor and respect or out of necessity to finalize the process. Either way, the women wanted to complete the burial process.

[Verse 2] A large, circular **stone** probably at least 4 feet in diameter and 14 inches thick sealed the tomb. Removing the stone would have been a major obstacle. The stone’s sheer size and weight would have made it impossible for them to roll it up the slanted channel. Yet when they arrived, **they found the stone rolled away**. Miraculously, God had solved the stone problem for them. May we be reminded that God rolled away the stone for the women to peer in, not for Jesus to get out! The tomb was open and empty. Jesus was not there.

[Verses 3-4] A sad labor of love was transformed into mystery. Yet the absence of the body was not sufficient to lead them to belief in Jesus’ resurrection. As we read in verse 41, even when Jesus’ followers saw Him face-to-face, they experienced joy, but they still could not believe. The women stood surprised and **wondering**, unable to process what was happening. **Suddenly two men** appeared. They were angels. They **stood beside**, which means “to step up suddenly” or “to burst upon” a person.

[Verse 5] The women were in **fright**, a common response to angelic appearances. Their fear may have been more reverential awe rather than stark terror. They **bowed down with their faces to the ground**—a mark of respect in the presence of the angels. The angels asked: **“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”** The question revealed the folly of believing that Jesus was still in the tomb. The angels gently rebuked the women for seeking Jesus in the graveyard.

[Verse 6a] **“He is not here; he has risen!”** is a statement of faith, the capstone of Christianity, the very essence of the gospel message that changes people’s lives and eternity. Jesus is not dead; He is alive. In contrast to all other leaders of world religions, who died and their grave sites sit undisturbed, Jesus is alive and His grave is empty.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

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Luke 24:6b-8

6b Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' 8 Then they remembered his words.

READ: Luke 24:6b-8 on page 70 of the PSG.

RECAP: Read aloud the second-to-last paragraph on page 70 of the PSG:

The empty tomb should not have been a surprise to these women—or to any of Jesus’ followers. The angels reminded them that Jesus had repeatedly predicted both His death and His resurrection.

GUIDE: Refer to the fourth paragraph on page 91 of this Leader Guide to find additional Scripture references where Jesus predicted His death and resurrection.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 70 of the PSG: **“Why is it significant that Jesus knew in advance what would happen to Him?”**

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity “What Would You Say?” on page 73 of the PSG. If time permits, encourage volunteers to share their responses.



Choose one of the following statements connected with Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Record how you would respond to that statement during a conversation with a friend or family member.

- “Jesus was unconscious when they put Him in the tomb, but He never actually died.”
- “I don’t think Jesus was an actual person in history; He’s just a story.”
- “It was probably Jesus’ disciples who made up the story of Jesus rising from the dead; they just couldn’t let Him go.”
- “People wanted to believe Jesus was still alive, so they just imagined they saw Him.”

Where could you start looking to find additional information on the historical accuracy of Jesus’ death and resurrection?

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When has remembering God’s Word helped you in a crisis?

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Luke 24:6b-8 Commentary

Jesus foretold His resurrection.

[Verses 6b-7] The angels not only informed the women of Jesus' resurrection, they also challenged the women to **"Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee."** All of Jesus' disciples had failed to anticipate or understand His pending death and resurrection, but it was not for lack of instruction on Jesus' part. He had plainly revealed His resurrection from the dead as occurring on the third day (see Luke 9:22; 18:32-33).

The third day does not refer to three 24-hour days, but inclusively to any part of three days. He was buried on Friday before sundown, the beginning of the Sabbath as the Jews reckoned time. Thus, Friday was the first day He was in the tomb. Saturday would have been the second day, with Sunday (from sundown Saturday evening until the time of His resurrection) being the third.

Jesus often spoke metaphorically and the women, along with the rest of Jesus' followers, had probably taken the strange words about resurrection in the same way. Or perhaps, in their anguish and grief, the women simply had forgotten Jesus' prediction that He would rise from the dead. Either way, a bodily resurrection was beyond their comprehension and hopes. Yet Jesus had clearly told His followers that He would be betrayed, crucified, and resurrected. Without 20 centuries of hindsight, we can understand how His words might have sounded preposterous, if not downright ludicrous. But even today, when we know His words to be a living reality grounded solidly in historical fact, many people still fail—or refuse—to recognize the simple truth of Jesus' resurrection.

[Verse 8] Having been prompted by the angels, the women **remembered his words.** "His words" were Jesus' prophecies concerning His resurrection. On several occasions, Jesus told His followers that He would suffer and die and be raised from the dead (see Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; Luke 9:22,44; 18:31-34).

Even though Jesus had uttered these words, with the fact that He had died such a cruel death on the cross, it never entered the minds of these women (or the other disciples for that matter) during their despondency and sorrow that Jesus would rise again. But once they realized that not only was Jesus' resurrection possible, but now a reality, the women could again clearly recall Jesus' words. They now interpreted the empty tomb in light of Jesus' foretelling. The women then understood that the body had not been removed or relocated, but that Jesus had risen from the dead. The tomb was empty.

Now the women had a story to tell. They couldn't wait to return to the others and report what they had seen and heard. It was news that would transform them into powerful proclaimers of truth and would birth a movement. Unfortunately, the other disciples did not believe the women, considering their story to be "nonsense" or an idle tale (see Luke 24:9-11). They wouldn't believe without a personal experience. Luke recorded that Peter went to check out the story for himself and was amazed at what he discovered (see v. 12).



15 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

Luke 24:36-40

36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." 40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.

READ: Luke 24:36-40 on page 71 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE: Help group members walk through the main points from pages 71-72 of the PSG:

1. "This was no hallucination. Yes, we can sometimes convince ourselves we see something because we really want to see it, but the disciples were not expecting to see Jesus."
2. "Doubt and faith are often co-mingled in our lives. Sometimes our faith is robust, yet at other times doubts threaten to derail our walk with God."
3. "And, just like He provided His first disciples with proof of His bodily resurrection, He provides us with proof as well."

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 72 of the PSG: **"How has Jesus proven Himself to you in the past?"**

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 72 of the PSG: **"What makes the resurrection so important for believers today?"**

RECAP: Conclude the discussion on these questions by reading aloud the final paragraph on page 72 of the PSG:

History was forever transformed when Jesus rose from the dead early on a Sunday morning. Sin and death were defeated by the conquering King. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is now at work in those who trust Him (see Rom. 8:9-11). Because Jesus has risen from the grave, His perfect life is now ours through faith in Him.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
In what specific ways has Christ given you peace?

Luke 24:36-40 Commentary

The disciples saw Jesus after His resurrection.

[Verse 36] Before the day was over, other disciples would hear the news and see the resurrected Christ. Believers gathered in the evening to share their exciting stories of Jesus' appearing. Suddenly, Jesus **himself stood among them**. Although the doors were shut and locked for fear of the authorities (see John 20:19), Jesus appeared by supernatural power within the closed room; He was no longer bound by limitations of an ordinary earthly body. Jesus sought to console and calm the gathered believers. He uttered a familiar blessing: **"Peace be with you."** It was the normal greeting of the day, but it carried a far deeper meaning *this* day. No reason remained for them to fear. The God of peace was with them, not just in Spirit, but in bodily form.

[Verse 37] One might think that upon seeing Jesus the believers would sigh in great relief or burst forth in song, but instead **they were startled and frightened**. "Startled" is not surprising. After all, the risen Lord suddenly appeared in their midst behind locked doors without warning, without knocking, without entering through the door. That they were "frightened" or terrified is not as easily explained, since several of them had already seen the risen Christ earlier that day and they had been talking about Jesus' appearances. Small wonder they were **thinking they saw a ghost**, or a disembodied Jesus. Their fear was a natural reaction to the supernatural.

[Verse 38] **"Why are you troubled?"** Jesus asked. The verb translated as "troubled" means "to agitate, to stir up, to get excited." Jesus called on them to look upon the situation in a clearheaded manner. He also asked, **"and why do doubts rise in your minds?"** The doubts likely originated with whether Jesus had actually been raised bodily from the dead, or whether the person they were encountering was actually Jesus, or whether Jesus were a ghost. Luke had in mind that the disciples were wondering if Jesus were a ghost.

[Verse 39] Jesus sought to calm the disciples not only with His presence, but also by showing them His wounds. Jesus' command to **"Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself!"** was an invitation to verify that it was Jesus Himself who stood before them.

Touch me or "handle me" would have shown them He was not a ghost. The proof of Jesus' human body could be felt. Jesus' presence was neither the simple resuscitation of a "swooned" body nor the appearance of a disembodied spirit, but rather a true resurrection into a new and glorified body.

[Verse 40] The text says nothing about scars, though we can be certain the prints of Calvary were on His body. Those prints Jesus bears throughout all eternity as a reminder of the price He paid for our salvation and the victory He won over death by being resurrected to life.

Jesus is the risen Lord. Through His resurrection He conquered death so His followers can experience true, authentic, and everlasting life. The facts are clear—Jesus' resurrection provides a foundation we can build our lives on.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 74 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following responses to the historical fact of Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Believe.** If you’ve never embraced the truth of Christ’s resurrection and what that means for your life, do so now. The inside front cover of this book will help you. Talk to your group leader about your decision to trust and follow Christ.
- ▶ **Study.** Read further about the historical evidence that proves the resurrection of Christ. Consider a book such as *Buried Hope* or *Risen Savior* by Charles L. Quarles or *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel.
- ▶ **Share.** Ask God each day to provide opportunities for you to share your faith with someone who has yet to believe in Christ.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the Conclusion from page 74 of the PSG:

The disciples were afraid. They doubted the truth of the resurrection. And yet they were ultimately transformed by Christ and used in marvelous ways to advance His kingdom in this world. The same can be true of us.

PRAY: Conclude by praying that the people in your community would be confronted with the truth of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Pray also for the courage to proclaim that truth to any and all who need to hear it.



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CARE FOR EVERY PERSON

BY DAVID FRANCIS

One of the things that sets apart a healthy Groups ministry from a struggling one is a commitment to care for every person. Nothing says “we care” like a church with a vital and functioning system of care groups.

Ideally, this means that every person is assigned to a care group and that every care group has a leader. The mission of the care group and the job description of the care group leader are the same, and they include the following key tasks:

Contact Every Member Every Week

Do you mean every absent member every week? Nope. I mean every member every week.

This contact can be face-to-face, by phone, or by e-mail. Or, on a really special occasion—such as a birthday or an anniversary—the care group leader might make the special effort of mailing a card.



The responsibility of the care-group leader is not to get people to come to class. The role of the care-group leader is to help members connect in community. In fact, care group leaders should seldom mention class attendance. Rather, their role is:

- ▶ “Just keeping in touch.”
- ▶ “Just checking in to see how you’re doing.”
- ▶ “Anything going on you’d like the class to pray about?”

The contacts need not be long. Just a quick phone call during a daily commute will do. The goal is simply to stay connected with every person in the group and to report news and needs to the teacher and, in urgent cases, to the pastor so that the appropriate person can make a timely ministry response.

Many people, properly enlisted, will be ready to accept this entry-level leadership position—one that’s very important yet not overwhelming.

5-7 Men or Women

Best practice suggests that each adult care group leader will assume responsibility for five to seven men or women. Men should contact men and women should contact women.

Why not have couples’ care groups? Because usually the women will contact the women but the men won’t. Besides, you don’t want to place people in potential positions that could lead to a compromise.

Not surprisingly, this sets up a perfect system to communicate information related to women’s or men’s ministries, too, without creating a separate organization!

Every Person Assigned

Each member should be assigned to a care group. Some classes call these ministry groups. You might even call them connect groups. I have also heard the groups called CPR groups to signify the three purposes of the group: care, prayer, and reaching.

It matters less what you call them than that you do them!



Groups should start with about five members, with a maximum of seven. Starting with fewer allows you to add new members. Seven is a good maximum because there are seven days in a week, which means a group leader could contact one member each day. Once several group leaders have seven members, enlist new group leaders so you can get group numbers back down to five.

Care Groups on Steroids

The previous paragraph describes a relatively passive care group. Nobody except the care group leader might even know who is in the group. That's OK. It's a start. And it's certainly preferable to not having care groups at all.

But care groups can be and do more, especially if your class is intentional about becoming a community.

One step forward is to reserve 10 to 15 minutes at the beginning or end of every class session for the class to gather into care groups. Some classes even check attendance in these groups.

During this time, the group has two primary objectives:

- ▶ Calling the names of all absent group members to identify ministry needs.
- ▶ Sharing and praying with one another.

Once again, this is one of the primary reasons for having single-gender care groups. Women and men often have different kinds of prayer needs and are usually more likely to share them if the group includes only their gender.

This article is an excerpt from David Francis' book *One Hundred: Charting a Course Past 100 in Sunday School*, a 64-page booklet filled with practical ideas for creating, sustaining, and growing Bible study groups in your church. You can download the book for free at Lifeway.com/davidfrancis.