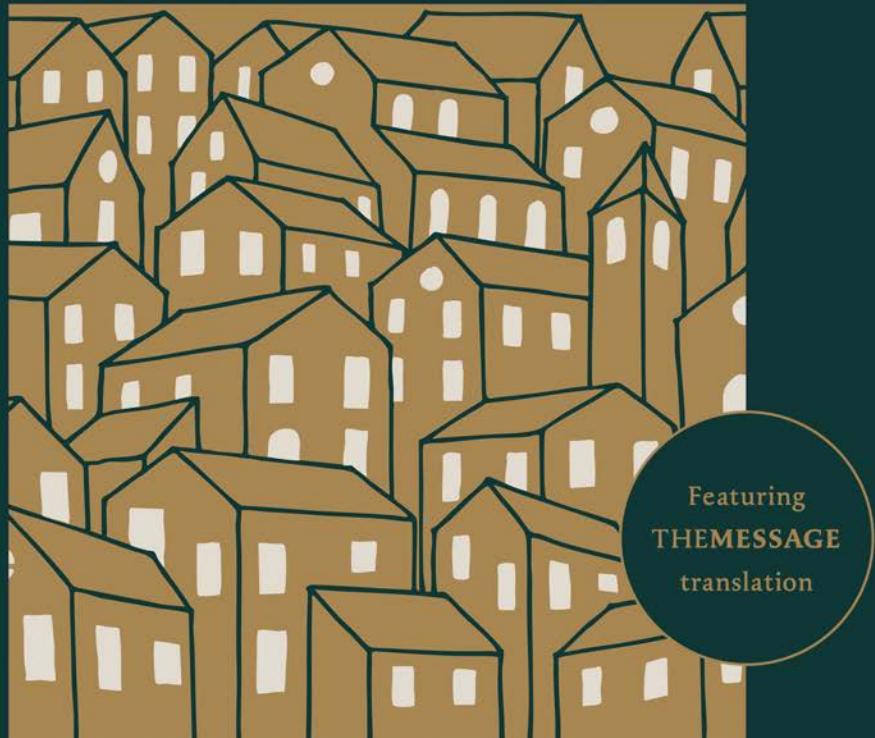


RESURRECTION

GOD IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD BIBLE STUDIES



8 Lessons on How God Restores Us

DEREK VREELAND

The most sublime mystery in the Christian faith is the incarnation of God in Christ. “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14), as Eugene Peterson’s memorable translation puts it. Now Derek Vreeland has adapted *The Message* translation to lead us in a biblical exploration of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection in a fresh way for small groups and individuals alike.

BRIAN ZAHND, author of *The Wood Between the Worlds*

Derek has accomplished something rare with the God in the Neighborhood Bible Studies. His work is rich and deep, saturated in Scripture and theologically sound, yet it also reveals a profound attention to the condition of our hearts. Through heartfelt prayers and spiritually attuned pastoral leadership, Derek invites us into the all-important work of Christlikeness. God in the Neighborhood is sure to deepen our affection for Christ and exhort us to enjoy closer fellowship with our incarnate, crucified, and risen Savior, Jesus.

KAT ARMSTRONG, Bible teacher, podcast host, and author of the *Storyline Bible Studies* series

Vreeland artfully guides us into Scripture’s wild country, where we see with fresh eyes the wonder of the human God.

WINN COLLIER, pastor, director of the Eugene Peterson Center for Christian Imagination, and author of *A Burning in My Bones: The Authorized Biography of Eugene H. Peterson* and *Love Big. Be Well*

With theological depth and pastoral warmth, Derek Vreeland leads us into Scripture using the down-to-earth beauty of *The Message* translation to reveal the wonder of God made flesh. What I love most about this study is how it keeps our eyes on Jesus—God with us—and at the same time helps us imagine how that truth reshapes how we live with and for our neighbors. It is prophetic and hopeful, grounded and transformative.

JULIET LIU, pastor of Life on the Vine Christian Community

Derek Vreeland serves as a thoughtful guide in this excellent Bible study. I especially appreciate the way each lesson is structured in four sections, offering space for journaling and prayer. It's a rich resource—perfect for personal reflection as well as group study.

TIM WILDSMITH, pastor, professor, YouTuber, and author of *Bible Translations for Everyone* and *Daily Scripture Guidebook*

In the God in the Neighborhood Bible Studies, my friend Derek Vreeland opens up the heart of the gospel not as a collection of abstract doctrines but as the truth of God to be lived every moment, every day, wherever we are. *Incarnation* reveals God drawing near. *Crucifixion* displays God's self-giving love. *Resurrection* announces that hope is stronger than despair. These studies are grounded in the story of Scripture, pastoral in tone, and deeply practical. Derek writes as both a pastor and a friend, guiding us gently toward Jesus. As you work through these studies, you will find that God is not only in heaven above us but also alive in the laughter, sorrows, and stories of the place you call home.

TOMMY BROWN, author of *The Speed of Soul*

As Christians we know that Jesus is the face of God (2 Corinthians 4:6), which means that every contour of the Scripture is but the outline of the face of the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected one; the one in whom is all the fullness of the Godhead (Colossians 2:9), in whose presence we melt in adoration and worship. We believe this—but sometimes it is difficult to see. We need wise guides to help us not only recognize his face but also hear his voice and follow him where he goes—into the country of sin and death to seek and save the lost. I commend to you this series by Derek Vreeland—biblical, accessible, pastoral, wise. A resource that will edify believers old and new.

ANDREW ARNDT, lead pastor at New Life East and author of *A Strange and Gracious Light*

Anybody familiar with *The Message* translation has likely been moved by the idea of the Word that “became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14). It’s one of those verses that begs for more reflection. With the God in the Neighborhood Bible Studies, Derek Vreeland has delivered on that impulse by leading us through reflections on the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These studies are not a survey in abstract theology; they are an invitation to consider what it means to be “in Christ”—the Christ who poured himself into the incarnation, who gave his life in redemptive work, and who rose in triumph over the order of death and darkness. This study will invigorate your partnership with the God who is still at work in our neighborhoods.

MARTY SOLOMON, author of *Asking Better Questions of the Bible* and creator of *The BEMA Podcast*

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8 Lessons on How God Restores Us

DEREK VREELAND

NavPress



Published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers



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Resurrection: 8 Lessons on How God Restores Us

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For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com, or call 1-855-277-9400.

ISBN 978-1-64158-992-5

Printed in the United States of America

32	31	30	29	28	27	26
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

To Dylan

May you always do for others and let others do for you



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The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out,
true from start to finish.

JOHN 1:14

AS WE BEGIN

An Introduction to Resurrection

I recently sat at our local DMV, waiting on new license plates, and the guy sitting next to me started up a conversation. (Sadly, I'd left my AirPods at home. They would have given me a buffer to prevent a conversation I didn't want to have.) I acknowledged him initially with a comment about getting older and my two little grandchildren, but then I just got quiet while he talked about how everything feels like it's falling apart—the economy, crooked politicians, and whatever the people in charge had said on the news the night before. I stared at the ground and sighed deeply within myself but said nothing. Any affirmation would only plunge this conversation deeper into the darkness. Any comments to the contrary would only start an argument. I chose the third way—silence—because I knew that to dwell on the darkness with empty complaints would only give the devil a foothold in my heart.

I know it can feel like life is unstable and the darkness of corruption is spreading. It's not *completely* dark yet, but it seems like it's getting there. Admittedly, we see the darkness of moral corruption and injustice all around us—in our news feeds, in conversations with friends, and even in conversations with strangers at the DMV. The problems in our neighborhoods, compounded by the problems in the country we call home, are very real. But I won't let the darkness win. I won't let despair and hopelessness get the best of me. Our collective troubles tell a story of setbacks and loss, a story of pain and wrongdoing, but they do not tell the whole story.

The good news is that the Word came to live among us, determined to renew our neighborhoods. As the living Word of God, Jesus joins us in life, and we awaken to God's presence. He joins us in death, dying with us and for us, and we believe.

But he didn't remain in the tomb—the shackles of death couldn't bind him. On the third day, he rose again! Jesus joined us in new life, and we participate in what God is doing through Jesus to make all things new. The light of resurrection pushes back the darkness of despair.

The joy I feel throughout the season of Easter is not just because of Easter eggs, the Easter Bunny, and Easter Sunday services with a church full of worshipers. Every year, Easter reminds us that God has not abandoned God's good creation—the wide-open meadows; deep, dark forests; white-sand beaches; breathtaking mountain vistas; and especially human beings living together in neighborhoods. The resurrection of Jesus is the first sign that God's new-creation project is up and running. The current state of the world may be dark and growing darker, but the light of resurrection continues to shine through new beginnings and new life, like a flower growing through a sidewalk crack. So I refuse to allow despair's dark thoughts to dominate my imagination. I'm too busy participating in God's new creation.

When I look inside my own heart, I see this new life being produced. As Paul writes, "We look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life emerges! Look at it!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). I recognize this paradigm created by Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection in my own life. The Christian life is a process of the old dying and the new being born. We grow into the likeness of King Jesus as our stubborn and rebellious old selves are crucified and our redeemed and restored new selves come to life. I can say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). And just as I have been crucified, I have also been raised to new life with Christ.

The following eight lessons will prepare you to live this life of faith in the sure hope of the resurrection. We begin in the book of Job, where Job expresses his confidence—amid his suffering—in the God who can redeem and restore life. Lesson 2 takes us into the Gospels, where Jesus declares to Martha his identity as the embodiment of resurrection and life. Lesson 3 moves us into Paul's letter to the Romans, where he shows us how the resurrection of Jesus brings an end to the fear of death *as the end*.

Lesson 4 invites us as resurrection people to offer up to God our everyday, ordinary lives. Lesson 5 walks us through Paul's lengthy but important description

of resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, where he reveals how Jesus' victory over death is the linchpin of our faith. Lesson 6 challenges us to know Jesus in the power of his resurrection, not just know things *about* Jesus. Lesson 7 shows us how to live what Paul calls "this new resurrection life" (Colossians 3:1). Lesson 8 takes us to the end of the Bible, the book of Revelation, to see one final image of God making all things new.

This Bible study series uses the beauty and sacredness of ordinary language found in *The Message*, a contemporary and imaginative translation of the Bible, to lead you on a journey through the Scriptures to encounter Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection. The series is broken into three parts:

Book 1, *Incarnation*, dives deep into the mystery of the incarnation, where God meets us, joining us in life.

Book 2, *Crucifixion*, reflects on Jesus' execution, where God joins us in death, and in doing so, saves us.

Book 3, *Resurrection*, leads us on an Easter journey, where God joins us in life anew to restore us to what we were created to be: image bearers of the God of love.

When we realize that God is with us in life, we *come alive*. When we understand that God is with us in death, we *believe*. When we experience God-With-Us in new life, we *participate*. These studies are designed to bring you into "God's neighboring presence," a phrase I picked up from Eugene Peterson.¹ The coming of Jesus marks God moving into our neighborhood, and he is present with us as personally as any of our neighbors.

How to Use This Bible Study

Lessons in these Bible studies are designed for either individual reflection or group study in small groups, Sunday school classes, or home groups. You are invited to use these Bible studies for your own personal growth and spiritual formation. Lessons are made up of four parts—"The Approach," "The Word," "The Neighborhood," and "The Prayer." Here is how each lesson is structured.

The Approach: Setting the Scene

We begin with an introduction to the Scripture passage from *The Message* we will cover in each lesson. “The Approach” ends with starter questions to get you thinking (if you are reading on your own) or to help your group begin sharing with one another.

The Word: Diving into Scripture

Following our introduction and opening questions, we turn our attention to a particular passage of Scripture and dig in, looking at the uniqueness of the language of *The Message*. In his translation, Eugene Peterson sought to break down the dividing wall between so-called secular and so-called sacred language. For Peterson, *all* language is sacred because it is all a gift from God.² Questions are provided here, as well, to encourage you to enter the text more fully.

The Neighborhood: Living It Out

We will wrap up each lesson by looking outward toward our own neighborhoods, asking how the passage of Scripture calls us to live in the way of Jesus while we are among our real flesh-and-blood neighbors. Following Jesus is not merely gaining knowledge and categorizing God facts. Following Jesus is a way of living shaped by the Holy Spirit around the death and resurrection of Jesus so that our lives look like dying to self and rising to reflect the life of Jesus. Reflection questions guide this outward focus on how we live in our neighborhoods filled with real people who may or may not identify as Christians.

The Prayer: Drawing Near to God

Each lesson concludes with a prayer drawn from the specific Bible passage used in that lesson.

There are companion videos available on my website here:



Before You Start

If you are using these Bible studies on your own, find a quiet and comfortable place to read. Before you start a lesson, take a deep breath, exhale slowly, and offer a brief prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to work with Holy Scripture to show you the ways of Jesus. As you are reading, feel free to jot down responses to the questions throughout each lesson.

If you are using these Bible studies in a group, take turns introducing yourself to the group; perhaps you could each share why you are in this Bible study or what you hope to get out of it. Open with prayer, asking Jesus to pour out the Holy Spirit on your group so that the Holy Spirit will be your teacher and guide. Identify a group leader to guide the conversation. Give people a few moments to reflect on the questions through the study, and then invite them to share with the group their thoughts and answers to the questions. Don't rush people to answer. Trust and learn from silence.

Whether you're doing this study on your own or in community, if you are able, read all Scripture passages out loud and pray the prayer at the end of each lesson aloud.

I love Jesus. I've loved Jesus since I was fifteen years old, and after all these years, I *still* love Jesus, because he never ceases to amaze and surprise me. And I love leading Bible studies, because when we take time to study Holy Scripture, God always surprises me with new details that make me ponder. My prayer is that you will grow in gratitude through these Bible studies and see with greater clarity what God has done for us in and through Jesus. I pray you will grow in your knowledge of the ways of Jesus and feel the nudging of the Holy Spirit to live out what you believe.

*Derek Vreeland
Easter 2025*



LESSON 1

THE ONE WHO GIVES ME BACK MY LIFE

The Approach

I believe, with deep conviction, in the literal and historical resurrection of Jesus.

Christians can discuss and debate what we believe about the proper mode of baptism, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, or the proper sequence of events regarding the end of this present age and not ever reach a place of perfect agreement, but Jesus' physical resurrection is an undeniable reality for Christian faith. It is the lynchpin of our faith. Everything we believe rests on the account of Mary Magdalene and the apostles, who saw the risen Jesus with their own eyes. His resurrection changes everything, including how we look at the cross.

Without his resurrection, the crucifixion of Jesus looks like failure and defeat—a crucified king is a cursed king. In Galatians, Paul reminds us of the Scripture that says, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Galatians 3:13; Deuteronomy 21:22-23). However, the Spirit has vindicated Jesus and revealed his death as victorious.

While the ruling powers wanted to humiliate Jesus through crucifixion and stamp

out his rival-Kingdom movement, God turned the cross into a throne, the place of Jesus' saving enthronement. Jesus' death defeats sin, death itself, and the power of the evil one. Through his resurrection, Jesus brings about new life—resurrection life—which marks the dawn of God's new creation. Jesus came bursting through the doors of death “leading the resurrection parade” (Colossians 1:18) and inviting us into restoration, where God is making all things new.

Jesus not only went down *into* death and came back to life; Jesus went all the way *through* death and came out on the other side, creating a gateway into a world of new creation.

By the first century, most, but not all, Jewish people believed that a resurrection would take place at the end of the age. Jews, Christians, and pagans of the first century understood the Greek word *anastasis* to mean something like new physical life after a time of real physical death. According to New Testament scholar N. T. Wright, “All of them were speaking of a new life *after* ‘life after death’ in the popular sense, a fresh living embodiment *following* a period of death-as-a-state.” The word *resurrection* as used by followers of Jesus didn’t mean metaphorical life after death but physical life on the earth, what Wright describes as “life *after* ‘life after death.’”¹

Jesus had told his disciples that he would be killed and on the third day he would rise, but none of them had the imagination to expect what happened on that first Easter Sunday. To understand how Jesus and the apostles viewed resurrection, we start in the Old Testament.

We don’t find many detailed descriptions of resurrection in the Old Testament, like we see in Paul’s letters, but we do find whispers of resurrection in some places. Here are a few of those hints:

“Many who have been long dead and buried will wake up, some to eternal life, others to eternal shame.

“Men and women who have lived wisely and well will shine brilliantly, like the cloudless, star-strewn night skies. And those who put others on the right path to life will glow like stars forever.”

DANIEL 12:2-3

But friends, your dead will live,
 your corpses will get to their feet.
 All you dead and buried,
 wake up! Sing!
 Your dew is morning dew
 catching the first rays of sun,
 The earth bursting with life,
 giving birth to the dead.

ISAIAH 26:19

“Therefore, prophesy. Tell them, ‘**GOD**, the Master, says: I’ll dig up your graves and bring you out alive—O my people! Then I’ll take you straight to the land of Israel. When I dig up graves and bring you out as my people, you’ll realize that I am **GOD**. I’ll breathe my life into you and you’ll live. Then I’ll lead you straight back to your land and you’ll realize that I am **GOD**. I’ve said it and I’ll do it. **GOD**’s Decree.’”

EZEKIEL 37:12-14

It was upon this Old Testament foundation that Jesus came to join us in new life through his resurrection. Most Christians worship corporately on Sunday, the first day of the week, because Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday. In that sense, every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection, but the season of Easter focuses our attention on the celebration of Jesus’ resurrection for seven weeks. During Lent we fast, but during Easter we feast. Christ is risen and death has been conquered! We celebrate because the Kingdom has come and God’s new-creation project is off and running!

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Before we move on to look at an important resurrection passage in the Old Testament, reflect on the following questions.

1. What kind of Easter traditions did you celebrate when you were a child?

2. What are your thoughts about the Easter Bunny? Are you pro-Bunny? Anti-Bunny? Indifferent?

3. What is your go-to Easter candy?

The Word

Job falls within the Wisdom Literature section of the Old Testament, right before Psalms. The world created by the wise sayings of King Solomon in Proverbs operates under these steady principles: *Do good, live well, and you will experience good things.* Proverbs also warns us that, by contrast, if we choose the way of foolishness, evil, and laziness, life will not turn out so well. For example, “The wisdom of the wise keeps life on track; / the foolishness of fools lands them in the ditch” (Proverbs 14:8).

I appreciate the story of Job because it’s a Spirit-inspired counterbalance to the voice we hear in Proverbs. While the wisdom of Proverbs is true in a general sense, Job comes along and says, “Hold on a second!”

Job *lived well* and *did good* but landed in a ditch of despair and suffering. Job “was honest inside and out, a man of his word, who was totally devoted to God and hated evil with a passion” (Job 1:1). He lived according to the exhortations of Proverbs, but he did not experience the fruitful results Proverbs promises.

Job lost his home, his health, and his heritage—that is, his children. His only remaining family member mentioned in the Scriptures is Job’s angry and grieving wife, who questioned him, saying, “Still holding on to your precious integrity, are you? Curse God and be done with it!” (Job 2:9). Job’s friends showed up, trying to convince him that he must have done something wrong. They were supposed to be his faithful friends, and instead they became his adversarial accusers.

Three of Job’s so-called friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—came to visit. They each questioned Job’s integrity in their own way, and at every turn, Job defended his innocence. Job called them “miserable comforters” and asked, “Is there no end to your windbag speeches? / What’s your problem that you go on and on like this?” (Job 16:2-3). When Bildad made his case that those who revel in wickedness are punished with calamity (Job 18:5-21), Job responded with the hope he had, a hope that forecasted the promised resurrection, a promise we still cling to as followers of Jesus (Job 19:25-27).

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“My relatives and friends have all left;
houseguests forget I ever existed.
The servant girls treat me like a deadbeat off the street,
look at me like they’ve never seen me before.”

JOB 19:14-15

Not only did Job lose his children, but he also felt the absence of family and *real* friends. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar brought him no comfort. Former guests in Job’s home ignored him. Even those who had served in Job’s household treated him with contempt.

“I call my attendant and he ignores me,
ignores me even though I plead with him.
My wife can’t stand to be around me anymore.
I’m repulsive to my family.”

JOB 19:16-17

Job even reached out to his attendant, the house servant who would have been closest to him, but heard nothing back. Job’s wife survived the calamity that took their children, but she, too, brought Job no relief. She couldn’t stand to even be in his presence. In another translation, Job laments, “My breath is repulsive to my wife” (Job 19:17, NLT).

“Even street urchins despise me;
when I come out, they taunt and jeer.
Everyone I’ve ever been close to abhors me;
my dearest loved ones reject me.”

JOB 19:18-19

The term *street urchins* refers to homeless children and youth who survive by picking pockets and committing other acts of thievery. Such children are seen in Charles Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist*. In nineteenth-century British culture, these troublesome homeless children were despised by many people. Yet when they appear in the book of Job, even they despise Job when he is out on the streets. Everyone had turned their backs on Job!

“I’m nothing but a bag of bones;
my life hangs by a thread.

“Oh, friends, dear friends, take pity on me.
God has come down hard on me!
Do you have to be hard on me, too?
Don’t you ever tire of abusing me?”

JOB 19:20-22

Despair had become Job’s only friend. He felt like a “bag of bones,” discarded with the morning’s trash. Job’s situation made him feel like God was against him. He certainly felt the contempt and accusations of his so-called friends. He felt that they, too, were against him. Not only had life been hard on him, but his friends, who he’d hoped would offer some relief, only showed up with abuse.

“If only my words were written in a book—
better yet, chiseled in stone!”

JOB 19:23-24

Job speaks with the heartbreakng voice of suffering, foreshadowing Jesus’ anguished words on Good Friday as he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (Matthew 27:46). Job wanted his words of anguish recorded because he felt like his life was coming to an end.

“Still, I know that God lives—the One who gives me back my life—
and eventually he’ll take his stand on earth.
And I’ll see him—even though I get skinned alive!—
see God myself, with my very own eyes.
Oh, how I long for that day!”

JOB 19:25-27

In his reply to Bildad, Job unknowingly moves us from Good Friday to Easter Sunday—from despair to hope. He doesn’t share our vantage point as readers of this story; what Job could not see was that it was not God who had taken away his family or inflicted terrible sores upon his skin. The hand that was hard against Job was that of Satan, the accuser, the enemy of God. Job assumed God had taken away his life but would one day give it back, when the truth of the matter is that Satan had taken away Job’s life but God had plans to restore it. We can take hope that what the devil has stolen God will return in the end.

Somehow, despite all he endured, Job believed he would see God with his own eyes. He trusted in God as the one who would give him back his life. He felt his own impending death but believed in a new, real, bodily life *after* life after death. The New Living Translation brings out the physical nature of Job’s hope: “After my body has decayed, / yet in my body I will see God!” (Job 19:26, NLT). In Jesus and through Jesus’ resurrection, Job’s hope would come to fruition.

With these words in mind, take a moment to reflect on the following questions.

4. What are the key differences between the world envisioned by the wisdom of Proverbs and the world seen through the suffering of Job?

5. Why do we have the tendency to blame God when things are not going our way?

6. As followers of Jesus, what are we to do in moments of suffering?

7. How does the promise of future embodied resurrection give suffering people hope today?

8. As you reflect on what God has done for you in the past, what are you most grateful for?

The Neighborhood

Sitting with the renewed hope that God will give us back our lives awakens in us a new dream for our neighborhoods. Who are the people society might write off as “street urchins”? Who are the people in your neighborhood who are overlooked or marginalized? Perhaps these people cause problems or create disturbances, or perhaps they are just ignored. Maybe they are children, teenagers, middle-aged divorcees, or lonely retirees. Can you see Jesus in them? Jesus taught us that whenever we show compassion to “someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). The people God puts in our neighborhoods are not just those we have friendly relationships with but also those who are overlooked and ignored.

9. How can you identify those without privilege who society has cast aside or who are marginalized from majority culture?

10. What can you do to help them yourself or connect them to local churches or organizations who can help them?

The Prayer

With your thoughts on your neighborhood, offer this prayer.

God of all compassion and grace, we thank you for joining us in new life. We thank you for the resurrection of Jesus, which undoes death and opens a door into a world you are making new. We pray for those in our neighborhoods who are overlooked. Help us see you in them. Help us extend the same grace you are extending to them. In the name of Jesus we humbly pray, amen.

