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Adult Bible Study

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Luke 24:13-35

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Adult Lesson One for OGM Because Presence Matters

Luke 24:13-27

Focus Verse: “He came near and went with them” (vs.15).

Theme: On the Emmaus Road, Jesus models a ministry of presence. In this lesson, participants will consider the role presence plays in their own formation as disciples and in the work of CBF field personnel around the globe.

Background on the Text:

Luke is the only gospel writer to tell the full story of the Emmaus Road encounter between the two disciples and the resurrected Christ. The extended ending of the Gospel of Mark makes reference to such an event, in which Jesus appeared to “two of them, as they were walking in the country,” yet Mark’s account lacks any further detail (see Mark 16:12-13). The author of Luke, however, devotes 22 verses to this moving narrative, making it the longest resurrection account in Luke’s gospel, sandwiched between the women’s discovery of the empty tomb, and the commissioning of the 11 disciples.

The story opens with two disciples walking along the road that leads from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus, some seven or so miles outside of town. One of the two is named Cleopas, and the other is unnamed, though some scholars suspect it was Cleopas’ wife who journeyed with him. These two travelers are not from the original core of the 12 disciples, but rather a part of Jesus’ extended group of followers throughout Jerusalem.

¹NT Wright, in his commentary *Luke for Everyone*, suggests the disciples were not merely discussing, but “arguing with each other” as they walked.



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Background on the Text: (continued)

We are not told why Cleopas and his companion are on the Emmaus Road. Perhaps they are returning home after Passover; or maybe they have business in the village. Maybe they simply needed to get out of the city and walk — putting one foot in front of the other, mile-after-mile, in order to make sense of what they have experienced. It has been three days since Jesus' trial and crucifixion, and they had just received news from the women visiting the tomb that Jesus' body is nowhere to be found. We can imagine these disciples were in shock, filled with bewilderment and grief as they journeyed. The text tells us they “were talking with each other about all of these things” (vs.14), and perhaps they were even arguing about the meaning of these events.

Jesus wades into their sea of emotions when he joins them on the road. The text says that “Jesus draws near and walks with them” (vs.15). It is a simple verse that suggests Jesus' intention in this encounter: to walk alongside these travelers in their grief. His first act of post-resurrection ministry is not to console or explain, but simply to be present. He meets them where they are, both literally and metaphorically. The irony is that they do not know who he is. While the disciples are speaking about Jesus, when he arrives, they are kept from recognizing him.

This is not the first time in Scripture that a divine stranger shows up whose identity is concealed to those around them. Think of Genesis 18, when Abraham and Sarah are visited by three strangers who share the news that Sarah, in her old age, will have a son. It is only later that they realized they had “entertained agents unaware” (Heb 13:2).



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Background on the Text: (continued)

When Jesus begins to speak, the disciples' emotions are written on their faces: "They stood still, looking sad" (vs. 17). While they can't see Jesus clearly for who he is, he can see them. He is present with their pain and invites them into conversation to share their story. Cleopas asks incredulously, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who doesn't know what's happened?" (vs. 18). Then Cleopas recounts the events of the previous days, eventually getting to the heart of their confusion: "We had hoped he would be the one to redeem Israel... and yet the women went to the tomb early this morning and didn't find his body. They came to us saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who told them he is alive" (vs. 23).

Only then does Jesus share with them his own story. He enters into their doubt and offers them a different interpretation of the events that have left them hopeless and lost. Starting with Moses, Jesus traces the story of salvation, through the prophets to the present day. He explains to them, "It was necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory" (vs. 26). For that is what is happening right in front of their eyes: Jesus, the resurrected Christ, has entered into his glory. Perhaps this is why they cannot see him clearly — Jesus has been transformed. And without knowing it, they are being transformed, too.



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Reflection:

Growing up in a fairly charismatic congregation, I had the experience that occasionally people there would be given “a Word from the Lord.” Maybe you are familiar with this term. A Word from the Lord is a word of encouragement or truth given from one Christian to another. Often it comes in the form of a verse from Scripture, a nugget of wisdom, or a vision that has arisen during prayer. I still remember the Word from the Lord I received before my wedding, a vision of the foundation of a house being built up with brick. It came from a dear friend and colleague who had been in prayer for me regularly. God had set this vision on his mind to share with me. It was a gift, both from my friend and from beyond my friend—from the very heart of God.

The story of the Emmaus Road encounter is a story of receiving Word from the Lord. The disciples are gifted with a word of encouragement and hope, straight from the heart of God. Like any meaningful “Word from the Lord,” a crucial part of its power is the person offering it. Jesus’ presence with the disciples along the road enables him to speak truth and beauty into their lives. It was his presence, at a difficult moment in their journey, that allowed him to minister to the disciples and help them see how God’s story was unfolding around them.

We are often attracted to avenues of service and ministry in which we can see quick tangible results. Yet Jesus models a ministry of presence in which our care for others begins with relationship. CBF field personnel follow Jesus’ example by walking alongside fellow travelers in 19 countries around the world. They meet people where they are, enter into dialogue and develop mutually transformative relationships. CBF’s commitment to long-term presence is what allows CBF field personnel to cultivate beloved community, bear witness to the presence of Jesus, and seek transformational development in the places they serve. Presence enables them to offer encouragement and hope when it is most needed, to offer a “Word from the Lord” as they journey together, and discover anew how God’s story is unfolding around them.

² Other examples can be found Judges 6 and Judges 13. See more in Alan Culpepper’s “The Gospel of Luke” in the New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary (pg. 475-6).



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Conversation Starters:

Choose one of the following activities as a conversation starter, to help your group begin to think about the themes of today's lesson.

- Faith List - Ask participants to make a list of the people who have been most formative in their faith journey, from their childhood to the present. After giving ample time to compile their list of names, invite participants to share their lists with one another. Reflect together on those named: Why were these people included? What was their impact? Pay attention to participants' responses. Notice if they chose people who did something exceptional for them, or simply because their presence made an impact on their story.
- Presence - The word "presence" has become a spiritual buzz word recently. The idea of presence offers a sharp contrast to the culture of productivity and achievement in which we live. As a group, make a list of the words, ideas and images that come to mind when you hear the word "presence." Use a white board or a piece of parchment to write down the list, so everyone can look at it together. After three to five minutes for participants to add to the list, step back and reflect on it together. What surprises you? What is left out? What do our ideas of presence have to do with Jesus?
- Why We Walk - Discuss the following question as a group or in smaller groups: When was the last time you took a walk to solve a problem, or mull over a challenging situation or event? What happened as you walked? Did you come to clarity? Why do you think this is?



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Ideas for Exploring the Text:

Before you turn to the text, you may wish to share some of the insights from the “Background on the Text” section above with the group.

Look: Finding Parallels in the Story

Read Luke 24:13-27 together. If your group likes to engage the Bible with different voices, identify three volunteers and assign each one as a character: Jesus, Cleopas and the narrator. Read the story with the different voices representing the different parts. After reading the text, watch one of the following Impact Stories from CBF field personnel and discussing the questions below.

- Uganda Impact Story: Jacob and Esau. This is the story of twin brothers, Jacob and Esau, who fled the war in Sudan as refugees. In this brief clip, they share about finding Beloved Community through Refuge and Hope in Uganda. (Find the video of Jacob and Esau at www.cbf.net/presencematters.)
- Danville, Va., Impact Story: Bruce. In this brief video clip, Bruce shares his story of experiencing homelessness, and the relationships and support he received through Grace and Main Fellowship in Danville, Va. (Find the video(s) about Bruce at www.cbf.net/presencematters.)

Making the Connections: Questions for Conversation

1. What are parallels between the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus and the story in the video? What similar emotions, experiences or “characters” can you identify?
2. In both stories, we see how presence matters. Jesus’ presence with the disciples was a form of care for them in a moment of confusion and grief. The presence of CBF field personnel provides care and support for people around the globe who are hurting. Both stories, at their essence, are about the presence of Christ transforming the world. How was Jesus’ presence on the road to Emmaus different from the presence of Christ in the Impact Story?



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Listen: Meditating on Scripture

This story from Luke 24 is often used as a focus for meditation, especially for those who find themselves in difficult or confusing situations. The practice of Lectio Divina is an ancient practice for praying with and meditating on Scripture. You may wish to use Lectio Divina as a way to enter into the story with your group today. If so, identify three volunteers who are willing to read the text aloud. Assign them a role (Reader #1, Reader #2, Reader #3). There is brief instruction for you to offer before each reading, and a sacred pause after each reading that allows participants a moment for reflection and prayer. I encourage you to set a hold on the sacred pause for one minute, using your watch to keep track. (The length of a minute may surprise you!) Use the following as a guide:

Lectio Divina Reading for Luke 24:13-27

Open in Prayer (Lord, help us hear you anew through your word today.)

Instruction #1: Listen to the first reading from Luke 24. Let your heart be opened to the movement of the Spirit today.

Reader #1: Luke 24:13-27

Sacred Pause (one minute of silent reflection)

Instruction #2: Listen to the second reading from Luke 24. Notice what word or phrase stands out to you today.

Reader #2: Luke 24:13-27

Sacred Pause (one minute of silent reflection)

Instruction #3: Listen to the final reading from Luke 24. Consider what God may be saying to you through this story today.

Reader #3: Luke 24:13-27

Sacred Pause (one minute of silent reflection)

Closing Prayer (Lord, thank you for your word which is alive and which transforms our lives.)



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Making the Connections: Questions for Conversation

1. What word or phrase stood out to you in the text today? (You may want to prompt people to consider how God was using that word or phrase to speak to them today.)
2. Today's lesson is titled "Because Presence Matters." Why do you think this story from Luke 24 was chosen for the theme? What does it have to do with presence?
3. Jesus models a ministry of presence with the disciples. Rather than doing anything, he simply journeys alongside them in their moment of need. When is a time someone has walked with you through a season of pain, grief or confusion? What was the impact of their presence?
4. CBF field personnel follow Jesus' example of walking alongside fellow travelers in 19 countries around the world. They offer comfort, invite people into dialogue and relationship, and bear witness to the presence of Christ. Why do you think presence matters as the basis for their ministry and service?



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Conversation Closings:

Before closing in prayer, choose one of the following ways to wrap up your group's conversation with a call to action.

- Encouraging Others - Have the group break into groups of two or three for this activity. Once in the groups, ask participants to prayerfully consider who in their lives is in need of encouragement. How might they offer the ministry of presence to this person in the coming week?
- Encouraging CBF field personnel - Before class, choose one or two CBF field personnel for this activity. You may wish to choose field personnel to which your congregation already has a connection, or you can use any of the Because Presence Matters Videos (found at www.cbf.net/presencematters) to introduce a new ministry to your class. Use the remainder of your time to have your group write letters of encouragement to those you have selected. You can collect them at the end of the class, or you can have participants bring their finished letters back the following Sunday to be mailed.



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Adult Lesson Two for OGM

When Presence Leads to Transformation

Luke 24:28-35

Focus Verse: “Then the two disciples described what had happened along the road and how Jesus was made known to them as he broke the bread” (vs. 35).

Theme: The ministry of presence often leads to unexpected, exponential transformation. In this lesson, participants will consider how one individual’s story can impact an entire community.

Background on the Text:

The second portion of the Emmaus Road story is structured as a “recognition scene,” a classical literary device in which a character who was previously blind or ignorant is able to see or understand anew. As the disciples near Emmaus, Jesus pretends to go on ahead, not wishing to obligate them to provide hospitality. As one commentator notes, this action is a reminder that Jesus “never forces himself on others... [that] faith must always be a spontaneous, voluntary response.” After the disciples have “urged him strongly” (vs.29), Jesus commits to stay with them for the night. They enter the village just as the sun is setting, and the scene transitions to their meal around the table.



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Background on the Text: (continued)

The image of the disciples gathered around the table with Jesus has a familiar quality to it. We are reminded of the other meals Jesus shared with his followers, particularly those in which the guest becomes the host. We hear the four verbs associated with Jesus' blessing of the table: take, bless, break and give (vs. 30). These four actions bring to mind the story of the feeding of the 5,000 and the Last Supper meal. Due to this use of liturgical language, some scholars have speculated as to whether or not the meal in Emmaus constitutes a celebration of the Eucharist. Alan Culpepper notes that the language alone does not designate this meal as the Eucharist, but it does suggest that any meal of hospitality has the potential to become a sacred moment. This is certainly true for the disciples here, as it is in this familiar gathering around the table that their "eyes were opened and they recognized him" (vs. 31). Not only is it a sacred moment, but a revelatory one. Yet, just as soon as they "see" anew, Jesus disappears from sight.

We can imagine this experience was both exhilarating and startling for Cleopas and his companion. It impacted them so intensely that they drop everything and retrace the seven-mile journey back to Jerusalem—in the dead of night! They are compelled to share what they have witnessed, and what they have come to now understand about God's story: Death is not the end and that what appeared to them at first to be the end, is actually the beginning. And that the women at the tomb were right—Jesus is alive!

The disciples' encounter with Jesus transformed both their sight and their lives. They return to Jerusalem to share what they have experienced with the 11 disciples gathered there. In doing so, Cleopas and his companion become the evangelists to the evangelists, the apostles to the apostles. Their small story takes on unexpected, exponential meaning, as the news of the resurrected Christ travels across Jerusalem, Judaea and to the very ends of the earth.

³ See more on this in Alan Culpepper's, "The Gospel of Luke" in the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary.

⁴ Alan Culpepper's, "The Gospel of Luke" in the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, 479.

⁵ See more on this in Alan Culpepper's, "The Gospel of Luke" in the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, 480



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Reflection:

Many of us have experienced sacred moments around a table. When I was in seminary, I lived in a small, rundown bungalow with two roommates. We had a big empty space along the far wall of our living room; so we bought a second-hand Ikea farm table to put there to fill the space. That scrappy table became the most important space in our house. It was around the table that we would sit with mugs of tea in the evening to process our day. It was around the table that we played cards, told jokes and hosted friends. The table saw the celebration of birthdays, new jobs and engagements. And it held the pain of stories of assault, police brutality and dreams lost. The table became sacred and transformative, as we learned one another's stories and walked together through beautiful and difficult moments.

Each time we gather around the table, there is the possibility of a sacred experience. It is around tables we learn from one another, that we give and receive hospitality, that we allow the line between guest and host to blur in the sharing of the bread and the sharing of our lives. Tables are places of intimacy and holy conversation—whether it's a communion table or an Ikea hand-me-down. It is no wonder that it was at a meal around a table that the disciples first recognized Jesus. Here, their hearts were most open, and their eyes soon open, too.

CBF field personnel gather around tables and build relationships with those in their communities, and these tables become sacred spaces of belonging, healing and change. The lines between host and guest are blurred as they learn from one another and see God's story unfold in one another's lives. Like the disciples, the impact of these moments reaches far beyond just themselves. The disciples return to Jerusalem to be a witness to the presence of Christ. CBF field personnel return to us with stories of Christ's presence at work in the lives of those they serve and the communities they inhabit.



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Conversation Starters:

Choose one of the following activities as a conversation starter to help your group begin to think about the themes of the lesson.

- **Table Memories** - Have participants break into pairs or smaller groups and discuss the following: Some of our most powerful memories are connected to meals or have occurred around the table. It could be a family table tradition from childhood, or a particularly delicious (or awful!) meal you enjoyed while traveling to a new place. Share one of your favorite memories of a meal, or table with the group. Use your five senses to see how much you can remember about the way the experience sounded, smelled, tasted, felt and looked.
- **Walking Blind** - You'll need plenty of space for the following activity. You may wish to move the group to a larger room or ask participants to scatter around the building. Direct participants to find a partner; then have each pair move to a different part of the room/hallway/wing. Have partners identify who will be the speaker and who will be the walker. The walker will be asked to close his or her eyes (blindfolds may be used if you have them available) and remain still. The speaker must give the walker instructions to help them move from one side of the room to the other without opening their eyes. The speaker is responsible for the safety of the walker, without any bumping into any walls or furniture. After three or four minutes, switch roles, asking the speaker to now be the walker and vice versa. After the exercise, spend a moment reflecting as a group. What was like to be "walking blind"? How did it feel? What did you need? What did you learn?



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Ideas for Exploring the Text:

Use the following as a guide for conversation and reflection. You may move through the sections in the order below, or mix and match as makes sense to you. There are multiple discussion questions listed for each portion, so do not feel you must ask and answer all questions. Instead, choose questions that you think will resonate with your group and deepen your conversation and learning.

Returning to Emmaus

Before reading Luke 24:28-38, you may wish to return to the theme of the previous week's lesson briefly. You can use the following questions as prompts or create your own:

- What do you remember about the disciples' encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus that was read last week?
- What do you remember about the "ministry of presence"? Did you receive or offer the ministry of presence this week? If so, how did it go?
- Read Luke 24: 25-27 (the conclusion of last week's section). If you hadn't heard this story before, what might you assume would happen next?



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Today's Story

Read Luke 24:28-35 aloud.

- Before you read today's text, ask participants to pay special attention to whether or not this story reminds them of any other Jesus story from the gospels. After reading the text, discuss what other stories come to mind. (There are many possibilities here, including the Last Supper and Feeding the 5,000, Jesus's interaction and invitation to Zacchaeus, or even the Mary and Martha scene.)
- There are four verbs used here that are a part of Jesus' table blessing formula: take, bless, break, give. We often hear these words in our own experience of communion. Discuss together your most memorable experience of the Lord's Supper. Then consider if you think this meal with Jesus and the disciples counts as "Communion"? Why or why not?
- The disciples leave Emmaus in the dead of night with a burning desire to share their news with the world. Ask your group the follow question and discuss your answers together: When did you have an experience that was so impactful that you dropped everything to share it with someone else, even if it was the middle of the night? What was the experience or news? Would you consider it a "revelation"? How do we share our experiences differently today because of social media and email?



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Considering Our Impact

Choose one of the following Impact Stories about CBF field personnel and those with whom they partner around the globe. Then explore some of the “Questions for Conversation” together.

- Macedonia Impact Story (www.cbf.net/presencematters) - Listen to the story of Gazmend Muhafemi and CBF field personnel Jeff and Alicia Lee as they work together on Aya Farms in order to cultivate transformational development in Macedonia.
- Lucien Impact Story (www.cbf.net/presencematters) - Listen to the story of Lucien Gede and CBF field personnel Jenny Jenkins as they work together to provide medical care in Magandou, Haiti.

Questions for Conversation

- What stood out to you in the Impact Story video? Did you notice any parallels between the disciples in Emmaus and the work of CBF field personnel?
- Last week we discussed the ministry of presence. The impact of ministry of presence may be slow and quiet, yet it often leads to unexpected and exponential results. How did one person’s “presence” in the video, change their entire community?
- CBF field personnel gather around tables with those they serve, building mutual relationships. Sometimes they are the “host” — offering collaboration and support. At other times they are the “guest” — receiving the hospitality of others and being transformed themselves by the witness of Christ in their community. How did you see this playing out in the video?
- Just as the disciples returned to Jerusalem to share their news of the resurrected Christ, CBF field personnel return to us with news of Christ’s presence around the globe. How are we impacted by their work and their witness?



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Conversation Closings:

Before closing in prayer, consider concluding with one of the options below.

- Breaking Bread - Ask participants to take out a piece of paper (or their iPhone!) and make a list of meals they have shared that felt sacred or even transformational. Then offer the following challenge: The word “communion,” in its original Greek, *koinonia*, has a double meaning. It at once draws to mind the eucharist meal (communion), and the fellowship of believers (community). The breaking of bread with others, whether at the Lord’s Supper, or a meal around the kitchen table, is an invitation to the sacred and holy. This week, invite a friend or neighbor to share a meal with you. As you break bread together, commit to being present. Look for the image of Christ in your friend or neighbor. Recognize the sacredness of the time together.
- Close with a meditation on the following quote from NT Wright’s commentary, *Luke for Everyone*: “[The Emmaus story] is both a wonderful, unique, spellbinding tale, and also a model for a great deal of what being a Christian is all about. The sad, slow dismay at the failure of human hopes; the turning to someone who might or might not help; the discovery that in scripture, all unexpected, there lay keys which might unlock the central mysteries and enable us to find the truth; the sudden realization of Jesus himself, present with us, warming our hearts with his truth, showing us himself as bread is broken. This describes the experience of innumerable Christians, and indeed goes quite a long way to explain what it is about Christianity that grasps us, and holds us in the face of so much that is wrong with the world, with the church, and with ourselves.”



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