

**Leader's Guide**  
**Sports in Focus Guide Seven**

**Below are some additional insights for**  
**John 11:1-54**  
**Source for answers: MacArthur New Testament Commentary**

**Context of John 11:1-54**

At the beginning of chapter 11, Jesus is standing in the shadow of the cross. His time in Jordan has ended. His death on the cross is only a few days away. The scene changes from hatred and rejection (10:39) to an unmistakable and blessed witness of the glory of Christ. The hatred could not diminish Christ's glory as displayed through the resurrection of Lazarus. This miracle is the most dramatic sign in the Gospel of John and is the capstone of Jesus' public ministry.

**Keys to Text**

**Mary and Martha:** This is the first mention of this family in John. It appears that they were good friends of Jesus and that He had stayed with them several times. In Luke 10:38-42, Jesus came to their house for dinner. Martha was so busy doing many things supposedly for Jesus' sake, but Mary was sitting humbly at Jesus' feet. **Caiaphas:** The high priest was the supreme religious head of his people. He controlled the temple and no doubt profited from the corrupt merchandising that was taking place there.

**Read John 11:1-54**

**1. What evidence in chapter 11 leads you to believe that Jesus had an especially close relationship with Lazarus and his sisters?**

John identified Bethany as the village of Mary and her sister Martha. The apostle, giving no further details, evidently expected his readers to be familiar with the two sisters (who are referred to in Luke's gospel [Luke 10:38–42]). Thus, he could write that it was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick; even though he would not relate that story of that anointing until chapter 12, his readers already knew of it from the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9).

John's note that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus makes explicit what is implied throughout the story. The Lord was close to this family, having undoubtedly spent much time in their home during His visits to nearby Jerusalem (cf. Matt. 21:17; Mark 11:11–12; and the discussion of 8:1 in chapter 27 of this volume). John interjected the thought here to show that the Lord's subsequent action did not reflect a lack of love and compassion on His part.

The Lord's close relationship with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha makes what happened next seem all the more puzzling. Instead of rushing back to Bethany in response to the sisters' message, when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was. The Lord did not delay to allow Lazarus to die since, as noted above, he had probably died before the messenger reached Jesus. The delay did serve several purposes: it strengthened the sisters' faith in the Lord by forcing them to trust Him; it made it clear that Lazarus was truly dead (cf. the discussion of v. 17 in chapter 39 of this volume) and hence that Jesus' raising of him was indeed a miracle; and, as always, Jesus operated according to God's timetable, not man's.

## **2. Why do you think the text describes Jesus as “groaning” and “weeping” over the death of Lazarus if Jesus knew that He was going to bring Lazarus back to life?**

11:33 saw ... the Jews ... weeping. According to Jewish oral tradition, the funeral custom indicated that even a poor family must hire at least two flute players and a professional wailing woman to mourn the dead. Because the family may have been well-to-do, a rather large group appears present. He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled. The phrase here does not mean merely that Jesus was deeply touched or moved with sympathy at the sight. The Gr. term “deeply moved” always suggests anger, outrage, or emotional indignation (see v. 38; cf. Mt 9:30; Mk 1:43; 14:5). Most likely Jesus was angered at the emotional grief of the people because it implicitly revealed unbelief in the resurrection and the temporary nature of death. The group was acting like pagans who had no hope (1Th 4:13). While grief is understandable, the group was acting in despair, thus indicating a tacit denial of the resurrection and the Scripture that promised it. Jesus may also have been angered because He was indignant at the pain and sorrow in death that sin brought into the human condition.

11:35 Jesus wept. The Gr. word here has the connotation of silently bursting into tears in contrast to the loud lament of the group (see v. 33). His tears here were not generated out of mourning, since He was to raise Lazarus, but out of grief for a fallen world entangled in sin-caused sorrow and death. He was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Is 53:3).

## **3. What do we learn about Jesus’ humanity from this passage? About His divinity?**

When word reached Martha that Jesus was coming into the village she went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. The actions of the two sisters are in keeping with the picture of them in Luke 10:38–42. Martha was the bustling, active one (“distracted with all her preparations”; Luke 10:40), Mary was the quiet, contemplative one (“seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word”; v. 39). According to Jewish custom, those who suffered the loss of a loved one remained seated while the other mourners consoled them. But Martha, in keeping with her forceful personality, left her house and went to meet Jesus as He approached.

When Martha reached Him, the disturbing thought that had been uppermost in her mind (and her sister’s; v. 32) for the last few days came pouring out: “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” Although obviously heartbroken, she was not rebuking the Lord for failing to prevent Lazarus’s death. As noted in the previous chapter of this volume, the sisters’ message had arrived too late, humanly speaking, for Jesus to have returned to Bethany in time to heal him. Martha’s words were simply a poignant expression of grief mingled with the faith she expressed in her next statement: “Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” That confidence, however, evidently did not extend to Jesus’ ability to resurrect her brother, as her later hesitation when the tomb was opened makes clear (v. 39). She seems to have had faith in the Lord’s power to heal, but not in His power to raise the dead (perhaps the possibility had not even crossed her mind). Nonetheless Martha recognized that Jesus had a special relationship with God. She was therefore confident that through His prayers some good could still come out of the tragedy.

Jesus responded by assuring her, “Your brother will rise again.” He meant that Lazarus was going to be resurrected immediately, but Martha missed the point. She assumed that Jesus, like the other mourners, was comforting her by pointing out that Lazarus would rise again at the end of the age. Martha, however, was already familiar with that truth, and so she replied, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” The resurrection of the body was taught in the Old Testa-

ment (e.g., Job 19:25–27; Ps. 16:10; Dan. 12:2), and affirmed by the Pharisees (though not by the Sadducees; Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:6–8). It was also, as Martha knew, the teaching of Jesus (cf. 5:21, 25–29; 6:39–40, 44, 54). Ironically, while she believed Jesus had the power to raise her brother in the distant future, she did not think that He could also do so immediately.

Challenging Martha to move beyond an abstract belief in the final resurrection to complete faith in Him, Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.” This is the fifth of the seven “I AM” deity claims in John’s gospel (6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 14:6; 15:1, 5). Martha’s focus was on the end of the age, but time is no obstacle for the One who has the power of resurrection and life (cf. 5:21, 26). Jesus will raise the dead in the future resurrection of which Martha spoke. But He was also going to raise her brother immediately. The Lord called her to a personal trust in Him as the One who alone has power over death.

Jesus’ next two statements, “he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die,” are not redundant. They teach separate, though related, truths. The one who believes in Jesus will live even if he dies physically because He will raise him on the last day (5:21, 25–29; 6:39–40, 44, 54). And since everyone who lives and believes in Him has eternal life (3:36; 5:24; 6:47, 54), they will never die spiritually (see the discussion of 8:51 in chapter 32 of this volume), since eternal life cannot be extinguished by physical death. As a result, all who trust in Christ can exult, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55).

When Jesus challenged Martha, “Do you believe this?” He was not asking her if she believed that He was about to raise her brother. The Lord was calling her to personally believe that He alone was the source of resurrection power and eternal life. R. C. H. Lenski writes,

To believe “this” is to believe what he says of himself and thus to believe “in him.” It is one thing to hear it, to reason and to argue about it; and quite another thing to believe, embrace, trust it. To believe is to receive, hold, enjoy the reality and the power of it, with all that lies in it of joy, comfort, peace, and hope. The measure of our believing, while it is not the measure of our possessing, since the smallest faith has Jesus, the resurrection and the life, completely, is yet the measure of our enjoyment of it all. (The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel [Reprint; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998], 803)

Because of His infinite love for Martha’s soul, Jesus pointed her to the only source of spiritual life and well-being—Himself.

Martha’s affirmation of faith in Jesus stands with the other great confessions of His identity in the gospels (1:49; 6:69; Matt. 14:33; 16:16). It anticipates John’s purpose statement for writing his gospel: “These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (20:31). Martha emphatically (the Greek text has the personal pronoun in addition to the verb) declared three vital truths about Jesus: Like Andrew (1:41), she confessed that He was the Christ, or Messiah; like John the Baptist (1:34), Nathanael (1:49), and the disciples (Matt. 14:33) she affirmed that He was the Son of God; and finally, like the Old Testament had predicted (cf. Is. 9:6; Mic. 5:2), she referred to Him as He who comes into the world—the deliverer sent by God (Luke 7:19–20; cf. John 1:9; 3:31; 6:14).

**4. As the Pharisees plotted to kill Jesus, what was Caiaphas' unwittingly profound remark (vs. 50)?**

11:50 one man die for the people. He only meant that Jesus should be executed in order to spare their own positions and nation from Roman reprisals, but Caiaphas unwittingly used sacrificial, substitutionary language and prophesied the death of Christ for sinners. Cf. 2Co 5:21; 1Pe 2:24.

**5. In what ways did Jesus' raising of Lazarus foreshadow future events?**

The huge crowds that gathered in Jerusalem eagerly were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?" Would He dare show Himself in Jerusalem, they wondered, since the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it, so that they might seize Him? They showed intense interest in Jesus, but no commitment. They were, in fact, ultimately indifferent to Him; many who eagerly anticipated Jesus' arrival and hailed Him as Messiah would soon cry out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" (19:15). Their fickle devotion proved that, despite their superficial concern, they were actually just as hard-hearted as their hostile leaders.

The resurrection of Lazarus, like the rest of Christ's life and ministry, forced people to a decision about Him. Many responded in faith; others were indifferent; and some were murderously hostile. As Jesus' final Passover drew near, it would not be long before those who were indifferent and those who were hostile would unite to crucify the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8).

**6. Clearly Lazarus and his sisters enjoyed an intimate friendship with Jesus. What do you think is the secret to that kind of relationship with Christ?**

**7. How does Christ's statement that He is the "resurrection and the life" change the way you view death?**