

*The Lazarus Life: My Journey of Transformation*

*A Study Guide for Small Groups*

*by Stephen W. Smith*

**Chapter One**

**I AM LAZARUS:**

*Finding Ourselves in the Story*

**Key Concepts**

- We are all soul-sick and in need of transformation.
- Transformation does not come from earning love. It comes from being loved.
- Only Jesus offers us the life we long for.
- The story of Lazarus is the story of the Christian life.

**Individual or Group Questions**

1. Look at Giotto's painting on the fold-out attached to the front cover of *The Lazarus Life*. Throughout church history, artists have painted scenes from Lazarus' story. In your opinion, why would painters feel compelled to illustrate this story?
2. Of all the supporting characters in the Lazarus story and painting, whom do you identify with the most? Why? Choose from Mary; Martha; Thomas; the disciples; the Jews who believed in Jesus after the Lazarus miracle; the Jews who did not believe
3. When we first encounter Lazarus he is dead: wrapped in graveclothes, stuck in a dark tomb, and smelling decayed. He's rigid and incapable of breathing. This

*Based on **The Lazarus Life: Spiritual Transformation for Ordinary People** by Stephen W. Smith. Permission is granted to duplicate this study guide for the purpose of study. David C Cook is publishing the complete workbook: **The Lazarus Life: My Spiritual Transformation** in December 2008 and will be available then.*

- description could also represent a person's soul-sickness. Does any part of your soul feel sick? If so, how would you describe this feeling?
4. On page 19, the author of *The Lazarus Life* describes how it feels not to be transformed. Why do you think we resist spiritual transformation?
  5. Are you thirsting for something more in life? If so, describe it as best you can.
  6. What areas of your life need transformation? List and briefly describe them. Most people harbor multiple needs for transformation, so please don't feel discouraged about listing several areas.
  7. What hope does the Lazarus story offer to you and your circumstances?

## Chapter Two

### THE LINGERING JESUS:

#### *Waiting for His Presence*

#### Key Concepts

- One of the mysteries of the spiritual life is that sometimes Jesus doesn't come when we need him most.
- Waiting for Jesus to arrive is part of the transformation process.
- Transformation involves working through our disappointments and disillusionments in life.
- We have hope in our transformation when we realize that we see today, and God sees eternity.

#### Individual or Group Questions

1. Jesus chose not to heal Lazarus from a distance. What might have motivated this choice?
2. Place yourself in the Lazarus story. How would you have felt when Jesus stayed away for two days and didn't arrive in time to heal his beloved friend?
3. In the past, how has God not performed as you expected? How did you feel? What did you learn?
4. Is Christ "at a distance" and/or lingering in your life now? If so, describe the circumstances.
5. How could you practice "active waiting" for changes in your life? Be specific about what you could do, or not do. *Consult page 37 in The Lazarus Life for a definition of active waiting*

6. The author says to be transformed, we can practice the discipline of disillusionment. What is this discipline? *See page 45 for the author's description of disciplined disillusionment.*
7. What illusions have you believed about life? (For example, “The Christian life should be easier than my life is right now.” Or, “I thought marriage would fill the emptiness inside of me.”) List and briefly describe these illusions as honestly as possible. Then consider how each illusion could be based on a false reality. If you’re in a group, write a compiled list of illusions on an easel pad and choose two or three to discuss.
8. How can you cultivate hope as you journey through the transformation process?

## Chapter Three

### TRAPPED IN THE TOMB:

#### *When Life Comes to a Dead End*

#### Key Concepts

- The tombs of our lives—the dark places of failure and pain—are where transformation begins.
- People often fail to recognize the reality of tombs.
- Entering our own tombs helps us face our need for God.
- God uses the tombs of our lives to reveal His true identity.

#### Individual or Group Questions

1. The author describes how the missionary Amy Carmichael wrote the book, *Things as They Are*, exposing the difficulties of missionary work. In contrast, why might Christians feel reluctant to truthfully describe their lives? *For Amy's story, see page 52.*
2. What are the varying viewpoints that Christians express about suffering? What could be the outcome for each of these attitudes?
3. On page 57 the author writes: "The beginning work of transformation does not begin with us. It begins with God." How do you feel about these statements? What questions do these statements raise for you?
4. According to the author, what is spiritual paradox? *See pages 59-60 for the discussion of spiritual paradox.*
5. What is one spiritual paradox in your life right now? (For example, "I'm fulfilling God's purpose for my life, but the amount of work discourages me." Or, "I'm

- suffering from a chronic illness, but it draws me closer to my spouse.”) How does this paradox affect you and/or your relationships?
6. Think of a “tomb” in your life. As God transforms you, how could it become a spiritual asset? *Consult page 63 for the author’s insight to tombs as spiritual assets*
  7. Do you feel the presence of Jesus when you’re in life’s darkness? If not, how could you begin to recognize his presence?
  8. The author concludes Chapter Three with these encouraging words: “The truth is, you do not belong in the tomb. Every tomb of life is too small for you.” Why are tombs too small for Christ’s followers? Specifically, why is your tomb too small for you?

## Chapter Four

### THE VOICE OF LOVE:

#### *Hearing Your Savior Call You by Name*

#### Key Concepts

- In the story of Lazarus, we learn three of the most important words of the spiritual life.
- Our lives change when we realize God loves us as individuals more than he loves the entire world.
- Only love transforms.

#### Individual or Group Questions

1. In the story of Lazarus, how did Jesus express his love for individuals? *To answer this question, you might want to review John 11:1-46.*
2. Do you truly believe that God deeply and uniquely loves you? Why, or why not?
3. Imagine Jesus spotting you in the midst of a crowd. He motions with his hand for you to walk in private with Him. As you walk toward Jesus, what does he say to you? Why does he say this?
4. What barriers, real or imagined, might you need to dismantle to experience God's love?
5. How could you cultivate hearing God's voice of love?
6. If you acquired a deeper sense of God's love, how might this transform you and your life?

## Chapter Five

### THE STENCH OF TRANSFORMATION:

#### *The Messy Realities of Spiritual Change*

#### Key Concepts

- Sometimes, transformation stinks.
- Many people don't know this and so they knowingly or unknowingly reject the person in the midst of transformation.
- True transformation happens when we expose the stench of our sins and shames to God.
- Even when others turn away, Jesus stays with us.

#### Individual or Group Questions

1. In the story of Lazarus, how did Martha want change to progress a certain way?  
Consider how she acted before and after Jesus arrived. In each instance, what did Jesus do instead?
2. Think about the personal tomb you described earlier in Chapter Three, Question #6. Or choose another difficulty that entombs you. Imagine the circumstances when Jesus calls you to emerge from this tomb. Ideally, how would you like this to happen?
3. If you emerge from your tomb with a stench, what do you fear about the circumstances? Where would you be? Who would know? What might occur?
4. Now dig deeper. What do you fear the tomb's stench might reveal about you?
5. The author uncovers this uncomfortable fact on page 100: "Something deeper than is visible to the eye is causing us to fall into the same habits again and



again.” At this point, do you understand what core needs cause you to repeat sins and habits, keeping yourself sealed in a tomb? Explain your answer.

6. As you emerge from your tomb, how could you prepare yourself for the possible rejection from some people?
7. We all need a “safe place” to emerge from our tombs. For you, what would characterize this safe place? Where could you find it, or create it for yourself?

## Chapter Six

### STEPPING TOWARD LIFE:

#### *Choosing to Stumble Out of Darkness*

#### Key Concepts

- Transformation is a step-by-step journey.
- Sometimes stepping into light is unsettling because it is new.
- Transformation is more about ordinary stumbling than dramatic moments.
- The most important thing is to be moving toward Jesus.

#### Individual or Group Questions

1. After Lazarus emerged from the tomb, graveclothes still bound him. Does this fact surprise you? Why, or why not?
2. When Jesus calls us from our tombs, why would he leave us bound in our “graveclothes” when we enter the daylight?
3. Why do you think spiritual growth and transformation is a slow process?
4. Writers have compared spiritual growth and transformation to a journey, stages of faith, the rooms of an interior castle, or a series of adventures. For you, what comparison describes this lifelong transformation? Why? Refer to the journey, stages, castle, or adventure comparison, or create one of your own
5. How would you describe your spiritual journey so far? Moving forward; feeling stuck; retreating to the tomb? Explain your response.
6. What might tempt you to return to your familiar, habitual tomb? How can you deal with this temptation so you keep moving toward Jesus?

7. What help do you need to grow more God-aware and self-aware? In your answer, include the people, resources, and spiritual disciplines that could support you.

## Chapter Seven

### NAMING THE GRAVECLOTHES:

#### *Recognizing the Things That Bind You*

#### Key Concepts

- When we emerge from the tomb, we still wear the outer reality of what is left to be transformed.
- Naming what is holding us back from Jesus will help us take steps toward him.
- Many Christians struggle with self-rejection, fear, guilt, blame and shame, and disappointment. Only God can help us lighten the load of those graveclothes.

#### Individual or Group Questions

1. After reading the author's discussion on pages 134-136, how would you describe the effects of still wearing your spiritual graveclothes? More specifically, how do these graveclothes restrict you and your daily life?
2. Have you personally encountered any of the five common graveclothes?  
Specifically describe how each gravecloth has bound you.
  - Self-rejection
  - Fear
  - Guilt
  - Blame and Shame
  - Disappointment
3. Can you name other spiritual graveclothes that bind you? List and briefly describe them.

4. How could both you and God participate in lightening your graveclothes? For each cloth, describe a) what you could do and b) what you hope God will do.

## Chapter Eight

### REMOVING THE GRAVECLOTHES:

#### *Embracing the Help of a Loving Community*

#### Key Concepts

- We need others to help us in the process of transformation.
- We cannot expect community to give what only Jesus can give.
- Yet Jesus did not do what community is created to do.
- A transformational community is a resurrected community.

#### Individual or Group Questions

1. Do you fear taking off any of your graveclothes? Why, or why not?
2. What would make you feel like someone yanked off your graveclothes? Why would you feel this way?
3. On pages 164-169, the author describes a loving community. If you're part of a support group, how can you develop these qualities within this community? If you don't belong to a group, how can you develop these qualities in yourself?
  - Safety
  - Sharing stories
  - Grace
  - Hospitality
  - Acceptance
4. Focus on one of your graveclothes, perhaps the "cloth" that bothers you most. What would be a first step toward unraveling it?

5. If you're ready, offer the prayer on page 170 to God. If you're in a group, the members might want to pray it aloud together.

## Chapter Nine

### LIVING IN THE LIGHT:

#### *The Power of Your Transformation*

#### Key Concepts

- A transformed life is a life of intimacy with Jesus.
- A transformed life is a life of gratitude and generosity.
- A transformed life is a life of danger.
- A transformed life is a life of influence.

#### Individual or Group Questions

1. After Lazarus resurrected from the dead, he continued his relationship with Jesus. On page 176 the author claims, “Intimacy with Jesus is the mark of a transformed life.” How would you characterize intimacy with Jesus?
2. At this juncture, how would you describe your intimacy with Jesus? How do you feel about this description?
3. How can you create a rhythm of intimacy with Jesus, balancing busy and quiet times into an “unhurried existence?” Jot down a few ideas about how you can achieve this balance. This isn’t a rhythm that can be achieved quickly, so identify a simple, initial action toward this process. You can begin with this one step. (For example, “I’m making room for quietness by turning off the television after the newscast on Tuesday evenings.”) *See pages 177-78 for the author’s explanation of this concept.*



4. As your life transforms, how can you express gratitude and generosity? Give specific examples.
5. What could be some “dangerous” results of transforming your life? Name specific actions. How can you respond to each of these results? *See pages 181-82 if you want to review the section, “A Life of Danger.”*
6. Eventually, how could your unique transformation story influence others?
7. Do you think your transformation needs to be completed before you can influence others? Why, or why not?

## Chapter Ten

### THE LAZARUS LIFE:

#### *Experiencing Transformation for a Lifetime*

#### Key Concept

- Is the life you're living the life you want to live?

#### Individual or Group Questions

1. How would you describe the life you want to live? Write a description or draw a picture of what you envision. Focus more on who you want to be, rather than what you want to do or own.
2. Are you living this life now? If not, how does your current life compare to your desired life? How do you feel about this gap in your expectations?
3. Pages 194-95 list some things we might primarily focus on instead of pursuing authentic transformation. These areas include work, another person, money, sex, or even the church. Do you substitute any of these areas for the inner transformation you need? If so, how?
4. Can you add other areas to the list in question #3? If so, what are they?
5. What are you living for? In other words, where do you focus your time, energy, and resources? How do you feel about this?
6. How Could spiritual transformation move you toward the life you want to live?
7. Do you believe that Lazarus's story of transformation can be yours? Why, or why not?