



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

What do you know about Jesus' ascension?



Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:



The ascension shows that Jesus' earthly work was complete – He had accomplished all that He needed to do. Now He could finally “sit down at His Father’s right hand.” It was the final demonstration of His victory. He returned to His heavenly glory and was lifted up by His Father with honour, receiving the “name above every name” - the reigning king over all powers in all ages.

Early Christians would have been familiar with the idea that when a Roman emperor died his ‘soul’ would go to heaven and he would become divine. But they knew that Jesus’ ascension fulfilled the glory of a divine King who rules in a completely different way. His ascension can strengthen us in at least three ways:

The ascension means that He is with us, wherever we are. The ascension meant that the Spirit of Jesus could now be available to everyone. He had told his disciples that it was good for him to go away, because only then would he send them another Helper, the Spirit of truth (John 16:7-16).

The ascension means that Jesus takes our humanity into God and prays for us. The resurrected Jesus was more human, not less, than he was before – human but without frailty and dying. This is a promise of genuine humanity. And we can be reassured of our eternal value by knowing that in His return to God, Jesus does not stop being human, but takes our humanity into God. Because humanity is in the heart of God, God now knows our weakness and struggles in His experience, and the ascended Christ can open the way for us to come as we are to God.

The ascension gives us the power to do the whole work of Jesus' through His gifts. Paul connects the ascension with the arrival of the gifts God gives each of us to carry out Jesus' work on earth. He quotes a Psalm which prophesies that "When he ascended on high...he gave gifts to his people." (Ephesians 4:7) Because none of us can individually carry out the full ministry of Jesus, various gifts are shared out to everyone, for example, teaching, pastoring, leading, sharing good news, and listening to God. Only when these gifts are all present in a church community can we "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12)

The ascension also gives us hope. Human beings seem wired for hope. Genuine hope is the only source of lasting peace. For disciples, the hope of the reuniting of heaven and earth is "an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf." (Hebrews 6:19) We are offered the promise as well that we are not alone but that we are "surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses". (Hebrews 12:1)

Genuine hope motivates us to care for the world, not use it for ourselves. Karl Marx wrote that the church used Christian religion like a drug to keep people passive in this world by making them focus on the next. But Jesus announces that God's healing kingdom has already arrived, and that our hope is not to 'go to heaven', but to see the world transformed in preparation for when that hope will be complete. So when someone asked Martin Luther what he would do if Jesus was returning tomorrow he replied, "I would plant a tree."

If this life is all there is, the temptation to use the world and others as much as we can, clinging to as much as we can, may be greater. But hope of resurrection prevents us both from being passive about looking after the world – because we are seeking God's coming kingdom on earth - and means gives us the best reason to avoid grabbing hold of it while we can. The greater our hope, the easier it becomes to not treat the world now as if it is all that there is.

Genuine hope is about living in the future promise today. In the light of the future, one way of viewing our purpose and calling in life today is to join in with God in making the present world look as much like it will be when heaven and earth are fully reunited. Because, for example, in God's future every tribe and nation will worship together, we seek that reality as much as possible today by resisting racism. When Jesus offered His disciples "eternal life" He was talking about the quality of resurrection life that begins today – before our physical death.

Vedran Smailovic is known as the 'Cellist of Sarajevo'. During the siege of Sarajevo he became famous for playing his cello, dressed in his full orchestral clothes, in bombed out buildings, often under threat of snipers. After a mortar bomb killed 22 people who were waiting for food in a market-place in Sarajevo, he caught the world's attention by going there and playing Albinoni's Adagio in G Minor for twenty two days, once for each victim. In the same way, among the ruins of the world, disciples are called to seek God's beautiful kingdom by replacing destruction with the music of hope - with signs that evil does not have the last word.

Discuss: How can you be a sign of God's hope in your everyday life?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Hebrews 4: 14-16 which describes the significance of Jesus' ascension.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of how Jesus' ascension strengthens you.



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

Almighty God,
whose blessed Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
ascended far above all heavens
that he might fill all things:
Mercifully give us faith to perceive that,
according to his promise,
he abides with his Church on earth,
even to the end of the ages;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God,
in glory everlasting.
Amen.





Why does Jesus' ascension make such a difference? What is genuine hope?



The ascension shows that Jesus' **earthly work was complete** – He had accomplished all that He needed to do. Now He could finally “sit down at His Father’s right hand.” It was the **final demonstration of His victory**. He returned to His heavenly glory and was lifted up by His Father with honour, receiving the “name above every name” - the reigning king over all powers in all ages.

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