

April 21

Lesson 8 (NIV)

CALLED TO BELIEVE THE RESURRECTION

DEVOTIONAL READING: [1 Corinthians](#)

[15:12-22](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Matthew](#)

[28:1-15](#)

MATTHEW 28:1-15

¹After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

²There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.

⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There

you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

¹¹While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.

¹²When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ ¹⁴If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” ¹⁵So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

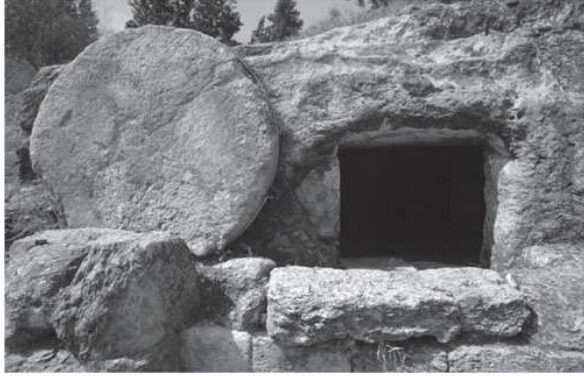


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KEY VERSE

Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”—**Matthew 28:10**

DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

Unit 2: Call to Ministry

LESSONS 5–9

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Retell Matthew’s record of the discovery of the empty tomb.
2. Compare and contrast the reactions of those who became aware that Jesus’ body was missing.
3. Prepare a testimony based on the truth of the resurrected Jesus.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

A. The Greatest Discovery

B. Lesson Context

I. Amazing Sight (MATTHEW 28:1–4)

A. Women’s Arrival (v. 1)

B. Angel’s Actions (vv. 2, 3)

C. Guards’ Alarm (v. 4)

II. Assuring Words (MATTHEW 28:5–7)

A. News to Hear (vv. 5, 6)

No Doubt About the Tomb

B. News to Tell (v. 7)

III. Astonishing Appearance (MATTHEW 28:8–10)

A. Moving Quickly (v. 8)

B. Meeting Jesus (vv. 9, 10)

IV. Arranged Cover-up (MATTHEW 28:11–15)

A. Guards’ Concern (v. 11)

B. Leaders’ Conspiracy (vv. 12–15)

Truth Has a Way of Getting Out

Conclusion

A. No “Fake News”

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Bethlehem	<i>Beth-lih-hem.</i>
Caesar	<i>See-zer.</i>
Corinthians	<i>Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in thin).</i>
Galilee	<i>Gal-uh-lee.</i>
Gethsemane	<i>Geth-sem-uh-nee (G as in get).</i>

Judas	<i>Joo-dus Iss-care-ee-ut.</i>
Isca-ri-ot	
Magdalene	<i>Mag-duh-leen or Mag-duh-lee-nee.</i>
Pharisees	<i>Fair-ih-seez.</i>
Pilate	<i>Pie-lut.</i>
Sadducees	<i>Sad-you-seez.</i>
Sanhedrin	<i>San-huh-drun or San-head-run.</i>

Introduction

A. The Greatest Discovery

An online search for the 10 most significant discoveries in history reveals many lists. Most include breakthroughs in the field of medicine—development of antibiotics such as penicillin, etc. Eventually, however, death comes to everyone ([Hebrews 9:27](#)). That is why the greatest discovery of all time happened on the day we celebrate as Easter Sunday.

The great discovery that was made by those who came to Jesus’ tomb after his crucifixion was the absence of something: Jesus’ body. Never before and not since that morning has the absence of something conveyed such a profound message. Today’s lesson introduces us to that message.

B. Lesson Context

The events in last week’s text from

Matthew occurred at a point when the Jewish religious leaders were plotting to arrest Jesus. But they did not want to create a public disturbance by doing so ([Matthew 26:3-5](#)). To their delight, the leaders found among Jesus’ disciples an ally for the scheme: Judas Iscariot ([26:14-16](#)).

After the Passover meal, Jesus led his disciples from the upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane. That was a place to which he had brought them often. Therefore the location was known to Judas, who guided those who arrested Jesus there ([Matthew 26:47](#); [John 18:1-3](#)). There followed the series of appearances before the Jewish ruling council (the Sanhedrin; see last week’s [Lesson Context](#)) and Pilate that resulted in Jesus’ crucifixion.

Of the four Gospel writers, only Matthew records the concern of the chief priests and Pharisees that Jesus’ disciples might attempt to steal his corpse. Their concern was based on being aware of the claim of “that deceiver” that he would rise from the dead. A missing body meant that a resurrection could be claimed. Therefore the chief priests and Pharisees recommended to Pilate that steps be taken to ensure against such a hoax ([Matthew 27:62-66](#)). Pilate agreed. The results of that effort are considered in today’s lesson.

All four Gospels record the actions of devoted women who returned to Jesus' tomb to honor him after his death. We say "returned" because they had been there when Jesus' body was interred ([Matthew 27:61](#); [Mark 15:47](#); [Luke 23:55](#)). Their intent was to finish the hurried job started by two others ([John 19:38–41](#)) in anointing his body with various preparations ([Mark 16:1](#); [Luke 23:55, 56](#); compare [2 Chronicles 16:14](#)).

I. Amazing Sight ([MATTHEW 28:1–4](#))

A. Women's Arrival (v. 1)

1. After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

After the Sabbath means that the Sabbath had passed (compare [Mark 16:1](#)). *The first day of the week* is what we call Sunday.

There are several women named Mary in the New Testament, and it's easy to get them mixed up. The designation *Magdalene* is not a last name, but indicates a village she comes from that is located on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (compare [Mark 16:9](#); [Luke 8:2](#)).

The other Mary is likely "the mother of James and Joseph" ([Matthew 27:56](#)). The parallel accounts designate "the mother of James" ([Mark 16:1](#) and [Luke 24:10](#)). If

we combine [Matthew 13:55](#); [27:56](#); and [Mark 15:40, 47](#), then this Mary may be the mother of Jesus, but this is not certain. For the women's intention in coming to *look at the tomb*, see the [Lesson Context](#).

What Do You Think?

What demonstrations of devotion to Jesus will you help newer believers adopt as their own?

Digging Deeper

Should personality characteristics play a role in your helping attempts? Why, or why not?

B. Angel's Actions (vv. 2, 3)

2. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

An *earthquake* occurred at the moment of Jesus' death ([Matthew 27:50, 51](#)); now one takes place as part of the unfolding drama here. Matthew is the only Gospel writer to record them. These are supernatural temblors, a sign of the activity and presence of God (compare [Isaiah 29:6](#)).

Angels have already appeared at crucial occasions during the life and ministry of Jesus: his birth ([Luke 2:8–14](#)), his temptation ([Matthew 4:11](#)), and at Gethsemane ([Luke 22:43](#)). The heavy *stone* that *an angel of the Lord* moves indicates that

the tomb has been carved out of a rocky hillside ([Matthew 27:57, 60](#)). Such stones seal the entrances to tombs.

3. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

Such a description as this is fitting for a being whom the previous verse says has come “down from heaven”! The brightness of both the angel’s *appearance* and *clothes* is reminiscent of how Jesus appeared at his transfiguration ([Matthew 17:1, 2](#)).

C. Guards’ Alarm (v. 4)

4. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The guards stationed at the tomb experience both the sight of an angel of the Lord and the sudden terror of the earthquake. They shake as much as the earth does! The overall shock of what they witness leaves them paralyzed with fear or unconscious. The phrase *became like dead men* does not mean they actually died, because some of them report the stunning series of events to the religious leaders in Jerusalem ([Matthew 28:11](#), below).

II. Assuring Words ([MATTHEW 28:5-7](#))

A. News to Hear (vv. 5, 6)

5. The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.”

This is not the only place in the Bible where those to whom an angel appears are encouraged to *not be afraid* (compare: [Genesis 21:17](#); [Luke 1:13, 30](#); [2:10](#)). Since angelic appearances are sudden and unexpected, this greeting is certainly appropriate.

We can note, however, that there was no message of “do not be afraid” to the guards of [Matthew 27:65, 66](#)); the angel’s intention for them is the opposite. By contrast, *the angel* carries out a ministry of comforting assurance to the bewildered women by affirming awareness of their mission to *Jesus, who was crucified* and buried.

[Luke 24:4](#) records the appearance of “two men in clothes that gleamed,” later described as “angels” ([24:23](#)). Matthew chooses to include only the angel who speaks to the women.

6a. “He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.”

This is the grand announcement. The reminder *as he said* refers to [Matthew 16:21](#); [17:22, 23](#); [20:17-19](#). The fact of Jesus’ resurrection fulfills the promise of a sign to the skeptics who demanded one (see [12:38-40](#)).

NO DOUBT ABOUT THE TOMB

Several years ago, I went with about a dozen friends on a guided tour of the Middle East. We visited the usual tourist sites, both secular and sacred. We saw Jewish sites such as the Wailing Wall. We visited Islam's Dome of the Rock, the golden-domed seventh-century edifice on the site of Solomon's temple.

I was more drawn to places that reminded me of Jesus' time among us. The olive groves of Gethsemane held special meaning for me, as did the area surrounding the Sea of Galilee. As significant as those places were to me, it was my reaction to the Garden Tomb that caught me by surprise.

I knew before seeing the tomb that is usually shown to tourists that it was likely not the one briefly occupied by Jesus' body. But seeing a place where his body conceivably could have lain triggered my imagination: my mind's eye pictured the moment when the Lord's followers first realized that he had risen.

We may not know into which tomb Jesus' body was placed, but the eyewitnesses did! As I stood in front of a tomb in Jerusalem, I was moved by the knowledge that the angel's words were and are true. If you're not convinced, what evidence would you have to have to change your mind?

—C. R. B.

6b. "Come and see the place where he lay.

The women had seen a dead body lain in this rock-hewn grave ([Matthew 27:60, 61](#)). Now they are invited to witness the absence of that body. Can we really understand how dumbfounded the women must be as they hear the angel speak? Jesus was dead, but now he is not. The women's quest for a dead Jesus has become pointless.

What Do You Think?

How can you better prepare yourself to offer evidence for the fact that Christ rose from the dead? Why is it important to do so?

Digging Deeper

Watch an online video by J. Warner Wallace to learn how a homicide detective approaches these questions. Compare and contrast your approach with his.

B. News to Tell (v. 7)

7a. "Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead'

The "come and see" of the previous verse gives way to the *go ... and tell* we see here. The women had arrived as seekers ([Matthew 28:1-5](#), above). They then transitioned from seekers to finders ([28:6](#), above)—but finding something better than expected. Now they must make the

transition from finders to tellers. When it comes to knowledge of Jesus, there's no such thing as God's being content with those who never progress out of the seeker stage.

Time will tell whether the disciples will believe the women's testimony. According to the Jewish historian Josephus (AD 37–100), women of that time are not allowed to testify in court (*Antiquities*, 4.8.15). The affirmation by angels of the women's role thus flies in the face of a first-century practice. The first witnesses to the evidence of Jesus' resurrection are indeed women.

While the women seek the tomb as soon as enough daylight allows, the 11 disciples are still cowering in fear behind locked doors. They fear retribution at the hands of the same men who crucified Jesus (*John* 20:19).

7b. “and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

These phrases repeat and reinforce Jesus' promise in *Matthew* 26:32 and *Mark* 14:28 that he is to go before the disciples *into Galilee*.

III. Astonishing Appearance (*MATTHEW* 28:8–10)

A. Moving Quickly (v. 8)

8. So the women hurried away

from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Both the fear and the joy of the women are easy to imagine. It is no wonder that they run to tell the disciples (also *John* 20:2). *Mark* 16:8 puts this in even stronger terms: “The women went out and fled from the tomb.” Such a mixture of emotions is only fitting for the astounding news the women now bear.

What Do You Think?

Who among your acquaintances is ready to hear the message that Jesus is risen? What will cause them to be receptive?

Digging Deeper

How do you know when a slower, more measured approach in sharing this message is better than a faster, more exuberant approach?

B. Meeting Jesus (vv. 9, 10)

9. Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.

The women's surprises are not finished. Before they can complete the task of telling Jesus' disciples, they meet Jesus himself. We are told nothing about Jesus' appearance, but we can see that the women recognize him. Their worshipful response is understandable.

To clasp Jesus' *feet* means that the

women are on their knees. As speculation, perhaps they are trying to convince themselves that they are not hallucinating. Can this be the same Jesus whom they had known and worshipped prior to his death? Yes, he is the same Jesus: once crucified, now alive.

An ironic touch lies in Jesus' first word, *Greetings*. The Greek word behind this translation is the same word translated "hail" of the soldiers' mocking worship ([Matthew 27:29](#)) and the "greetings" of Judas betraying Jesus before that ([26:49](#)).

10. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Jesus' words of comfort and instruction mirror those of the angel. A distinction is noted in Jesus' referring to the disciples as *my brothers*. This indicates the special closeness that still exists despite their recent desertion (compare [Matthew 26:56](#); [John 20:17](#)).

Naturally, these men plan to return home to Galilee anyway. But now there is incentive for speed: the promise of seeing Jesus back there. Even so, the trip back to Galilee does not begin for several days ([John 20:26](#)).

IV. Arranged Cover-up ([MATTHEW 28:11-15](#))

A. Guards' Concern (v. 11)

11. While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.

Only Matthew records the report of the soldiers who were charged with guarding the tomb to keep the body in it ([Matthew 27:66](#)). They have failed. It may seem odd that the Roman guards do not report to Pilate, the Roman governor. But there are two reasons for reporting to *the chief priests* instead. First, the religious authorities were the ones given the authority by Pilate to post the guard and seal the tomb. The second is seen in verse 14, below.



Visual for Lesson 8. When you reach [Matthew 28:7a](#), start a discussion by asking, "In what ways is the angel's command ours too? In what ways is it not?"

B. Leaders' Conspiracy (vv. 12-15)

12, 13. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a

plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’

This is a meeting of the Jewish ruling council (compare [Matthew 27:1](#)). *The chief priests* are Sadducees, while *the elders* are Pharisees. Their successful plot to kill Jesus has not ended their “problem.” Now another problem has developed. As with Judas Iscariot ([Matthew 26:15](#)), they use money as the “solution.” As with previous miracles of Jesus, the religious leaders cannot deny that something supernatural has occurred. So they resort to a paid-for lie to calm the aftershocks of the resurrection earthquake.

14. “If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.”

The first reason the soldiers report back to the council instead of Pilate is noted in verse 11, above. The verse before us gives us the second reason. Guards who fall asleep on duty or otherwise fail in their task are subject to execution (compare [Acts 12:1-19](#)). But the religious leaders assure the soldiers no negative consequences will befall them. Should Pilate hear of what has occurred, the leaders promise that they can and will protect the soldiers from suffering consequences. The religious leaders’ confi-

dence that they can do so reflects the high degree of influence they have. Their influence was previously seen in successfully pressuring Pilate to crucify Jesus ([John 19:12-16](#)).

15a. So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed.

No voice of protest is recorded; the guards simply accept the payoff and do as told. Money now has been used to purchase both the betrayal of Jesus for his death ([Matthew 26:15](#)) and a lie about Jesus regarding his resurrection.

15b. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

Matthew’s Gospel is generally considered to be the earliest of the four Gospels. Scholars date its writing to about AD 50 (or perhaps even earlier). Thus the phrase *to this very day* indicates that the lie has been circulating for some 20 years as Matthew writes.

This lie, *this story*, falls apart immediately when we consider the eventual martyrdoms of the apostles. People are known to be willing to die the deaths of martyrs for two things: (1) for truth and (2) for a lie believed to be true. But people are not willing to die for a lie that they know is a lie. But that doesn’t stop twenty-first century skeptics from creating other theories to explain away the account of Jesus’ resurrection.

What Do You Think?

How should responses to common misunderstandings of the gospel message differ from responses to biased misrepresentations?

Digging Deeper

Distinguish between situations that call for no response (example: [Mark 14:60, 61a](#)) vs. an explanatory response (example: [John 4:19-26](#)) vs. a pushback response (example: [Mark 12:18-27](#)).

TRUTH HAS A WAY OF GETTING OUT

Richard Nixon was the first president to resign from office. But many observers believe others should have done so as well. Innumerable politicians have seen their proverbial “skeletons in their closets” dangled in public view. Still those individuals persist in secretive underhanded dealings and liaisons.

The Old Testament prophets often called Israel’s leaders to task for their sins. One of the most memorable of these rebukes is Nathan’s confrontation with David for the king’s involvement with Bathsheba and subsequent attempt at a cover-up via murder of her husband ([2 Samuel 12:1-14](#)).

The Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day failed to learn from history. Their conspiratorial cover-up was rooted in their vested

interests as noted in [John 11:48](#): “If we let [Jesus] go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.”

In the end, the efforts at killing Jesus and covering up his resurrection did not negate the threat of [John 11:48](#). In AD 70, the Romans did indeed come. The ensuing siege and destruction of Jerusalem marked the end of “temple and ... nation” of the Jewish leadership. The ruling council’s attempt to solve its problem by using falsehood in various ways (see [Matthew 26:59](#); compare [Acts 6:13](#)) ultimately failed. Today, the truth is available for all to see.

The church’s explosive early growth suggests the liars ultimately end up fooling mainly themselves. Learn from the ruling council’s sinful errors! Truth still has a way of getting out. Stay alert for your chance to reveal the grace and truth of Jesus (see [John 1:14, 17](#)) to those who are under the spell of the world’s lies.

—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

Regarding the explanatory response in the previous question, how will you avoid shifting from “defending the faith” to being “defensive about the faith”?

Digging Deeper

How do passages such as [Daniel 3](#);

Acts 24–26; 1 Corinthians 9:1–23; and 2 Corinthians 10–12 inform your answer?

Conclusion

A. No “Fake News”

The phrase “fake news” became a part of the vocabulary during the 2016 American presidential campaign. Certain news outlets were accused of creating stories that had no basis in fact in order to further an agenda. Christians may similarly be accused of propagating “fake news” regarding the resurrection of Jesus. The idea is that Christians accept on faith something that cannot be proven to be an actual event of history.

But the resurrection can be proven true, as this lesson has demonstrated. Yet getting people to see the truth can be a slow process. This calls for prayer and patience. Even Jesus’ own disciples were not convinced at first. When the women reported to the disciples what they had found and not found at Jesus’ tomb, “They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense” (Luke 24:11). The apostle Thomas (in) famously declared, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25).

Why would men who were slow to believe news of a resurrection end up trying to make it appear as though one had happened if it had not? No one, neither the women nor the disciples, was anticipating that Jesus would arise. They were not spending the days following his death planning how they could perpetrate a hoax on the public.

Paul’s declaration in 1 Corinthians 15:20 is the one that followers of Jesus gladly embrace and proclaim: “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Fake news—no; actual news—absolutely!

B. Prayer

Father, how thankful we are that on this Easter Sunday and every day we can celebrate the triumph of Jesus over death. Use us to change hearts and minds with this good news of a risen Savior. We pray this in his name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

We serve a risen Savior!

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible](#)
Student

Into the Lesson

Begin a “create-a-story” activity by saying, “It seems too good to be true! I just got a message that when I go home today I will find ...” Ask class members to add to the story. Keep going, expecting the unbelievable story to become more and more outrageous!

Alternative Distribute copies of the “Gone Phishing” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students read examples of e-mails designed to steal personal information. Have them point out reasons why they would be too good to be true and how they would react.

After either activity say, “In a world that often seems cruel and pointless, really good news might seem too good to be true! Let’s see how those witnessing the events of Jesus’ resurrection reacted.”

Into the Word

Divide students into three groups. Assign each group one of these Scripture passages: [Matthew 28:1-5](#); [Matthew 28:6-10](#); [Matthew 28:11-15](#).

After reading their passage, group

members should summarize it by writing two or three headlines in supermarket-tabloid style. *For example:* Graveyard Fright!—Women Report Divine Encounter / Spiritual Experience or Too Much Spirits?—Guards Struggle to Explain Why They Were Found Unconscious / Dead Man Walking!—Crucified Prophet Reported Meeting with His Followers / Military Cover-up!—Guards Reportedly Bribed to Give False Testimony.

Option. If time allows, you may wish to assign groups to write a paragraph or two summarizing the content of their assigned Scripture passage in the tabloid style. Point out that tabloids tend to exaggerate and sensationalize reports to attract readers.

After groups finish, allow them to share and explain their headlines to the class.

Allow for discussion and then say, “The account of the resurrection may sound like a tabloid tale, but it was established by eyewitnesses, became the message of the church, and has changed lives over centuries. Let’s examine our personal reactions to this incredible—but credibly true—Easter message.”

Into Life

Divide the class into pairs. Have each person prepare an “elevator speech,” a

talk of 30 seconds, which is the time it takes an elevator to move one floor. The talk is to begin this way: "I once thought the idea of a resurrected Savior was too good to be true. But that truth has changed my life this way ..." Ask members of pairs to practice their talks with each other.

Examples:

- Having new friends due to church fellowship has made it easier to cut ties with old friends that were negative influences.

- Trusting Jesus for daily needs has helped conquer financial issues.

- Daily prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit has resulted in the strength to conquer bad habits and even addictions.

In any of these cases, expect class member to point out that his or her human strength alone was unable to make a difference. If learners do not do so, stress that relying on the power of God, as displayed in the resurrection, is what makes these life changes possible. Request volunteers to share their speeches with the class.

Alternative: Distribute copies of the "Reassemble!" activity from the reproducible page to complete as indicated. Briefly discuss the quote by asking, "Can you name one or two of God's promises that might seem too good to be true?" Follow responses by asking why we can

believe them. This can be done just before prayer or as a take-home activity.