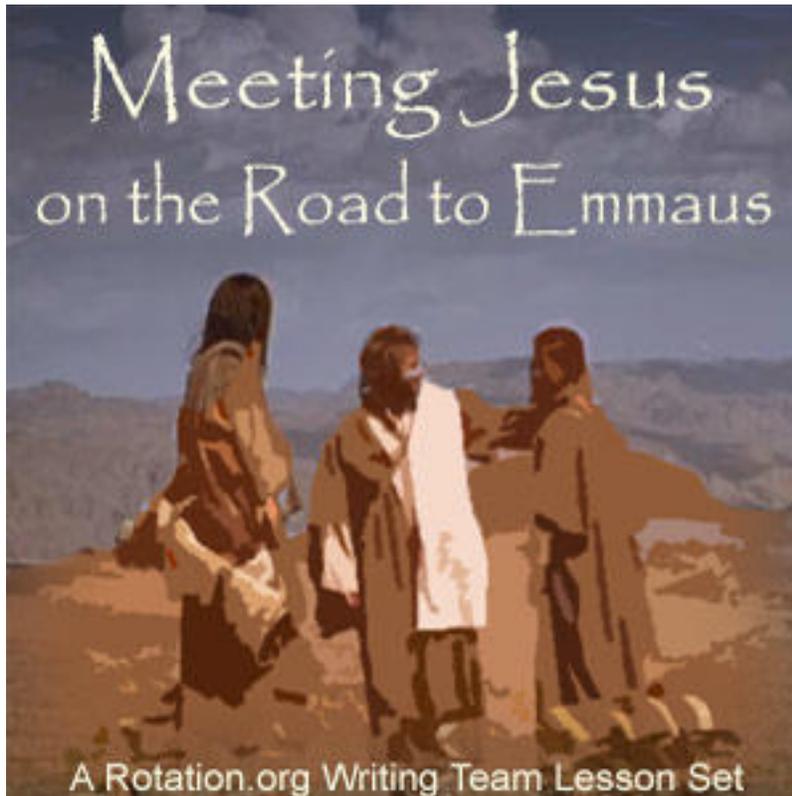


The Rotation.org Writing Team

## Meeting Jesus on the Road to Emmaus

### Bible Background and Lesson Objectives



### Scripture for the Set

[Luke 24:13-35](#) (NRSV)

**Memory Verse/Key Verse:** Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24: 31-32, NRSV)

### Learning Objectives for the Rotation

After completing this Rotation, students will be able to:

- Retell the story and its meaning.

- Talk about how Christians prepare for and "see" the presence of Jesus today.
- Consider where they are "along the road" in their belief in the Risen Christ.
- Consider how they are sharing the message as did those two on their return from Emmaus.

**The Emmaus story is among the most important Bible stories** our children can learn because it speaks to the essential faith experience -encountering and "seeing" (believing in, being transformed by) the Risen Christ.

**But the story is developmentally challenging because** it deals with spiritual insights and life experiences that young children are just on the cusp of having and being able to grasp.

This is why the best thing we can do with this particular story is **plant it firmly and vividly in their memories** so that it can guide their faith experiences and expectations in the years to come.



## **Unfolding the Emmaus Story**

Who can blame Cleopas and his traveling companion for their doubts? Who can blame ANY of us for our doubts? Dead people don't come back to life. Jesus was dead and buried.

So how do we get from two confused, grieving, and disheartened disciples, to one of the most important stories in all the Gospels? The answer comes

from the story itself: faith in the Risen Christ comes directly from Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Faith isn't the product of evidence or an act of will. Faith that Jesus is alive and is our Lord is God's gift to us through the Holy Spirit.

One of the reoccurring fallacies loose in Christianity is the belief that faith can be acquired simply by doing religious things, like going to church. This is because we casually confuse faith with belief -and it's easy to do. But as this story and other scriptures point out, faith is what God gives, and our beliefs and actions are what grows out of that gift. (See more on this below.)

Indeed, Cleopas and his companion had been to "church" --they had been with Jesus for some time, yet they still could not recognize him. Based on early church documents, scholars believe Cleopas was quite likely Jesus' uncle, and therefore some believe his traveling companion was likely his wife (the "other Mary"). Realizing who they were --only deepens the central point of the story and is the center of most of Jesus' teaching: faith is received, not earned, and is not the product of study or following the Law. To be sure, faith can be shaped and even prepared for, but it is the Holy Spirit that empowers us to believe in Jesus and have faith.

Throughout the lessons in this set, we'll look at what the disciples did that prepared them for this encounter and what their response was. But the central point of the story should not be obscured. **We need Jesus to change our sorrow into sight.**

The Emmaus story reminds us that  
Jesus often steps into our lives as one unknown,  
...a stranger who perplexes,  
...a teacher who makes our heart flicker and flutter.  
And then he does something that breathes his name  
into our soul and sight.  
The veil is pulled back, and we are forever changed.



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## Digging Deeper

### Why couldn't they recognize Jesus on the road?

Theologically speaking, as adults we understand all about being blind to the obvious. In the phrase, "their eyes were kept from recognizing him," the Greek word for "kept" can be translated as "held" or "restrained" or "seized." A lot can be inferred as to what "kept" them from seeing Jesus, but there is also no suggestion that their blindness was due to divine intervention. What we can say for sure is that the inability to recognize God in our midst is a universal problem. I've heard a teacher explain that grief and confusion blinded them, and that is probably also true, but after a while, wouldn't his own uncle and aunt have recognized him? Yes, so what's going on here?

**We've seen this "strangers" story before.** Sarah entertaining angels unaware, the stranger (Jesus) talking to the woman at the well, and from Jesus own words, "I was a stranger, and you invited Me in." John records that Mary Magdalene had the same problem at the Empty Tomb in John 20:11-18. She thought Jesus was the gardener, and Thomas couldn't believe it either until Jesus spoke to him and offered his hands.

Similarly, there's the story of when Peter finally "gets it" (after sixteen chapters!) and declares Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus' immediate response is that, "this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."

So answer seems clear: **the eyes of faith are something only Jesus can open.** As much as we would like to be in charge of our faith and we feel that we have somehow earned it, faith is a gift from above.

Unfortunately, the words "faith" and "beliefs" are often used interchangeably, even across scripture. We speak of "The Faith" when what we mean is "the beliefs" which Jesus' gift of faith has empowered us to believe. These are important distinctions to share with our children. They prepare them for the essential and most importance experience of their life --encountering the Living Christ. Unpacking the language of scripture and the Church is one of the reasons Sunday School exists.

# Faith powers belief

*Jesus* *action*



We love because he first loved us.

(1 John 4)

this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God

(Ephesians 2)

I live by faith in the Son of God,  
who loved me and gave himself for me.

(Galatians 2)

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There are two resurrection stories in which **it wasn't until Jesus did something familiar that they recognized him**. He called Mary Magdalene by her name, and he broke bread with Cleopas and his companion. And while The Church likes to use this story to support mystical Communion theology (Jesus' "real" presence in the bread, and so on), to the two disciples on the road, Jesus' familiar actions, like saying Mary's name at the tomb, like the stretching out his hands to Thomas, were a moment of transforming grace. To wit, the Table is not the only means of grace. Jesus can and does approach us in many ways and places with transforming moments of faith-sight.

- What "familiar things" will Jesus reach out to you through? Will it be in a moment of darkness and doubt? Or during an act of reaching out to help a stranger?

- What will it feel like when your eyes are opened and you realize Jesus is with you, and how will you respond? ("Will I dance with you, Jesus?")
- The Church creates or uses "reminders" of Christ's presence. Crosses, Baptismal Fonts, Communion Tables with Bread, Bibles, Music. What things and actions feel most like the presence of Jesus with you? What can you DO every day to remind yourself that Jesus lives?

## Have you ever wondered "where is God?"

- Maybe walking alongside you.
- Maybe the stranger you need to walk a little further with.
- Maybe the one asking you, "tell me what you are talking about."
- Maybe handing you bread.
- Maybe putting an arm around you and offering counsel.
- Maybe calling you back.
- Maybe you need to open your mind before God can open your eyes?
- Maybe God is that little bit of light coming closer as you walk the darkest valley.

## The unimportance of seeing the physical Jesus

Jesus vanishes the moment they recognize him, and though we don't know how they felt about that, I think it must have been rather frustrating. They got to see their dead Lord alive again. They undoubtedly wanted to embrace him but aren't given the chance. And that's when we realize that this story is not really about those two disciples, but about all the rest of us who only get to see and feel Jesus' presence. Luke's Emmaus story could have easily ended with John 20:29 insight, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Why didn't he stick around? God obviously didn't think it was important to keep Jesus' body walking the earth. You might think it would be helpful, but one only has to remember that people rejected Jesus when he was walking around the first time.

While we may envy Cleopas and friend, and all the others who got to see the Risen Christ with their eyes, **what defined them was what happened AFTERWARDS. A blink-of-an-eye glimpse was enough** for Cleopas and his companion to turn their lives around and return to dangerous Jerusalem and share the good news.

## The Role (and limits) of Scripture and Teaching

**Point to all teachers: Reading and knowing scripture doesn't produce faith in Jesus** --even when it feels like it is "burning" inside you. The Pharisees knew scripture backward and forward. Cleopas and his companion had no doubt heard Jesus preach and teach many times. But none of it truly makes sense until JESUS himself makes sense to you.

Can you be ill-prepared to receive that faith-sight? Yes. Can you reject that insight? Yes. Can knowing Jesus' story help prepare you for his "Advent" in your heart? Yes. But we are left with the paradox of why God chooses not to give everyone the same experience of the Risen Christ that Cleopas and his friend had that day. The Reformers called it the doctrine of "Election." As teachers, we do all we can to prepare our students, but we cannot see Jesus for them. We can only humbly see him for ourselves, and let his presence reach out through us to others, and trust that "in the end, every knee shall bow."



**Plant the story and trust God to water it.**

## Who were the two disciples Jesus met on the Road?

A lot has been written about the identity of Cleopas and his walking companion. Early Church documents identify Cleopas as Mary's brother; literally, Jesus'

uncle. According to some extremely early Church documents, he was also known as Alphaeus or Clopas. Both names are attempts to transliterate the Aramaic name "Hilfia." It is also known that the disciple James' father was named Alphaeus (Hilfia in Aramaic), as was Matthew's.

Who would have been walking with Cleopas (Alphaeus)? It could have been his wife, who was also named Mary, and who had gone to the empty tomb, according to Matthew 28. (Mary was a common name shared by a number of women in the Bible.) It has also been suggested that the name of the disciple was not included so that it could represent any of us. Stories like these remind us that the followers of Jesus were not limited to the 12, and included Jesus' family and friends, including women.

## **Where is Emmaus?**

Emmaus was a small and insignificant village whose definitive location has been lost to time. Luke says that Emmaus was within a day's walk from Jerusalem. Being relatively near Jerusalem also tells us that Cleopas and his companion had not necessarily "given up and gone home," but perhaps were merely returning to their relatively nearby home to tend to other needs or have a place to stay after Passover had ended during this period of uncertainty. In Hebrew, "Emmaus" literally means "Warm Baths." Perhaps mineral springs. People believe the baths would cure them. Cleopas and his friend were headed that way until Jesus revealed himself.

## **What did Jesus explain to the two disciples "beginning with Moses...."?**

"(Jesus) said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:25-27)

"Beginning with Moses" is a reference to the first five books of the Old Testament which tradition says were written by Moses. The New Testament, and in particular, John's Gospel, have dozens of "prophecy fulfillment" references. Here's a list of some of the most often referenced messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled.

- Messiah would be born of a virgin. Isaiah 7:14
- Messiah would be rejected by his own people. Psalm 69:8, Isaiah 53:3
- Messiah would be preceded by Elijah. Malachi 4:5-6
- Messiah would be declared the Son of God. Psalm 2:7
- Messiah would be called a Nazarene. Isaiah 11:1
- Messiah would bring light to Galilee. Isaiah 9:1-2
- Messiah would speak in parables. Psalm 78:2-4, Isaiah 6:9-10
- Messiah would be sent to heal the brokenhearted. Isaiah 61:1-2
- Messiah would be betrayed. Psalm 41:9, Zechariah 11:12-13
- Messiah would be crucified with criminals. Isaiah 53:12
- Messiah would be given vinegar to drink. Psalm 69:21
- Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced. Psalm 22:16, Zechariah 12:10
- Messiah would be mocked and ridiculed. Psalm 22:7-8
- Messiah would resurrect from the dead. Psalm 16:10, Psalm 49:15
- Messiah would ascend to heaven. Psalm 24:7-10
- Messiah would be seated at God's right hand. Psalm 68:18, Psalm 110:1
- Messiah would be a sacrifice for sin. Isaiah 53:5-12

### **"So Much for Signs"**

What's particularly striking about the above list, however, is that so many people and religious experts MISSED or misinterpreted these signs, and that Jesus needed to explain them to the two disciples. What does that say about scriptural proofs? Jesus "explanations" made their hearts burn, but did not open their eyes, proving once again that it's not what you know, but WHO you know.

Emmaus is one of those stories whose meaning cannot be exhausted because at the center of it is a mystery and miracle. This is why our first job is to "teach the story" so that it can continue to unfold its truth and guide our children in their own encounter with the stranger who even now is walking beside them.

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