

A Journal of Spiritual Formation & Reflection

LIVING *Life*

To. _____

From. _____

2010 03 Contents

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The Savior of the World



This month we conclude our readings in the Gospel of John, and explore the brief Old Testament book of Jonah. Both books reveal much about God's heart. May God grant that we more fully reflect His heart toward others: looking down upon none of our neighbors, and sharing God's Gospel with others that they, like we, may find life eternal and abundant in Jesus Christ.

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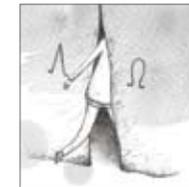
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150 Life Answers
The Worship Leader

Whether we are worshiping in particular ways with fellow believers or worshiping daily by our obedience at home, at work or at play, there is one critical truth about worship that always applies: we are enabled to worship only by Jesus Christ. He is, in other words, our true worship leader.



152 Culture
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154 Bookshelf
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2010 03 Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17 Fasting day	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			



LIVING *Life*

PUBLISHER

Yong Jo Ha

EDITORIAL

Editor-in-Chief Eddie Byun
 Managing Editor Sung Hye Park
 Editor Hannah Kim
 Writers Gary Parrett
 Walter Kim (1-5)
 Leo Rhee (6-11)
 Daniel Sangi Im (12-15)
 Isaac Surh (16-23)
 Lisa Pak (24-31)
 David Koo (WBS)

DESIGN

Creative Director Jae Goo Lee
 Senior Designer Sung Hye Park
 Illustrator Seo Jung Hahm

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USA Duranno
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4. Visit our websites:
 English site <http://www.duranno.com/livinglife>
 Korean Site <http://www.duranno.com>
 USA Duranno Site <http://www.usaduranno.com> (in Korean).

Questions?

Email livinglife365@gmail.com

Call 02-2078-3455

Write #401 Duranno Building, 95 Seobinggo-Dong
 Yongsan-Gu, Seoul, 140-240, Korea



The Heart of Worship

Dear *Living Life* Readers,

A popular worship song of our day is one by Matt Redman and it is called “The Heart of Worship.” It is a song that reminds us that the center of our worship must always be on Jesus Christ. But interestingly enough, this song was born out of a very dry season for Matt’s church, Soul Survivor, back in the UK during the 1990’s. Something seemed to be missing in their worship services, so the pastor, Mike Pilavachi, decided to do something that surprised everyone—he got rid of all the instruments and the sound system. At first, there was a lot of awkward silence because the people didn’t know what to do without the usual background help. But eventually, the people began learning to express their worship to God through prayers and simply using their voice to bring a song to life. They didn’t need a band to have a true “worship experience.” They were finally beginning to realize that worship wasn’t about the band or the singer or the instruments. They simply needed a heart that is focused on Him. They rediscovered that worship was all about Jesus. And it was during this time that Matt Redman was inspired to write out these lessons he learned and thus this song was born.

When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come / Longing just to bring something that’s of worth that will bless your heart... / I’m coming back to the heart of worship, and it’s all about You, Jesus

How important it is to remind ourselves that worship is always about Jesus. As a praise leader in the past, I remember how easily it can be to get focused too much on exterior things, such as the number of singers on the team or the sound that we’re looking for. With this month’s focus on worship, I hope you too can pause and remember that worship, at its core, is all about Jesus—who He is, what He’s done and how worthy He is to have our whole being—always.

Worshiping Jesus with you...

Eddie Byun
 Editor-in-Chief

The Voice of the Martyrs



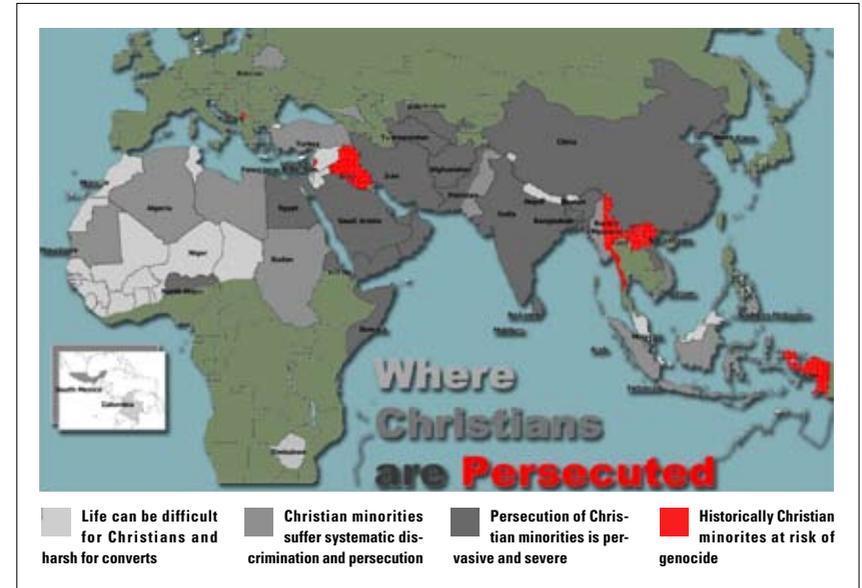
Sometimes, the church is easy to forget that there are brothers and sisters still being persecuted around the world today. There are places in the world where it is still illegal to practice Christianity, share one's faith, or even own a Bible. Christians are still beaten, imprisoned, and even killed for what they believe.

The Voice of the Martyrs is a non-profit, inter-denominational Christian organization dedicated to assisting the persecuted church worldwide. Its mission statement is as follows:

"Serving the persecuted church through practical and spiritual assistance while leading Christians in the free world into fellowship with them."

VOM was founded in 1967 by Pastor

Richard Wurmbrand, who was imprisoned 14 years in Communist Romania for his faith in Christ. His wife, Sabina, was imprisoned for three years. His story is well documented in his book, "Tortured for Christ," which accounts the pastor's courage, tenacious faith, and unbelievable endurance. In the 1960s, Richard, Sabina, and their son, Mihai, were ransomed out of Romania and came to the United States. Through their travels, the Wurmbrands spread the message of the atrocities that Christians face in restricted nations, while establishing a network of offices dedicated to assisting the persecuted church. The Voice of the Martyrs continues in this mission around the world today through the following main purposes:



1. To encourage and empower Christians to fulfill the Great Commission in areas of the world where they are persecuted for their involvement in propagating the gospel of Jesus Christ. We accomplish this by providing Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts, medical assistance, and other forms of aid.
2. To give relief to the families of Christian martyrs in these areas of the world.
3. To equip local Christians to love and win to Christ their enemies who are opposed to the gospel in countries where believers are actively persecuted for their Christian witness.
4. To undertake projects of encouragement, helping believers rebuild their lives and Christian witness in countries that have formerly suffered Communist oppression.
5. To emphasize the fellowship of all believers by informing the world of

atrocities committed against Christians and by remembering their courage and faith.

As aforementioned, one of the greatest roles of VOM is to provide updates on persecution happening globally so that the church can come together to pray and to give. Funds collected by VOM go to support the persecuted, especially as many lose their means of living, or a father who provides for the family when he is taken to prison or killed.

The Bible is clear about the sufferings one must endure for believing in Christ. 1 Peter 4:12-13 states, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." Moreover, the Apostle Paul



“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it”
(1 Cor. 12:26).

challenges the body of Christ to suffer with those who are being persecuted: “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it” (1 Cor. 12:26).

A visit to their website reveals the horrid details of recent attacks on Christians. These stories will generally never make the headlines in most countries. The following is one such story:

Somalia: Christian Martyred

On Nov. 14, the body of a 23-year-old Christian convert, Mumin Abdikarim Yusuf, was discovered in Mogadishu’s Yaqshid district, according to Compass Direct News.

On Oct. 28, members of al-Shabaab, an Islamic extremist group, detained Yusuf and searched his home for Christian materials. A 15-year-old Muslim boy had accused Yusuf of trying to convert him to Christianity.

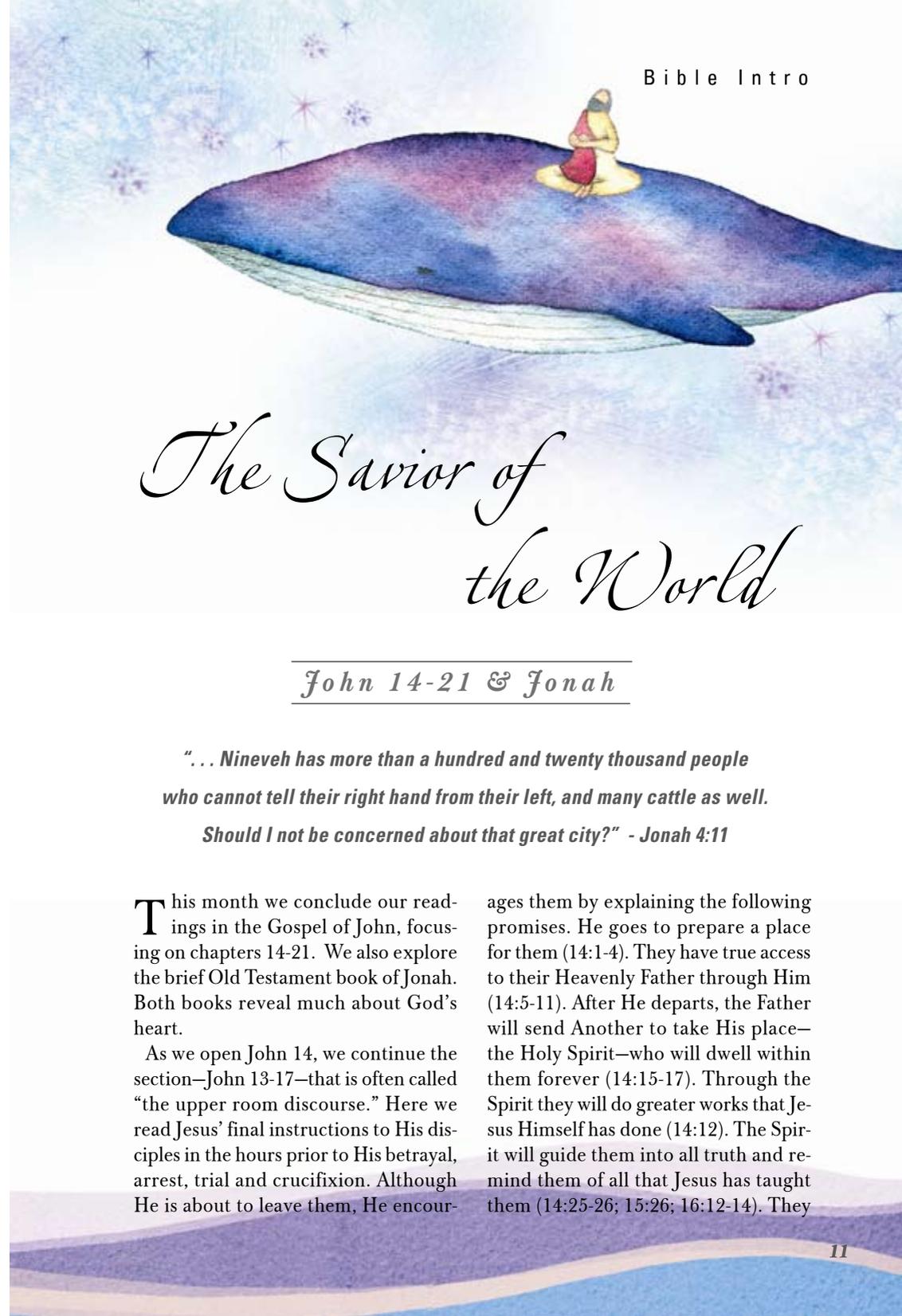
In an attempt to gain evidence against Yusuf and to gain information about other Somali Christians, the extremists knocked out all of Yusuf’s front teeth and broke several of his fingers.

They then shot him twice in the head and dumped his body on an empty residential street. Since it is unknown whether Yusuf revealed information about other Christians during his torture, the underground Christians who knew him have relocated for their safety. Yusuf’s Muslim family members are also in danger, as extremists have accused them of failing to report his conversion to Christianity.

The Voice of the Martyrs supports persecuted Christians through a project to assist evangelists and encourage converts from Islam. Pray for all those mourning the death of this brother in the Lord. Pray for safety for the relocated believers. Pray that Yusuf’s faithful witness will be a testimony to his Muslim family members and that they will turn to Jesus for their salvation. (Source: www.persecution.com).

Written by Leo Rhee

For more information on VOM, log on to www.persecution.com. Please pray for the plight of those being persecuted for the same faith that we share.



The Savior of the World

John 14-21 & Jonah

“... Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well.

Should I not be concerned about that great city?” - Jonah 4:11

This month we conclude our readings in the Gospel of John, focusing on chapters 14-21. We also explore the brief Old Testament book of Jonah. Both books reveal much about God’s heart.

As we open John 14, we continue the section—John 13-17—that is often called “the upper room discourse.” Here we read Jesus’ final instructions to His disciples in the hours prior to His betrayal, arrest, trial and crucifixion. Although He is about to leave them, He encour-

ages them by explaining the following promises. He goes to prepare a place for them (14:1-4). They have true access to their Heavenly Father through Him (14:5-11). After He departs, the Father will send Another to take His place—the Holy Spirit—who will dwell within them forever (14:15-17). Through the Spirit they will do greater works that Jesus Himself has done (14:12). The Spirit will guide them into all truth and remind them of all that Jesus has taught them (14:25-26; 15:26; 16:12-14). They

“ On the evening of His crucifixion, then, Jesus was praying for us who have, by grace, come to trust in Him all these centuries later. ”

will not be left as orphans, but will actually experience communion with both the Son and the Father through the Spirit (14:18-21). Because of this communion, they will be able to bear much lasting fruit to glorify God (15:1-17).

After Jesus' departure, things will not be easy for His followers. They will go through times of pruning or cleansing (15:2). The world will often hate them and persecute them, as it hated and persecuted Jesus (15:18-25). They will soon be scattered (16:32) when He, their Shepherd, is struck (Zec. 13:7). In this world, they will have trials and tribulations. But they must not despair, for Jesus has overcome this world (16:33).

Above all, Jesus prays for His disciples: that the Father will keep them safe, so that not one of them will be lost (17:11-12); that He will protect them from the evil one (17:15); that He will sanctify them in the truth (17:17, 19); that they may be one—as the Father and the Son are one—so that the world will believe the Good News about Jesus (17:21-23). This beautiful prayer was not only for the first disciples but for all who would come to believe through them (17:20). On the evening of His crucifixion, then,

Jesus was praying for us who have, by grace, come to trust in Him all these centuries later.

Jesus said earlier in the Gospel that no one would take His life from Him. Rather, He would freely lay it down of His own accord for the sake of His sheep. And, in the end, He would take up His life once again (10:14-18). Death would not prevail. When He—the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29)—had finished the once-and-for-all perfect offering of Himself (19:30), He is powerfully raised from the dead (20:1-10). As the glorious risen Savior and Lord, He sends forth His disciples as the Father had sent Him (20:21), to preach the Gospel. And John invites all who read this wonderful Gospel through the ages to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world (4:42), so that believing, we might have life in His name (20:31).

The Reluctant Prophet

At some point in the 8th century B.C., God commissioned the prophet Jonah to preach a word of judgment against Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. The Assyrians were the wicked and bit-



ter enemies of Israel who would in fact conquer Israel later in the century. Jonah longed to see Assyria be judged, but he was unwilling to be the appointed mouthpiece of the Lord in this matter. So he fled in the opposite direction, booking passage by sea to the city of Tarshish. But God—who is Master of the seas and of the creatures in the seas—finally got the full attention of Jonah. The prophet at last obeyed and went to Nineveh. There he preached a very, very short sermon: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned” (3:4).

On hearing these words, however, the people of Nineveh, from the lowest citizen to the king, humbled themselves before the Lord. And God relented from sending the disaster upon them. What was Jonah's response to this amazing conversion? He was furious that the promised destruction did not occur. He explains that this was why he did not want to go to Nineveh in the first place: “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love” (4:2; Exo. 34:6). Jonah apparently shared the heart that many religious leaders in Jesus' day held when they taught the people to

“love your neighbor and hate your enemy” (Matt. 5:43). But Jesus taught that we must love our enemies, for thus God loved us (Rom. 5:8-9).

God chose Israel to be His unique people, but He did so to make them a light for all nations. In the end, God redeems for Himself people from every nation, tribe and tongue (Rev. 5:9-10). As we read in John's Gospel: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...” (John 3:16; emphasis added). As God Himself put it to the pouting Jonah, “...Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?” (4:11).

Thus is God's heart displayed in both John's account and in this story of Jonah. May God grant that we more fully reflect His heart toward others: remembering our own redemptive stories, looking down upon none of our neighbors, and sharing God's Gospel with others that they, like we, may find life eternal and abundant in Jesus Christ.

Written by Gary Parrett



01 Mon. Trusting Jesus

John 14:1-14

Homeward Bound

1 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

2 In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

4 You know the way to the place where I am going.”

The Way

5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

8 Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus says that He is going to prepare a place for His disciples. When Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father, He says anyone who has seen Him has seen the Father. Then Jesus declares what will happen to those who have faith.

9 Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.

12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.

14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

• Memory Verse of the Week

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 12:21-51 □ Luke 15 □ Job 30 □ 1 Cor. 16

Reflection

Homeward Bound (14:1-4)

We all have a profound need for a home—a place that provides security and identity. For three years, the disciples have made their home with Jesus, but their world is about to be upturned. How can their hearts not be troubled? Jesus invites us all to discover that home is our eternal destiny with God. Although we will encounter all kind of trials in this world, our hearts do not need to be troubled. We can find security, not in our fluctuating circumstances, but in the unwavering pledge that Jesus has prepared a place for us. Jesus will lead us to the Promised Land of our everlasting rest with God. Beyond the crucifixion, beyond trials, and beyond the years of arduous discipleship lies the bliss of our true security and identity. Life here is merely the doorstep to our eternal home.

The Way (14:5-14)

Trusting Jesus not only guarantees our future home, but also recognizes that He is the way, truth, and life in the present moment. Jesus is the Way to God because He is the revelation of God in Truth. Do you want to know God? Then, look at Jesus. Anyone who listens to Jesus' words (v. 10) hears God's invitation to a transformative and abiding relationship. Anyone who sees Jesus' miracles (v. 11) witnesses the evidence of God's love for a hurting and broken world. Moreover, as the true revelation of God's mercy and holy gift of salvation, Jesus brings the Life of God to a derelict humanity. Faith in Christ brings with it life in God. Such a communion with God in the present moment connects us to the glorious power of the Spirit to be explored in a life of prayer (vv. 12-14).

Application

- In times of difficulty, where do you seek security and your identity? Those who live with eternity on their minds will discover a sure foundation and perspective for their earthly lives.
- Reflect on the miracles of Jesus and what they say about the character and purposes of God. Praise Jesus that He is the way, the truth, and the life.

"I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men." —Richard Baxter

[Prayer Guide >>](#) | [Adoration](#) | [Confession](#) | [Thanksgiving](#) | [Supplication](#)

A Channel for God's Power

The Scriptures overflow with passages teaching that our almighty, omnipotent God is ready, willing and able to answer the prayers of his followers. The miracles of Israel's exodus from Egypt and journey to the Promised Land were all answers to prayer. So were Jesus' miracles of stilling storms, providing food, healing the sick and raising the dead. As the early church formed and grew and spread throughout the world, God answered the believers' continual prayers for healing and deliverance.

God's power can change circumstances and relationships. It can help us face life's daily struggles. It can heal psychological and physical problems, remove marriage obstructions, meet financial needs—in fact, it can handle any kind of difficulty, dilemma or discouragement.

Someone has said that when we work, we work; but when we pray, God works. His supernatural strength is available to praying people who are convinced to the core of their beings that he can make a difference. Skeptics may argue that answered prayers are only coincidences, but as an English archbishop once observed, "It's amazing how many coincidences occur when one begins to pray."

- *Too Busy Not to Pray* by Bill Hybels

A Letter to God Jesus, You are the perfect revelation of God. In You, I discover divine love and mercy, holiness and purity. In my impoverished imagination I do not think enough about my eternal home or about Your abiding presence. Forgive me, and in mercy, expand my thoughts of You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Following Jesus

John 14:15-24

Intimacy and Obedience

15 “If you love me, you will obey what I command.

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—

17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

Jesus promises the Counselor, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth lives with those who believe and will be in those who believe. Jesus will not leave them as orphans but will come to them again. Whoever obeys His commands is the one who loves Him.

20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

Obedience and Intimacy

22 Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”

23 Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

Intimacy and Obedience (14:15-21)

Following Jesus involves a snug dance between intimacy and obedience. In this section, intimacy takes the lead. For the disciple, love is the prior condition, and then follows obedience (v. 15). Obedience is a manifestation of love, which is the foundation of our relationship with God. Intimacy with the Triune God is the central issue for Jesus. So, on our behalf, He petitions the Father to send the Spirit to be with us, as a Counselor and Comforter. This gift alone is astounding. Jesus, however, goes even further to declare that the Spirit will dwell in us (v. 17). Our lives are wrapped up in the very life of God. There can be no greater expression of intimacy than the mysterious communion between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now, we get to enter into this eternal dance of love through the invitation of the Son.

Obedience and Intimacy (14:22-24)

Jesus answers Judas' question indirectly and teaches an important lesson of obedience. While true love certainly leads to obedience, the process does not simply move in one direction. True obedience leads to greater intimacy. Those who obey Jesus' teachings will know the Father's love and will enjoy the presence of the Father and Son (v. 23). This divine dance of intimacy and obedience works in coordination. God's initiative brings us into an intimate relationship which produces our obedience; and this subsequently enables us to enjoy greater intimacy, which kindles deeper obedience... And so the dance goes on. Our obedience does not earn intimacy; it enjoys the gift of intimacy. It puts us in a place to be swept off our feet. However, disobedience is our willful act to ignore the music of divine grace and to detach ourselves from the arms of our divine partner.

Application

- Make a list of five things that Jesus has done in your life to exhibit His love and desire for intimacy with you.

- Search for any area in your life in which a more loving obedience to Jesus' teachings may be pursued.

"[Jesus] teaches us that to enter a life of prayer is nothing less than entering into the heart and being of God himself." – James Houston

Prayer Guide >> Adoration | Confession | Thanksgiving | Supplication

By the Counsel of God

“We left our moorings at the Outer Harbor Dock, San Pedro, California, at 2:06 today. Mom and Dad stood together watching at the pier side. As we slipped away Psalm 60:12 came to mind, and I called back, ‘Through our God we shall do valiantly.’ They wept some. I do not understand how God has made me. Joy, sheer joy, and thanksgiving fill and encompass me. I can scarcely keep from turning to Pete and saying, ‘Brother, this is great!’ or ‘We never had it so good.’ God has done and is doing all I ever desired, much more than I ever asked. Praise, praise to the God of Heaven, and to His Son Jesus. Because He hath said, ‘I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,’ I may boldly say, ‘I will not fear...’”

Jim Elliot laid down his pen. He was a young man of twenty five, tall and broad-chested, with thick brown hair and blue-gray eyes. He was bound for Ecuador—the answer to years of prayer for God’s guidance concerning his lifework...

“My going to Ecuador is God’s counsel, as is my leaving Betty, and my refusal to be counseled by all who insist I should stay and stir up the believers in the U.S. And how do I know it is His counsel? ‘Yea, my heart instructeth me in the night seasons.’ Oh, how good! For I have known my heart is speaking to me for God! ... No visions, no voices, but the counsel of a heart which desires God.

- *Through Gates of Splendor* by Elisabeth Elliot

A Letter to God O God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, You live in perfect and loving communion and have invited us to share in this divine intimacy. Though our minds may not be able to fully grasp this mystery, our hearts leap with joy over this gift of love. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



03 Wed. Spiritual Math

John 14:25-31

Peace by Addition

25 “All this I have spoken while still with you.

26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Jesus promises peace as well as the Holy Spirit. The peace that Jesus gives is different from the world's. Those who love Jesus would be glad that He is going to the Father. When it happens the disciples will believe.

Glory by Subtraction

28 “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

29 I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.

30 I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me,

31 but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. “Come now; let us leave.

Peace by Addition (14:25-27)

The gift of peace that Jesus promises to leave with His disciples is unique. The world tends to view peace as the absence of conflict; the Bible rather presents peace as the presence of Jesus. So, peace is much more than the subtraction of challenging circumstances. It is the gift of the Spirit that mediates God's presence for us today as surely as Jesus did for His disciples. Therefore, our Savior repeats the exhortation "do not let your hearts be troubled" (v. 27), which He first spoke at the beginning of the chapter. This negative command assumes that it is within the domain of faith to prevent our hearts from becoming agitated and disturbed from external circumstances. Faith may not make our circumstances any better or easier, but it will connect us to the Prince of Peace, who through the Spirit, abides with us still.

Glory by Subtraction (14:28-31)

The Gospel of John has clearly affirmed the fully divine nature of Jesus. He is the Creator of all and the Word who is God (John 1:1-3). Jesus claims boldly that He and the Father are one (John 10:30). In this final speech, Jesus also assures Philip that anyone who sees Him is looking at the essence of God the Father (14:9-10). So, Jesus' statement that "the Father is greater than I" is perplexing. While theologians have debated these words for centuries, a profound spiritual lesson endures. Although Jesus was fully God, He willingly chose a path of humility. As the messenger of divine love and salvation, He allowed the honor and worship due Him to be subtracted. Yet, this path of subtraction became His path of glory. Through death, He gained life for others; in suffering, He won salvation.

Application

- Pray for the Lord to grant you peace in the midst of your circumstances. Even before you ask for your situation to change, ask the Lord for a deep connection with the Spirit.
- What does it mean for you to follow a path of glory by subtraction? How can you pursue humble service and intentionally reflect the character of Jesus?

"Always seek peace between your heart and God, but in this world, always be careful to remain ever-restless, never satisfied, and always abounding in the work of the Lord." -Jim Elliot

Prayer Guide >> Adoration | Confession | Thanksgiving | Supplication

Inward Change

As we have seen, our sins should not be viewed as a series of unrelated incidents, but as the symptoms of an inward moral disease. To illustrate this, Jesus several times used the simile of the tree and the fruit. The quality of fruits, he taught, depends on the quality of the tree which bears them. "Every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit."

The cause of our sins, therefore, is our sin, our inherited nature which is perverted and self-centered. As Jesus put it, our sins come from within, out of our "heart." Therefore an improvement in behavior depends on a change of nature. "Make the tree good," said Jesus, "and its fruit (will be) good."

But can human nature be changed? Is it possible to make a sour person sweet, a proud person humble or a selfish person unselfish? The Bible declares emphatically that these miracles can take place. It is part of the glory of the gospel...

This tremendous inward change is the work of the Holy Spirit. The new birth is a birth "from above." To be born again is to be "born of the Spirit."

- *Basic Christianity* by John Stott

A Letter to God Prince of Peace, who reigns with the Father in majesty and might, I turn my attention to You. I am amazed that You chose a path of humility in order to win our salvation. Help me to find my glory in You and in Your ways. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



04 Thu. Abide

John 15:1-17

Remain in Jesus

- 1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.
- 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.
- 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.
- 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.
- 5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.
- 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.
- 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.
- 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

• **Memory Verse of the Week**

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

• **Bible-In-One-Year Reading**

□ Exodus 15 □ Luke 18 □ Job 33 □ 2 Cor. 3

Jesus says that He is the vine, the Father the gardener and us the branches. Jesus tells us to remain in Him and bear fruit. He also tells us to remain in His love by obeying His commands. His command is this: Love each other as He has loved us.

Remain in love

- 9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.
- 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.
- 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.
- 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.
- 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.
- 14 You are my friends if you do what I command.
- 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.
- 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.
- 17 This is my command: Love each other.

Remain in Jesus (15:1-8)

Throughout the Gospel, John recounts various metaphors that Jesus uses to describe His identity and purpose: “I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world; I am the good shepherd,” etc. This passage contains the final “I am” statement, in which Jesus describes His relationship with us: “I am the vine, you are the branches.” The agricultural metaphor richly conveys necessity—the branch can only have life through the vine. Moreover, since nothing comes between vine and branch, the image also conveys the vital intimacy between us and Christ. The very life of the branch flows into the vine. The believer is united to Christ with the utmost intimacy and immediacy. Jesus’ death for sin becomes our death to sin; His resurrection becomes our resurrection to new life. We are to abide and endure in Him as the dominating reality of our lives.

Remain in love (15:9-17)

By looking at the fruit, we ought to be able to tell what kind of tree is before us. Apples come from apple trees. Since the very sap of Christ flows into and through us, the kind of life produced in us ought to resemble the character and purposes of God. Jesus reiterates the centrality of love in this passage. The Father has loved the Son, who has in turn loved us. Jesus models the extraordinary love that would lay down its life for another (v. 13). The magnitude of this love cannot be contained. This passage clearly assumes that friendship with God results in fruitfulness for God. Therefore, we are exhorted to remain in His love and to love others according to His love.

Application

- Think about your past month. How would you characterize your union with Christ? Is it like a vine to branch? Or would you use a different metaphor to describe the relationship?
- Consider how to envelop someone with God’s love. What can you say, do, or pray for another, so that he or she experiences a measure of divine love through you?

“God does not ask you to give the perfect surrender in your strength, or by the power of your will; God is willing to work it in you.” –Andrew Murray

Prayer Guide >> Adoration | Confession | Thanksgiving | Supplication

Learn to Love

Life is all about love. Because God is love, the most important lesson he wants you to learn on earth is how to love. It is in loving that we are most like him, so love is the foundation of every command he has given us: “*The whole Law can be summed up in this one command: ‘Love others as you love yourself.’*”

Learning to love unselfishly is not an easy task. It runs counter to our self-centered nature. That’s why we’re given a lifetime to learn it...

Why does God insist that we give special love and attention to other believers? Why do they get priority in loving? Because God wants his family to be known for its love more than anything else. Jesus said our love for each other—not our doctrinal beliefs—is our greatest witness to the world. He said, “*Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are my disciples.*”

In heaven we will enjoy God’s family forever, but first we have some tough work to do here on earth to prepare ourselves for an eternity of loving. God trains us by giving us “family responsibilities,” and the foremost of these is to practice loving each other.

God wants you to be in regular, close fellowship with other believers so you can develop the skill of loving. Love cannot be learned in isolation. You have to be around people—irritating, imperfect, frustrating people...

- *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren

A Letter to God Father God, I ask that the life of Your Son to flow into and through me. As You have loved me, so would I seek to love others and bear fruit that is worthy of Your vineyard. Prune any lifeless thing in me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



Witness during Persecution

John 15:18-16:4

Shared Persecution

18 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

20 Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.

22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin.

23 He who hates me hates my Father as well.

24 If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.

25 But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’

• Memory Verse of the Week

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 16 □ Luke 19 □ Job 34 □ 2 Cor. 4

The world will hate the disciples because they do not belong to the world but have been chosen by Jesus. The world will hate Jesus as well. But the Holy Spirit will come and testify about Jesus, and the disciples will also testify.

Shared Witness

26 “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

27 And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

1 “All this I have told you so that you will not go astray.

2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.

3 They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.

4 I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you.

Shared Persecution (15:18-25)

Certainly, Jesus has already spoken of the world as the object of divine love and as the recipients of eternal life (John 3:16). When Jesus speaks about the world in this context, He is thinking of humanity in opposition to God. The recurring description of the world as ‘hating’ God indicates a corporate repudiation of God’s perspective and authority. This animosity toward God is the essence of sin. Individuals and institutions may be very polite and may do some real good, but if they reject God’s authority, they are at odds with God. Yet, given this situation, Jesus does not ask the disciples to withdraw into a Christian bubble of security. His basic assumption is that His followers will go out to the world in loving witness and accept whatever persecution may come, just as He was persecuted (v. 20).

Shared Witness (15:26-16:4)

Jesus recognizes that persecution is deeply unsettling. Disciples may begin to question their faith, wondering whether or not their beliefs are true. Or even if they do not doubt their beliefs, they may certainly be tempted to remain silent minority and muzzle their witness. For this reason, Jesus again assures the disciples that the Spirit of Truth will precede them and will testify about Jesus (v. 26). This Spirit will carry the authority of the Father and the Son. Notice the order of commissioning: the Spirit goes first and then we are asked to testify also (v. 27). Jesus makes a provision for us during times of persecution. The Holy Spirit will make sure that we will not go astray and grant us the courage to endure opposition. He will enable us to see our way through false accusations, ridicule, or hostility.

Application

- In what areas of your life are you encountering individuals or institutions that do not have God’s perspective or submit to God’s authority?
- Pray for the Spirit of Truth to precede you in witness. Pray that He will testify about Jesus to your friends or family and that you will have the courage to share that witness also.

“Do not pray for more of the Holy Spirit... Every child of God has all of Him, but does He have all of us?”
-F. B. Meyer

Prayer Guide >> Adoration | Confession | Thanksgiving | Supplication

Chosen Out of the World

From the very beginning Christianity—whose founder, after all, the state executed—has lived in tension with government. Jesus warned his disciples that the world would hate them as it had hated him, and in Jesus’ case it was the powerful who conspired against him...

Early Christians hammered out rules to govern their duties to the state. They forbade certain professions: the actor who had to play the part of pagan gods, the teacher forced to teach pagan mythology in public schools, the gladiator who took human life for sport, the soldier who killed, the policeman and the judge. Justin, who would become a martyr, spelled out the limits of obedience to Rome: “To God alone we render worship, but in other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men, and praying that with your kingly power you be found to possess also sound judgment.”...

Missionaries who carried the gospel to other cultures saw the need to challenge certain practices, bringing them into direct conflict with the state. In India they attacked the caste system, child marriage, bride burning, and the immolation of widows. In South America they banned human sacrifice. In Africa they opposed polygamy and slavery. Christians understood that their faith was not merely private and devotional, but had implications for all of society...

For all its flaws the church at times has, fitfully and imperfectly to be sure, dispensed Jesus’ message of grace to the world.

- *What’s So Amazing about Grace?* by Philip Yancey

A Letter to God Holy Spirit of Truth, I recognize my deep need for Your ministry. Without Your witness, my witness will be hollow and my resolve will be weak. The world will press me into its mold. Have mercy upon me and fill me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



Come Holy Spirit

John 16:5-15

The Role of the Holy Spirit

5 “Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’”

6 Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief.

7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:

9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;

10 in regard to righteousness, because I am

Jesus says that it is good for the disciples that He is going away because then the Holy Spirit will come. The Holy Spirit will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment. He will guide them into all truth.

going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;

11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Guidance of the Holy Spirit

12 “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.

13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

The Role of the Holy Spirit (16:5-11)

Verse 6 states that the disciples were filled with grief, but it was not because Jesus announced His departure, but rather, due to their own selfish concerns for themselves. After all they committed and sacrificed, what would now become of them? But the Lord proclaims that His purpose for coming to this earth would now be fulfilled—to die for the sins of the world. Without this act, there would be no reason for the Spirit to come. Furthermore, the physical body of Jesus was limited to time and space, whereas, the Holy Spirit would be able to move beyond one setting, thus reaching the world with the Gospel. Also note that the Holy Spirit is a person, and is often referred to in Scripture as a man.

The role of the Spirit, as described by Jesus is tri-fold:

- 1) Convicting the world of sin and calling it to repentance. Apart from the Spirit’s revelation, we cannot see our sin.
- 2) Revealing the standard of God’s holiness.
- 3) Demonstrating Christ’s judgment over Satan.

Guidance of the Holy Spirit (16:12-15)

When Jesus says that the Holy Spirit would guide the disciples into “all truth” (v. 13), He is not speaking about truths on all subjects, but the truth about the Person of Jesus Christ and the significance of what He said and did. At this point, the disciples did not have the big picture of the things that would take place in the coming hours leading up to the crucifixion. It would only be after Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and the coming of the Holy Spirit that they would understand “what is yet to come.” This same Spirit leads and guides us today, revealing the Person of Jesus and the hope that we have in Him through His death and resurrection. Without the Spirit illuminating your heart, you would have never come to know the salvation that is offered through Him. God’s Spirit still resides in the heart of every believer, working in them and through them.

Application

- Are you grieving or quenching the Spirit’s work in your life?

- What ways do you see the Holy Spirit working in you? The Spirit’s work needs to be central to every part of our life and ministry. Without Him, there can be no evangelism. Without Him, sinners will not come to repentance. Without Him, you can never experience the life of fulfillment and holiness that is destined to everyone who comes to faith.

“Wise leaders should have known that the human heart cannot exist in a vacuum... Christ died for our hearts and the Holy Spirit wants to come and satisfy them.” - A.W. Tozer

Prayer Guide >> Adoration | Confession | Thanksgiving | Supplication

Through Trial and Error

You simply cannot learn a language apart from trial and error. When a group of missionaries goes to a foreign land, the first thing they do is enter into a rigorous study of the language. The interesting thing is that it is often not the most academically skilled of the missionaries who learn the language first or best. Often, the academically-oriented missionary prefers to spend long hours studying a grammar book. He or she wants to make sure they learn the grammar perfect so they will not make any mistakes when they speak. On the other hand, the missionaries less inclined toward academics are the ones who volunteer to go buy the groceries and run errands. They make their grammatical mistakes right in front of native speakers as they try to speak the new language, usually getting on-the-spot correction!

The same is true with learning the language of the Holy Spirit. Only those who are willing to try and fail will ever become proficient at understanding which impressions come from God and which arise merely from their own soul. This is one of the reasons my children learned to speak the German language better than I did. I spent more time studying, while they spent more time practicing. I threw myself into learning, while they threw themselves into living. I learned through the sequestered safety of a book, while they learned through trial and error.

- *Surprised by the Voice of God* by Jack S. Deere

A Letter to God Lord, thank You for the Holy Spirit’s work in my life—from the moment of my call to salvation, to the sanctifying work being done in my life. I submit myself to His lead and call. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



From Mourning to Joy

John 16:16-24

In a Little While

16 “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”

17 Some of his disciples said to one another, “What does he mean by saying, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,’ and ‘Because I am going to the Father?’”

18 They kept asking, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We don’t understand what he is saying.”

19 Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, “Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me?’

Jesus says that in a little while He will leave but will come back afterwards. The disciples do not understand this. Jesus then says that they will grieve but in the end, they will rejoice when He will see them again. No one will take away their joy. Jesus also commands them to ask in His name.

20 I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.

21 A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.

The Dawn of a New Day

22 So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

23 In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

24 Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

• Memory Verse of the Week

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 18 □ Luke 21 □ Job 36 □ 2 Cor. 6



Reflection

In a Little While (16:16-21)

Some discussion amongst the disciples ensues about Jesus' statement, "In a little while." With death impending and having only a short time to explain everything to His disciples, Jesus offers hope that although they will be separated for a short while, that they would see each other again, after the resurrection. The weeping and mourning noted in verse 20 is the same verb found in 11:33, which connotes an outward expression of deep sorrow. However, this grieving will turn to great joy, similar to the metaphor used of a woman giving birth to a child. This can also be seen as a paradigm for life in this world. We presently live between the Friday of the death of Jesus and the Sunday of His resurrection. This life may be full of sorrow, sin, and hardship, but we look forward to the ultimate Easter when all things will be made new again when we see Jesus, in a little while.

The Dawn of a New Day (16:22-24)

What time is Jesus referring to when He states, "In that day..."? (v. 23). He is talking about a future era after His resurrection when it would be possible to have a direct relationship between God and the believer, not through a priest, as was the case in the Old Testament times. It would be a source of abundant joy. A new day has dawned and all believers are now capable of talking to God directly. We approach God, not because of our own merit, but because Jesus, our great High Priest, has made us acceptable to God through His sacrifice on the cross. What does Jesus mean in verse 23 when He says, "In that day you will no longer ask me anything"? Does He mean that His disciples would have no more concerns? Of course not. He is actually talking about information. They would no longer have questions about the Lord's plan of salvation, as everything would be made clear after the resurrection.

Application

- Have you experienced the dawn of a new day? How is your relationship with God? Do not take that relationship for granted, for it came at a great cost—the suffering and death of the Son of God.
- The information that the disciples so desperately longed for is freely made available to us today. Rejoice in the fact that you belong to Him. Nothing can take that away.

Sunday Worship

Sermon Title

Bible Passage

Notes

Application

A Letter to God

Lord, thank You for being the High Priest that makes it possible for me to come to God with every right and privilege. May I live out my life this day in response to the grace and mercy shown to me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Faith through Jesus

John 16:25-33

An Exclusivistic Truth Claim

25 “Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father.

26 In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf.

27 No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

28 I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”

• Memory Verse of the Week

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 19 □ Luke 22 □ Job 37 □ 2 Cor. 7

When the time comes, the disciples will ask in Jesus' name. When the disciples said that they believe that Jesus came from God, Jesus says that they will be scattered and leave Him all alone. But Jesus tells them to take heart even when they face trouble.

The Beginnings of Faith

29 Then Jesus' disciples said, “Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech.

30 Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.”

31 “You believe at last!” Jesus answered.

32 “But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.

33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

An Exclusivistic Truth Claim (16:25-28)

Jesus continues to speak about the post-resurrection era that the disciples will experience within few days. He once again refers to “that day” (v. 26) to point to the time when the disciples will have direct access to the throne of God through Jesus Christ. Jesus, our High Priest, has made us acceptable to God. Thus, verse 27 is an exclusivistic truth claim that many people in our pluralistic world would have problems with—after all, with all the different religions in the world, how can one say that Christianity or Jesus is the only way to God? But saying that there are many ways to God is also similar to imposing an exclusivistic truth claim. And as Dr. Timothy Keller states, “It is no more narrow to claim that one religion is right than to claim that one way to think about all religions (namely that all are equal) is right. We are all exclusivistic about religion, but in different ways.

The Beginnings of Faith (16:29-33)

The disciples finally begin to believe Jesus’ words to some degree, but they are still far from fully understanding God’s plan for salvation. It is in the midst of this infant stage of faith that the disciples will encounter the hour of darkness where their faith will be tested and tried. Jesus predicts that His disciples will scatter and that He would be left alone, except for His Father who was with Him. The Lord knows that the disciples’ faith will be shaken, but He also knows that He will overcome the world and offer peace to His disciples. When difficulties come our way, our faith may be shaken, but Jesus promises us peace that only comes from His hand. Be strong and take courage, for Jesus has overcome the world!

Application

- Are you in an environment where people are hostile to those making exclusivistic statements of faith? Reaffirm your faith in the Lord. The Word says that there is no other way to God except through Christ. Allow that truth to settle your heart.
- One of the ways for your faith to grow is through seasons of difficulty and hardship. All the disciples forsook Jesus, but ultimately came back to find their faith in Him more secure and grounded.

But Take Heart!

All day I kept my eyes fixed on that bit of heaven. Sometimes clouds moved across the squares, white or pink or edged with gold, and when the wind was from the west I could hear the sea. Best of all, for nearly an hour each day, gradually lengthening as the spring sun rose higher, a shaft of checkered light streamed into the dark little room...

As my health returned, I was able to use my eyes longer. I had been sustaining myself from my Scripture a verse at a time; now, like a starving man, I gulped entire Gospels at a reading, seeing whole the magnificent drama of salvation.

And as I did, an incredible thought prickled the back of my neck. Was it possible that this—all of this that seemed so wasteful and so needless—this war, Scheveningen prison, this very cell, none of it was unforeseen or accidental? Could it be part of the pattern first revealed in the Gospels? Hadn’t Jesus—and here my reading became intent indeed—hadn’t Jesus been defeated as utterly and unarguably as our little group and our small plans had been?

But... if the Gospels were truly the pattern of God’s activity, then defeat was only the beginning. I would look around at the bare little cell and wonder what conceivable victory could come from a place like this.

- *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom and Elizabeth and John Sherrill

A Letter to God Lord, thank You that You alone are God, there is no other, and that You have given me the privilege of coming into a relationship with You. I give You glory and honor. Walk with me through the difficult seasons of my life. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



The Son Glorified

John 17:1-8

How Do We Get Eternal Life?

1 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.

2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

Jesus prays for the glory of the Father and Himself. Then Jesus says how the Father gave the disciples to Jesus. He has revealed God to them, and they believed that God sent Jesus.

5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Prayer for the World Changers

6 “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.

7 Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you.

8 For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

How Do We Get Eternal Life? (17:1-5)

The whole of chapter 17 of John is the prayer of Jesus in the final hours before His suffering and execution. He addresses God as “Father,” applied in John’s gospel 122 times. It would also be the last time He calls God “Father,” as on the cross, He would address Him as “God” (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”), signifying Jesus’ separation from the Father. It is in His suffering that Jesus would be glorified.

Jesus would soon return to His place of eternal glory, after the work He was sent to do was completed. Jesus’ prayer further reveals the way to eternal life—by knowing God the Father through the Son, Jesus Christ. The Greek verb for “knowing” used in this context is in the present subjunctive tense, indicating that the “knowledge” of God is a growing experience. Salvation is not just a onetime experience, but an ongoing process of change and intimacy with God.

Prayer for the World Changers (17:6-8)

It is important to note that the disciples did not choose to follow Christ, but rather, they were handpicked by God to follow Him (v. 6). The Lord asserts this in other places in the gospel as well. For instance, in John 15:16, Jesus says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (See also John 6:70). In other words, God handpicked the Twelve (even Judas) for His specific plans and purposes. There was no second choice. There was no back-up plan. These were it. Jesus gave the words that were given to Him by the Father (v. 8), and now they were to turn the world upside-down. Similarly, the Lord chose you with a specific task. Like a coach who assigns players each specific role on the team, God’s strategically designated responsibility for you is especially designed with you in mind.

What Is Prayer?

A heart prayer is a process of self-giving and of being set free from isolation. To pray is to enter into a relationship with God and to be transformed in him. And the relationship is close to the relationships we have with human beings. Many people, however, see prayer merely as asking God for things, pleading with a remote Being about the needs and crises of earth. Sometimes these pleas produce a response: often they do not. So prayer is seen in essentially functional terms—is it effective or not? Does it produce results?... But in order to pray well we need to disengage ourselves from this way of thinking.

So what is prayer? It is a ‘sharing in the divine nature,’ a ‘taking of manhood into God.’ So we can say, in the words of the eastern teacher St. Gregory of Sinai, ‘Prayer is God.’ When we think about prayer, we are thinking about God, and about human consciousness of God. I am not suggesting that asking is not appropriate or unimportant. In fact, the teaching of Jesus places asking as a central element in prayer. But this depends upon the kind of relationship we have with God, and upon the kind of God we believe in. Beginning to think about prayer then is beginning to think about God, for the Christian faith knows nothing of God apart from the fact of relationship.

- *True Prayer* by Kenneth Leech

Application

- Although Jesus can become your Savior in a single moment, it takes a lifetime to make Him Lord. To know Him ought to be the cry of every believer’s heart. Is your knowledge of Him growing regularly in deeper intimacy and worship?
- What is your role in the Lord’s work in the world? You did not choose Him, but He chose you. In the midst of your busyness, don’t forget the mission that He has called you to.

A Letter to God Lord, thank You for calling me as a disciple, when there was nothing in me that desired to follow You. You took the initiative to seek me out, for I was hopeless without You. I desire to draw near to You and come into Your presence. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



Prayer for the Disciples

John 17:9-19

No Plan B

9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them.

11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.

12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

13 “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.

• **Memory Verse of the Week**

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

• **Bible-In-One-Year Reading**

□ Exodus 21 □ Luke 24 □ Job 39 □ 2 Cor. 9

Jesus prays for His disciples who will remain in the world. The world has hated them because they are not of the world. So Jesus asks God to protect the disciples who will remain in the world by the truth.

In the World, but Not of It

14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.

15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.



No Plan B (17:9-13)

A fictional story is often told of Jesus’ return to heaven after the crucifixion. As the angels welcome Him back home, the heavenly hosts ask Jesus, “Lord, what is Plan B?” not quite having the fullest confidence in the ragtag group of disciples left to carry out the mission given to them to spread the Gospel to the earth. Christ replies, “There is no Plan B. This is it. It is now up to the disciples to continue the work I have started.”

The whole of chapter 17 is a prayer, prayed by the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. Jesus’ ministry of teaching has concluded, but His priestly ministry goes on. In today’s passage, the Lord continues His prayer for the disciples that will be left behind after His departure—the very ones that will carry out the work of proclaiming the Good News of salvation to lost people. Two things the Lord prays for in particular in verses 11-13: protection after Jesus’ departure and the full measure of joy.

In the World, but Not of It (17:14-19)

Jesus continues to pray for His disciples. They must be left in the world, even though they are not of it, in order to continue to preach the Gospel that the world so despises. Our values as Christians ought to be different from that of the world. But that does not mean escaping or hiding from the world. We are still called to love sinners and preach the Gospel to them. There is a third thing Jesus prays for His disciples: sanctification. This term simply describes a life absent (or becoming absent) from sin. It comes from the biblical word *hagiazō*, which means to “set apart” for God or a special purpose. It also means “to make holy or sacred.” Thus, Jesus says, “For them I sanctify myself,” meaning, “For my disciples, I set myself apart to do His will, which ultimately means my death.”

Application

- Is there a difference in the actions and characteristics of you and your unbelieving friends? Can people identify something different about your attitudes, thoughts, values, or actions?
- You and I are responsible for this generation of people lost without God. We are called to be in the world, building relationships with unbelievers, sharing the Good News, yet not sharing in the values and actions of the world. We have been set apart for His special purposes.

“We believe, that the work of regeneration, conversion, sanctification and faith, is not an act of man's free will and power, but of the mighty, efficacious and irresistible grace of God.” - Charles Spurgeon

Prayer Guide >> Adoration | Confession | Thanksgiving | Supplication

Write to Prisoners!

Born in Texas in 1890, Myrtie was brought to Columbus, Georgia, at one year of schooling. Her parents gave her little in the way of religious education, but from the age of ten on she knew there was a God, felt He had His hand on her, and knew she would “do best to obey Him.”

... Married at seventeen, she had her first child the next year and two more in rapid succession. Her middle child, a son, died at the age of two...

The death of her youngest son, her “baby boy,” the declining health of her oldest, and her own move into the home sent Myrtie into a spiritual depression...

“Lord, what more can I do for You?” she prayed with all her heart one day. “If You’re ready for me, I’m ready to come. I want to die. Take me.”

“I knew I was dying,” she continued. “But then He spoke to me as clear as be: WRITE TO PRISONERS. Three words: WRITE TO PRISONERS...”

“He couldn’t of spoke to me any clearer if ‘n He’d been standing before me. And I was afraid at first. I said, ‘Lord, me write to prisoners? I ain’t got no education, had to teach myself to read and write. And I don’t know nuthin’ bout prisons.’

“But there wasn’t no doubt. I would have squirmed out of His hand if I hadn’t obeyed. I had to.”

... Myrtie has subsequently corresponded with hundreds of inmates, up to forty at a time, becoming a one-woman ministry reaching into prisons all over America.

- *Loving God* by Charles Colson

A Letter to God Father Almighty, set me apart for Your glory. As I journey through this world, protect me from the forces of evil that want to bring me down. Lord, grant me boldness and strength to share the message of hope with the lost world. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



Establishing the Future Church

John 17:20-26

A Common Denominator

20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:

23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Jesus prays for all believers, not just the disciples. He prays that all of them may be one in God. He also prays that the world may know that they are loved by God and that they would see the glory of Jesus.

Get in Tune

24 “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

25 “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me.

26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

A Common Denominator (17:20-23)

As Jesus was about to complete the work He was sent to do, He prays for the future church for which He was going to die a sinner's death on a cross. This prayer would cover future generations of believers. He prays for the unity of the church—to be unified as a powerful witness to reveal the reality of God's love. This unity is not based on our background, geographical location, or even theological beliefs. The unity of the church would be based on the same unity shared by the Father and Son: "That all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me, and I am in You." Through this expression of love for one another, the world would come to believe and know God. In other words, our greatest apologetic (defense for God) is not in our ability to argue, but in our ability to show the unity.

Get in Tune (17:24-26)

When I used to play the violin in the concert orchestra, I remember how before a performance started, the first chair violinist would play a single A string, and all the other instruments, would tune themselves to that single pitch. The kind of unity Jesus prays for cannot be accomplished unless the believers are in one accord, attuned to the Father. This unity is supernatural and is fundamentally the same unity that exists between the Father and Son. Disunity happens when we are out of tune with the Father. As we grow to know the Father (v. 26), our love for Him will grow. You and I have a responsibility to protect the unity of the church. That begins with preventing gossip or negativity of any kind, especially against the leadership. You can contribute to unity by praying for others, building each other up, serving in humility, giving your time and money, worshiping together, and refusing to get sidetracked arguing over divisive matters.

Application

- When the world sees your church, do they see a community of people in tune with God, and in love with one another? Or do they see a group of people merely bickering over minor things, unwilling to put in their time and effort?

- As Rick Warren says, "People are not looking for friendly churches; they're looking for friends." You are the piece of puzzle in a greater picture of what the church ought to be.

"One hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organization do not constitute a church any more than eleven dead men make a football team. The first requisite is life, always" - A.W. Tozer

Prayer Guide >> Adoration | Confession | Thanksgiving | Supplication

A Promise of Relationship

There are many ways to become an orphan. Some children become orphans when their parents die. Others become functional orphans when their parents divorce. Other people are orphaned by their parents' emotional unavailability. When you have been neglected, abandoned or abused by people who were important in your life, you appreciate what it is like to be an orphan.

It is a painful and lonely experience. Orphans doubt their ability to sustain intimate relationships and find it difficult to trust others. Experiences of abandonment leave us full of loneliness and fear.

Jesus understands the acute pain that orphans experience. He responds to that deep pain with a promise of relationship. "I will not leave you as orphans," Jesus says. "I will not abandon you. You will not be without family because I will come to you."

In Jesus we see most clearly that God is attentive and available to us when we feel abandoned or neglected. God respects our needs and responds to our desires for relationship. God calls us out of the brokenness and dysfunction of our personal orphanage into the community and fellowship of his family. We are no longer orphans. We are God's beloved children.

- *Rooted in God's Love* by Dale and Juanita Ryan

A Letter to God Lord, protect the unity of my church. As we grow deeper in knowledge of You, connect our hearts, so that we may grow in love and deeper community with each other. Forgive us for the fighting and bickering over selfish things. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



A Planned Fate

John 18:1-14

A Silent Journey

1 When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it.

2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples.

3 So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

I Am He

4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?”

5 “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.)

6 When Jesus said, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.

7 Again he asked them, “Who is it you want?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

Judas came with soldiers to arrest Jesus. Jesus says who He is and asks them to let His disciples go. Peter tries to resist with a sword, but Jesus rebukes him. Jesus is then arrested and brought to Annas.

8 “I told you that I am he,” Jesus answered. “If you are looking for me, then let these men go.”

9 This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you gave me.”

10 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.)

11 Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”

12 Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him

13 and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.

14 Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people.

• Memory Verse of the Week

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 23 □ John 2 □ Job 41 □ 2 Cor. 11



A Silent Journey (18:1-3)

After Jesus’ majestic prayers of dedication for Himself, His disciples, and all believers in chapter 17, He knew what He had to do. Although Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray Him and that Judas knew where the olive grove was (v. 2), Jesus still chose to walk right into this fate. Can you imagine how long and silent that journey from the upper room, out of the city, eastward down into the Kidron valley, and then up the other side would have been? For Jesus, He knew that every step He took, was really a step towards persecution, pain, and death. For the disciples, they were probably confused and trying to process everything that Jesus had told them, while still wondering why Judas had left them.

I Am He (18:4-14)

In the olive grove, Jesus did not wait for Judas, the Roman soldiers, and the religious leaders to approach him; rather, He approached them, “Who is it you want?” (v. 4). When they told Jesus that they wanted Him, Jesus frankly replied, “I am He.” Jesus was not merely replying as a student would during a roll call, but His choice of words was very significant. Jesus was declaring His identity as God Himself when He said “I am He” because this was a deliberate echo of God’s name, “I am who I am” (Exo. 3:14). Jesus not only declared His identity, but He spoke with power. After all, does anyone ever draw back and fall to the ground when you speak or tell them your name? What power! Can we expect anything else from God Himself?

Application

- How often do you wonder why God chooses to do things the way He does? Do you ever question His goodness and His plans? Be honest with God and talk to Him about your questions.
- If you are a Christian, then that means you are “of Christ.” In other words, your identity is tied up with Jesus—you are a Christ person. Rejoice!

Judas’s Betrayal

The name “Judas,” once common, has all but disappeared. No parent wants to name a child after the most notorious traitor in history. And yet now, to my own surprise, as I read the gospel accounts it is Judas’s *ordinariness*, not his villainy, that stands out... The Gospels contain no hint that Judas had been a “mole” infiltrating the inner circle to plan this perfidy.

How, then, could Judas betray the Son of God? Even as I ask the question I think of the remaining disciples fleeing from Jesus in Gethsemane and of Peter swearing, “I don’t know the man!” when pressured in a courtyard and of the Eleven stubbornly refusing to believe reports of Jesus’ resurrection. Judas’s act of betrayal differed in degree, but not in kind, from many other disloyalties...

I know of no more poignant contrast between two human destinies than that of Peter and Judas. Both assumed leadership within the group of Jesus’ disciples. Both saw and heard wondrous things. Both went through the same dithery cycle of hope, fear, and disillusionment. As the stakes increased, both denied their Master. There, the similarity breaks off. Judas, remorseful but apparently unrepentant, accepted the logical consequences of his deed, took his own life, and went down as the greatest traitor in history. He died unwilling to receive what Jesus had come to offer him. Peter, humiliated but still open to Jesus’ message of grace and forgiveness, went on to lead a revival in Jerusalem and did not stop until he had reached Rome.

- *The Jesus I Never Knew* by Philip Yancey

A Letter to God Dear Father, help me understand who You are. Help me understand who I am in You. Give me the strength to stop living for my purposes and myself, may I live wholeheartedly for You and Your ways. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



13 Sat. Fire and Faith

John 18:15-27

Insights Regarding Fire

15 Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard,

16 but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

17 "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" the girl at the door asked Peter. He replied, "I am not."

18 It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

19 Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

20 "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret.

21 Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said."

Jesus was taken to Annas. When the high priest questioned Jesus, He said that He has spoken openly to the world. Peter went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard and disowned Jesus three times in front of a girl on duty and other people.

22 When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded.

23 "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?"

24 Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.

Integrity

25 As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not."

26 One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?"

27 Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

• Memory Verse of the Week

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 24 □ John 3 □ Job 42 □ 2 Cor. 12

Insights Regarding Fire (18:15-24)

The fire—is it merely a detail or a significant insight? While reading the passage, did the presence of a fire stick out to you, or did you pass over it and focus more on Peter’s denial and the interaction between the high priest and Jesus? There are two insights into this passage that we can discover by examining the presence of this seemingly minute detail. First, the presence of a fire confirms that Jesus was being put on trial during the night. The trial had to take place during the night if the Jews wanted to bring Him to Pilate the next day. Second, the fire at night signified that something unusual, but of momentous proportions, was taking place. After all, according to A.N. Sherwin-White, a scholar on ancient Roman society in the New Testament, in those times lighting a fire was an act of extravagance when people were sleeping.

Integrity (18:25-27)

What is the cost of your integrity? What kind of situation will cause you to lose and sacrifice your integrity? For Peter, it was the desire to please others. Every time Peter was asked if he was one of Jesus’ disciples, in the Greek, he was asked in a way that expected the response, “No.” As a result, each time Peter was asked, he submitted to the pressure of his questioner and sacrificed his integrity. Wanting to please others and stay discrete, he did not think much of his lying until the rooster began to crow (v. 27). Immediately, he remembered Jesus’ words to him earlier, “Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!” (John 13:38).

Peter Denies Jesus

It’s a scene worth stepping into for a few moments, as we ponder what is at stake and what it all meant. Think of the fireside, that chilly April night. Loyalty has taken Peter this far, but as the night wears on tiredness has sapped his resolve. It’s a familiar problem, which sometimes strikes in the middle of the night but more often strikes in the middle of someone’s life, or of some great project. We sign on to follow Jesus, and we really mean it. We start work on our vocation, and we have every intention of accomplishing it. Beginnings are always exciting, if daunting; the midday heat, or the midnight weariness, can drain away our intentions, our energy, our enthusiasm. Few if any Christians will look down on Peter and despise him. Most, if not all, of us will think: yes, that’s what it’s like. That’s what happens. Perhaps it’s only when we’ve been there that, like Peter, we can start to live and work in a new way, no longer out of our own energy but out of a fresh, and humbling, call of God.

- *Luke for Everyone* by Tom Wright

Application

- When you read the Bible, do you skim over it, or do you savor every word? Spend some time meditating on Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 119:105.
- What is the cost of your integrity? Is it the desire to please others? Money? Lust? Popularity? Fame? Education? Search your heart and offer that area of your life back to God.

A Letter to God

Dear God, help me savor Your word and treasure my times with You. May I not bow down to the pressures of this world and sacrifice my integrity. Please strengthen my convictions and create in me an unwavering belief that Your ways are better. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



A Kingdom Of...

John 18:28-40

Moral or Ceremonial Purity?

28 Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.

29 So Pilate came out to them and asked, “What charges are you bringing against this man?”

30 “If he were not a criminal,” they replied, “we would not have handed him over to you.”

31 Pilate said, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” “But we have no right to execute anyone,” the Jews objected.

32 This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.

A Different Kingdom

33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

34 “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”

Pilate questioned Jesus. Jesus said that His kingdom is not of this world and that He came into the world to testify to the truth. Pilate tried to set Jesus free but the Jews asked for Barabbas instead of Jesus.

35 “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

36 Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

37 “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

38 “What is truth?” Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.

39 But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews’?”

40 They shouted back, “No, not him! Give us Barabbas!” Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.

• Memory Verse of the Week

“Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”” (John 18:36)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 25 □ John 4 □ Prov. 1 □ 2 Cor. 13



Reflection

Moral or Ceremonial Purity? (18:28-32)

After the first trial, Jesus was sent to Caiaphas. The contents of that trial aren't revealed here since in verse 28, the reader is immediately taken to the palace of the Roman governor. That day was the official Jewish Passover and it was going to take place in the afternoon in the temple. The only way that one could take part of the ceremony was if one was ceremonially clean. However, from this text, it seems as if entering the palace of the Roman governor would have defiled a Jew. Thus, Pilate had to come out to meet the Jews, since they wanted to take part in the Passover. It is fascinating to observe the behavior of the Jews. They were more concerned with ceremonial cleanness than their unclean moral behavior which entailed mistreating Jesus and putting him through a false trial without legitimate witnesses.

A Different Kingdom (18:33-40)

In this passage, Jesus describes a different sort of kingdom than the one that Pilate and we are used to. Jesus is describing a Kingdom where He reigns as King forever—He is describing the eternal Kingdom of God, which is not of this world (v. 36). In fact, in verse 37, Jesus reveals a key characteristic of the Kingdom of God—it is a Kingdom of Truth. And since the Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of Truth, it makes sense that the King embodies truth and that the citizens of that Kingdom are those that love truth. Jesus is not merely a witness to the truth; He is the truth (John 14:6).

Application

- What is more important to you? Right behavior or right behavior done in front of others? Spend some time reflecting on the difference.
- When you act truthfully, speak the truth to others, uphold truth, and tell others about The Truth, Jesus Christ. Then you are building the Kingdom of God. Ask God for opportunities to testify about the truth and Truth today.

Sunday Worship

Sermon Title

Bible Passage

Notes

Application

A Letter to God

Dear Father, may I not be concerned about performing rightly before others; instead, help me always perform rightly before You. Please open my eyes to the opportunities that You bring before me today to testify about Your Truth. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



The Great Story

John 19:1-16

False Worship

1 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.

2 The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe

3 and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they struck him in the face.

One Event, Different Perspectives

4 Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him."

5 When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

6 As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

7 The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

8 When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid,

Pilate had Jesus flogged and the soldiers put a crown of thorns on Jesus' head. Pilate declared Jesus' innocence to the Jews. But the Jews pressured Pilate and insisted on crucifixion. Finally Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

9 and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer.

10 "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

11 Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

12 From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."

13 When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha).

14 It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews.

15 But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered.

16 Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.

• Memory Verse of the Week

"Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.'" (John 18:36)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 26 □ John 5 □ Prov. 2 □ Gal. 1

False Worship (19:1-3)

Since Jesus was not actually guilty with the charges laid against Him, Pilate just decided to inflict a lighter punishment upon Jesus and let Him go. After the punishment which was not at all light, the soldiers decided to mock and humiliate Jesus even more by dressing Him up and hailing Him as king of the Jews. What's interesting about this mock coronation ceremony is that it often reflects the attitude that many of us have when we worship Jesus. Just as the soldiers dressed up Jesus, we tend to dress up our worship services with many elements that actually distract people from Christ. In the same way the soldier spoke words to Jesus, we often do the same while we sing, but that's all they are—they're just words. Do we actually mean them? When we don't, we are basically slapping Jesus in the face, just like the soldiers did.

One Event, Different Perspectives (19:4-16)

Upon reading this passage, it is interesting to think about all the emotions and thoughts that must have been going through everyone's hearts and minds. Here's an example.

Pilate's Perspective: What will happen to me if Jesus really is the Son of God? This man doesn't deserve death, yet they want me to crucify him. But if I don't kill him, Caesar will probably kill me.

The Jewish Perspective: What's taking so long? We put him to trial in our courts and we have presented a clear case to those Romans. Jesus must die. I hope this doesn't take too long—the Passover is this afternoon.

Jesus' Perspective: Father, I knew this would happen. You prepared me for this and this is why I have come to the earth. Please have mercy upon them, for they do not know what they are doing.

Application

- When was the last time you worshiped Jesus? Did you mean the words you spoke or sung? Or was it merely ritual? How should you change your attitude towards worship?

- What is your perspective? Take some time to journal what has been going on in your heart and mind as you have been reading and reflecting on this passage.

"The Roots of Violence: Wealth without work, Pleasure without conscience, Knowledge without character, Commerce without morality, Science without humanity, Worship without sacrifice, Politics without principles." – Mahatma Gandhi

Prayer Guide >> Adoration | Confession | Thanksgiving | Supplication

Had He Known What Is Truth

Pilate brings Jesus in full view of those crowds, hoping the pitiful sight will evoke a sense of pity. Pilate announces, "here is the man!" *The one you want to crucify. Look at him now.*

Behold the face.

Behold the back.

Behold the blood and bruises and the broken heart.

Behold the God who became flesh and allowed this to be done to it.

"Here is your king." And with those words Pilate says more than he knows. Had he known what is truth, he would have thrown himself at Jesus' feet and surrendered his crown, his career, his life.

But Jesus is a sad caricature of a king, and what rational man could believe that royalty would come packaged like this?

So the crown goes unsundered. And the career. And the life. And so goes the crowd of rational men, who refuse not only to submit to their king but to show him even a shred of mercy.

"Crucify him!"

"Crucify him!"

"Crucify him!"

The words come as waves of hate, one after the other, surging louder and louder until at last they crest and come crashing down.

- *Intense Moments with the Savior* by Ken Gire

A Letter to God Dear Father, may I not offer false worship to You. Help me worship You with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength. Thank You for Your mercy and forgiveness over me. So many times I do what I shouldn't be doing—I'm sorry. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



The Visible Jesus

John 19:17-24

The Sign

17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).

18 Here they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.

Jesus is crucified in Golgotha. Pilate had a notice that said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," and fastened it to the cross. The soldiers took Jesus' clothes, divided them into four shares. And they cast lots for the undergarment.

21 The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews."

22 Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

The Shame

23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

24 "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." So this is what the soldiers did.

The Sign (19:17-22)

When a man was crucified, there was a custom to post a sign on top of the cross to show what the man's crime was. The sign would also serve as a warning to all who passed by not to commit that crime lest they suffer the same fate. The Jews wanted Pilate to write that Jesus claimed to be the King of the Jews, the Son of God, which was blasphemy according to their laws. But since that was not a crime under Roman law, Pilate did not think it was fitting to write it. Instead, Pilate wrote only that Jesus was the King of the Jews. Whether he meant this to add to Jesus' ridicule or as some form of acknowledgement of Jesus' claims, we cannot be certain. But God used the sign to fulfill John 3:14-15, that Jesus would be lifted up as a sign of salvation.

The Shame (19:23-24)

When we talk or sing about the cross, we often focus on the sufferings it symbolizes. There have been many studies and sermons on the effects of crucifixion on the human body, but not nearly as many on the mind. We tend not to think about the shame of crucifixion as much as the pain, but for Jesus, the shame was just as real and just as difficult to bear. Back in verse 20 we read that many people saw Jesus on the cross because the site was near the city. What we often miss, however, is that Jesus was completely naked on the cross! Verse 23 tells us that the soldiers gambled for His undergarment, meaning He was not wearing them at the time. Everyone who passed saw Jesus in His torture and nakedness. Because He bore the shame of our sin for us, we do not have to (Rom. 8:1).

Application

- God in His mercy devised a simple and easy way for people to be saved, yet so many still perish because they do not believe.
- That Jesus took our shame does not mean we can sin shamelessly. It means we do not have to bear the shame of being identified as sinners because we are now identified as glorious children of God.

"Sin has the devil for its father, shame for its companion, and death for its wages." – Thomas Watson

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The Cross and Heaven

Many imagine that it is civilized, humane, and compassionate to deny the existence of an eternal Hell, but in fact it is arrogant that we, as creatures, would dare to take what we think is the moral high ground in opposition to what God the Creator has clearly revealed. We don't want to believe that any others deserve eternal punishment, because if they do, so do we. But if we understood God's nature and ours, we would be shocked not that some people could go to Hell (where else would sinners go?), but that any would be permitted into Heaven. Unholy as we are, we are disqualified from saying that infinite holiness doesn't demand everlasting punishment. By denying the endlessness of Hell, we minimize Christ's work on the cross. Why? Because we lower the stakes of redemption. If Christ's crucifixion and resurrection didn't deliver us from an eternal Hell, his work on the cross is less heroic, less potent, less consequential, and thus less deserving of our worship and praise. As theologian William G. T. Shedd put it, "The doctrine of Christ's vicarious atonement logically stands or falls with that of eternal punishment."

Satan has obvious motives for fueling our denial of eternal punishment: He wants unbelievers to reject Christ without fear; he wants Christians to be unmotivated to share Christ; and he wants God to receive less glory for the radical nature of Christ's redemptive work.

- *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn

A Letter to God Father, thank You for sending Jesus who took away my shame. It breaks my heart that so many people refuse to look at the sign and be saved. Give me a greater conviction to help people see Jesus and receive eternal life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Finishing the Work

John 19:25-30

Divine Consideration

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son,"

27 and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

• Memory Verse of the Week

"Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."" (John 18:36)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 28 □ John 7 □ Prov. 4 □ Gal. 3

Jesus told John to take care of His mother. Then, Jesus said, "I am thirsty" and fulfilled the Scripture. So people soaked a sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant in wine vinegar and lifted it to Jesus' lips. Then Jesus said, "It is finished" and gave up His spirit.

It Is Finished

28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."

29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Divine Consideration (19:25-27)

As a divine being, Jesus was perfect in every way. This means that Jesus committed no sins, not even sins of omission. Often we are guilty not of the things we do but of the things we do not do. When we fail to apologize for something we've done wrong, that is a sin of omission. When we deliberately turn our back to someone in great need, that too is a sin. Jesus never sinned by neglecting to do what was required of Him, and this truth applies even to His suffering on the cross.

Anyone else in that terrible position would have been in too much pain, agony, anger, or self-pity to care about anybody else but themselves. Jesus, however, was different because He was God. Even while enduring such humiliating torture, Jesus took the time to care for His mother's needs. Truly, being Christ-like is no easy matter.

It Is Finished (19:28-30)

These three verses contain two of the last phrases uttered by Christ. The first phrase, "I am thirsty", was uttered to fulfill the prophecy of Psalm 69:21 ("They gave me vinegar for my thirst"). Jesus also asked for a drink to moisten His throat so that He could utter His last words "It is finished!" with a loud voice. These last words refer to the work of Christ that was completed on the cross. The work refers to the atonement for sins, the defeat of death, and the satisfaction of God's wrath upon Himself. These are works that only Christ could have accomplished.

Because Christ's work is finished, it never needs to be repeated again. We do not have to fear punishment, death, or God's wrath ever again. We can live in complete freedom in Christ because of the finished work of the cross. The cross is the heart of the Gospel.

Application

- How much do we care for others in times when we are stressed or feeling burdened? It is a true mark of spiritual maturity and Christ-like character to care for others when we are down.
- We do not have to fear punishment, but God still has the right to discipline His children. And while we do not fear God's wrath, we should still fear God Himself for that is the beginning of all wisdom.

Title

A Letter to God

Lord, thank You for the cross. It is through the cross that all my sins were atoned for, all my punishment taken away, and all my diseases healed. May I run to the cross every day and preach about it to those around me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Compelling Words & Actions

John 19:31-42

True Testimony

31 Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.

32 The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other.

33 But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

36 These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken,"

The Jews asked Pilate to remove the body of Jesus for the Sabbath. The soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, wrapped the body of Jesus with the spices in strips of linen.

37 and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

Caring Devotion

38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away.

39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.

40 Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.

41 At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid.

42 Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

• Memory Verse of the Week

"Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."" (John 18:36)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 29 □ John 8 □ Prov. 5 □ Gal. 4

True Testimony (19:31-37)

This passage offers several more important points in the testimony of John, the beloved disciple of Christ. First is the testimony of the blood and the water. Many people have tried to deny the death of Christ by saying that He did not really die but that He was taken off the cross alive. This false teaching has led to many conspiracies regarding Jesus, including the idea that He married and had children. But verse 34 shows that Jesus was clearly dead because both blood and water spilled from His side. Only when the heart stops beating can the blood separate from water. Also, in verses 36-37, we see that two more ancient prophecies were fulfilled in the crucifixion, that His bones would not be broken and that He would be pierced. So many prophecies were fulfilled in the crucifixion that it takes more faith not to believe that He was the expected Messiah.

Caring Devotion (19:38-42)

Even after His death, Jesus' followers were loyal and committed to Him, and two of His secret disciples display tender love and devotion for their Lord in this passage. Because Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were prominent Jewish leaders, they had much to lose if they were associated with Christ. But they were brave enough to take such a risk in order to give Jesus a proper burial. Joseph goes even further by placing Jesus' body in his own tomb that he bought and cut for himself (Matt. 27:59-60). Part of loving someone is taking risks for them. Part of being devoted to someone means giving up something for their sake. Love is not an easy matter. It is a committed and intentional act of the will. God calls us to love Him in this way. Let us not offer God sacrifices and worship that cost us nothing (2 Sam. 24:24).

Application

- From this passage, we see that both words and actions can make a powerful testimony. Take some time to consider how your recent words and actions have testified to others about Christ.
- Part of loving God means taking risks and making sacrifices for Him. What has your worship and devotion cost you recently? If it costs you nothing, ask God to show you how to be more committed so you can experience a deeper level of love.

"Spirit-filled souls are ablaze for God. They love with a love that glows. They serve with a faith that kindles. They serve with a devotion that consumes." – Samuel Chadwick

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The Larger Picture

Even if Satan is sometimes involved as the nearer cause of our calamities, it is not sin to see God as the more distant, primary, and ultimate cause. Satan's design is the destruction of faith (Job 2:5; 1 Thess. 3:5), but God's design is the deep cure of our soul, as the hymn, "How Firm a Foundation," says so powerfully:

When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

Like Job, Paul recognized his thorn in the flesh as a "messenger of Satan" (2 Cor. 12:7) but designed by God for a gracious purpose: "to keep me from being too elated [conceited]."

Satan does not have free reign in the world and even less so in the family of God. Therefore, in our struggle with suffering, it will never be a sufficient comfort to say, "It is of Satan and not of God." The only genuine comfort will come from acknowledging that the all-powerful God has done it and that He is infinitely wise and infinitely loving to those who trust Him.

- *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* by John Piper

A Letter to God Father, may I be like Joseph and Nicodemus who risked persecution just to show their devotion to You. And may my words and actions be a powerful testimony of Your love and truth to others. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Developing Disciples

John 20:1-10

Unending Devotion

1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Growing Realization

3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.

4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb of Jesus. When she saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance, she told the disciples about it. Peter and the other disciple ran to the tomb and saw the strips of linen, the cloth, and the empty tomb and went back to their homes.

5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.

6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there,

7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.

8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

10 Then the disciples went back to their homes,

Unending Devotion (20:1-2)

Yesterday we looked at the devotion of two of Jesus' secret disciples, Joseph and Nicodemus. In our passage today, we see a glimpse of the undying devotion of Jesus' followers even days after His death. As we know, Jesus was buried for three days and then rose from the tomb on the third day. The third day was the first day of the week, what we call Sunday, and early Sunday morning Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb. It is clear that she would not bother going there unless she still felt some commitment and devotion to her Lord. This devotion is all the more commendable when we remember that she did not yet have a complete understanding of Christ's death and resurrection. Her knowledge was incomplete, but her devotion was strong.

Growing Realization (20:3-10)

Despite Jesus' amazing teaching abilities, the Twelve disciples were still largely in the dark about His purpose and mission. Only after Jesus reappeared and explained things to them did they finally start to get the full picture. But here we see a little light of realization go on in John's mind that was a long time coming.

Peter and John ran to the tomb upon hearing that Jesus' body was missing. Apparently, they believed Mary's claim that someone had stolen it from the tomb and were running with alarm (v. 4). But a thief would not take the time to take off the burial cloths and fold them (v. 7). This puzzling observation led John to think twice and he started to recall Jesus' words about His resurrection. Only then did he start to piece things together (v. 8), but from what he saw, not from Scripture (v. 9).

Application

- Despite the lack of information, Mary showed complete and unquestioning devotion to God. We often fail to act or trust in God because we are always asking for more information or "confirmation." Sometimes we need more faith, not more information.
- The disciples had to rely on their eyes and memories to understand the Gospel, but we do not have that option. We have to rely on God's Word and the Spirit for revelation.

"The golden rule for understanding in spiritual matters is not intellect, but obedience." – Oswald Chambers

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The Truth

Scripture is clear that the resurrection of Jesus is both a matter of fact and faith. The historical fact is that Jesus Christ alone has risen from death. For that fact to be of any benefit to us, though, we must receive it by personal faith in the person of Jesus and fact of his resurrection. Rather than saying, "I haven't a clue" about what happens after death, through the fact of Jesus' resurrection we have the answer about what awaits us on the other side of the grave. We can live with assurance in our own eternal life and resurrection...

The resurrection of Jesus is the most known and celebrated miracle in the history of the world. There has always been consensus that it is in many ways the core issue of our Christian faith:

–Thomas Arnold: "No one fact in the history of mankind... is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort" than the fact that "Christ died and rose from the dead."

–Bishop B.F. Westcott: "Indeed, taking all the evidences together... it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ."

–John Locke: "Our Savior's resurrection... is truly of great importance in Christianity; so great that His being or not being the Messiah stands or falls with it."

- *Vintage Jesus* by Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears

A Letter to God Father in heaven, give me a heart of devotion to You that surpasses my knowledge and understanding of things. May I trust You even when I do not have all the information I want. Teach me more about You and Your Gospel through Your Word. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



20 Sat. The Risen Lord

John 20:11-23

Jesus' First Appearance

11 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb

12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."

14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

• Memory Verse of the Week

"Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."" (John 18:36)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 31 □ John 10 □ Prov. 7 □ Gal. 6

As Mary stood outside the tomb crying, Jesus came to her. She told the disciples about the resurrection just as Jesus told her to. Jesus appeared to His disciples when they were together. Jesus breathed on them and told them to receive the Holy Spirit.

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Grief Turns to Joy

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

23 If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus' First Appearance (20:11-18)

Mary Magdalene will forever have the distinction of being the first person to have seen the risen Lord. Perhaps it was because of her great devotion (which we read about yesterday) that she was given this honor. As we can see from verses 10-15, Mary still did not have a complete understanding of what happened, but she refused to leave the tomb.

All it took was one word for Mary to recognize her Lord (v. 16). When Jesus calls our names, our spirits recognize His voice and long to respond. Jesus' words in verse 17 are pregnant with meaning. Jesus hints at His ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit, for only when Jesus returned to the Father could He send the Spirit (John 16:7). Jesus also affirms His disciples as "brothers" under the same Father. This message was meant to encourage the disciples and to prepare them to see Him again.

Grief Turns to Joy (20:19-23)

That Sunday night, in verse 19, the disciples were gathered in "fear," but after seeing the risen Lord in verse 20, they were "overjoyed." This passage is proof that Jesus rose in flesh and not as some spirit, as some have claimed. It also shows that the disciples did not secretly hide His body, for then they would not have been surprised at His appearing to them. Verse 22 is more difficult to interpret. While some see this as the actual coming of the Spirit, its brief treatment here seems to suggest otherwise. Acts 2 is most likely the moment the Spirit came upon the church in full. Jesus breathing on the disciples here is probably a foretaste or temporary empowerment of what is to come, or it may be symbolic of the authority Jesus gives them in verse 23. But what's important is that Jesus made their joy complete as He promised (John 15:11).

Application

- In verse 17, Jesus says that the relationship we have with God the Father is now the same as His relationship with God the Father. How does this knowledge affect or help you approach God and pray to Him?
- Jesus always fulfills His promise to turn our grief into joy and to give us peace. Even when we are full of fear, Jesus can come to us at any time and surprise us with good news!

"The joy of the Lord will arm us against the assaults of our spiritual enemies and put our mouths out of taste for those pleasures with which the tempter baits his hooks." – Matthew Henry

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I Send You!

And now he sends us into the world as he was sent into the world (John 17:18; 20:21). We have to penetrate other people's worlds, as he penetrated ours: the world of their thinking (as we struggle to understand their misunderstandings of the gospel), the world of their feeling (as we try to empathize with their pain), and the world of their living (as we sense the humiliation of their social situation, whether poverty, homelessness, unemployment or discrimination). Archbishop Michael Ramsey put it well when he wrote in his critique of secular theology: "we state and commend the faith only in so far as we go out and put ourselves with loving sympathy inside the doubts of the doubter, the questions of the questioner, and the loneliness of those who have lost the way." Yet this costly entry into other people's worlds is not to be undertaken at the cost of our own Christian integrity. We are called to maintain the standards of Jesus Christ untarnished."...

"Mission" arises, then, from the biblical doctrine of the church in the world. If we are not "the church," the holy and distinct people of God, we have nothing to say because we are compromised. If, on the other hand, we are not "in the world," deeply involved in its life and suffering, we have no one to serve because we are insulated. Our calling is to be "holy" and "worldly" at the same time. Without this balanced biblical ecclesiology we will never recover or fulfill our mission.

- *The Living Church* by John Stott

A Letter to God

O Father, thank You for the gift of the Spirit, through whom I am united with Christ. Continue to fill me with Your Spirit and turn my sorrows into joy and peace in times of trouble. Send me to bring people Your message of life and forgiveness. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



21 Sun.

Doubt and Faith

John 20:24-31

Overcoming Doubt

24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “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 it.”

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”

27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Thomas did not believe in Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus appeared to His disciples again and told Thomas to see His hands and His side. Then Thomas believed Jesus. Jesus said that those who have not seen and yet have believed are blessed.

28 Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

The Blessing of Believing

29 Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

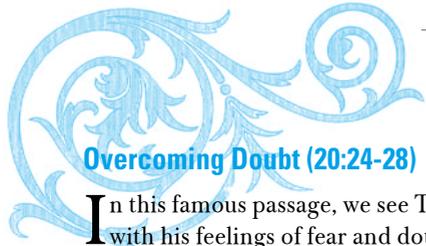
31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

• Memory Verse of the Week

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 32 □ John 11 □ Prov. 8 □ Eph. 1



Reflection

Overcoming Doubt (20:24-28)

In this famous passage, we see Thomas, one of the Twelve disciples struggling with his feelings of fear and doubt. Emotional struggles were nothing new to Thomas. In John 11:16, upon hearing that Lazarus was dead, Thomas rashly exclaimed that they should go to Lazarus' house so they could die with him. In today's passage, Thomas has trouble believing that the others had seen Jesus because of his inability to master his feelings; Thomas always let his feelings control him. Jesus graciously appeared to Thomas in the flesh so that he could see for himself that Jesus was alive. In fact, Jesus was more than alive. Once Thomas was convinced, he utters a statement that is one of the clearest affirmations of Jesus' deity, saying "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28)

The Blessing of Believing (20:29-31)

In the end, Thomas believed in Jesus because of what he saw with his own eyes and felt with his own hands. In the face of such clear and obvious proof, it does not take much faith to believe. But because Thomas believed in the end, he was blessed. Jesus' point in verse 29 is that those who believe without such tangible proof are more blessed because they demonstrate greater faith in Him. In verse 31, John writes the purpose for this book. The reason he wrote his gospel was so that his readers might believe in Jesus Christ and so share in the same blessing that Jesus talked about in verse 29. John adds that the blessing of belief or faith in Christ is eternal life, or "life in His name" as he puts it here. Jesus calls us to a higher level of faith than Thomas displays in this passage.

Application

- How well do you control your emotions? Are you able to behave toward others as you should even when you are angry? Are you able to do what God wants you to do faithfully without emotional hindrances?

- Often we ask God for proof or visible signs before we decide to believe in Him or trust Him. But those who put their faith in Christ without visible evidence are more blessed. Believe in Christ with all your heart today.

Sunday Worship

Sermon Title

Bible Passage

Notes

Application

*A Letter
to
God*

Father, my faith is sometimes so weak. Help me overcome any doubt or unbelief in my heart. May I put my faith in You, no matter what the circumstances around me are like. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Jesus Calls Again

John 21:1-14

Back to Old Habits

1 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way:

2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

3 “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

5 He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered.

6 He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Jesus’ Reminders

7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

Peter and some other disciples went to fish but caught nothing that night. But when they did what Jesus told them to do, they caught a large number of fish. Then the disciples recognized Jesus and met Jesus on the shore.

8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.

9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.”

11 Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.

12 Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord.

13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

• Memory Verse of the Week

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 33 □ John 12 □ Prov. 9 □ Eph. 2

Back to Old Habits (21:1-6)

Despite the miraculous and inspiring events the Twelve had witnessed recently, they lacked the motivation to go out and continue the work that Jesus wanted them to do. When Jesus first called Peter and the disciples, He told them that they would no longer be fishers of fish but fishers of men. Why, then, were they fishing instead of ministering among the people as Jesus had done? We can see the result of their labor in verse 5. Jesus knew all things, especially after His resurrection, and He knew that the disciples had no fish. The reason He asked them if they had any was to point out the futility of their former way of life, of doing things by their own strength and wisdom. Jesus’ question is similar to when God asked Adam and Eve where they were after they had sinned (Gen. 3:9).

Jesus’ Reminders (21:7-14)

Because the disciples had relapsed into their old life, Jesus had to remind them of the things He had taught them over the past three years. The disciples witness yet another miracle when this apparent stranger tells them—professional fishermen—where to find the biggest catch of fish they had ever seen. This immediately signals to John that the stranger was Jesus, and Peter, not wanting to approach His Lord half naked, puts his robe on (rather than taking it off as most people would do when they enter the water) and swims to shore. Then another amazing thing happens. Not only did the disciples catch a huge number of fish, but when they reached the shore, they found that Jesus had already provided for their needs with a warm fire, some fish, and bread. In this way, Jesus reminds His disciples that He is the great provider for their lives.

Application

- When we do things relying on our own strength and wisdom, it usually ends up in failure or partial success. But when we do things in God’s way, it ends up better than we could have expected.
- Jesus is the one who provides for all our own needs. Is there something that you really need from the Lord? Lift up your requests to Him in faith through prayer, and He will be faithful to take care of you.

Recommitment

“When Jesus was crucified,” Moreland began, “his followers were discouraged and depressed. They no longer had confidence that Jesus had been sent by God, because they believed anyone crucified was accursed by God. They also had been taught that God would not let his Messiah suffer death. So they dispersed. The Jesus movement was all but stopped in its tracks.

“Then, after a short period of time, we see them abandoning their occupations, regathering, and committing themselves to spreading a very specific message—that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of God who died on a cross, returned to life, and was seen alive by them.

“And they were willing to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming this, without any payoff from a human point of view. It’s not as though there were a mansion awaiting them on the Mediterranean. They faced a life of hardship. They often went without food, slept exposed to the elements, were ridiculed, beaten, imprisoned. And finally, most of them were executed in torturous ways.

“For what? For good intentions? No, because they were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that they had seen Jesus Christ alive from the dead. What you can’t explain is how this particular group of men came up with this particular belief without having had an experience of the resurrected Christ. There’s no other adequate explanation.”

- *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel

A Letter to God Father in heaven, I thank You and praise You because You always provide for all my needs. Keep me from returning to old habits, and give me Your strength and wisdom to do the ministry that You called me to do. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



23 Tue. Personal Relationship

John 21:15-25

Personal Restoration

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

16 Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

17 The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Personal Responsibility

18 Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”

19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” three times. Peter answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Then Jesus commanded him to feed His sheep. Peter asked Jesus about the other disciples, but Jesus told him to just follow Himself.

Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”)

21 When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”

22 Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.”

23 Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”

24 This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

• Memory Verse of the Week

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 34 □ John 13 □ Prov. 10 □ Eph. 3

Personal Restoration (21:15-17)

Before Jesus was crucified, Peter had denied Christ three times. Many believe this is why Jesus asks Peter three times if he loved Him. Denying Christ is considered one of the most egregious sins to most Christians. It was tantamount to blasphemy to early Christians who disagreed whether those who denied Christ under persecution should be allowed back into the church. It is clear from this passage what Jesus' attitude was toward Peter's denial. Jesus neither verbally abused Him or put a guilt trip on Him, nor did He ask Peter to pay any form of penance. He only told Peter to love Him, feed His sheep, and follow Him. One important note: much has been made about the different Greek words here for "love" and "sheep." These differences are not important, since it was John's habit to use many synonyms interchangeably all the time.

Personal Responsibility (21:18-25)

One of the key verses in this passage is verse 22. To paraphrase the words of Christ, it says that we should not think about what God calls others to do, but we should only be concerned with what God has called us to do. Humans are so often preoccupied with the game of comparison, and Christians are no different. We always seem to be comparing ourselves with our neighbors. This is why God took care to write a command about it in the Ten Commandments ("Thou shalt not covet"). When we play the comparison game, no one wins. Even if you are the top human in a particular area (the best athlete, the richest man, the most beautiful woman, etc.), there will always be someone better than you in another area, for no one can be the best in every human category. What is important is to keep our eyes on Jesus and follow Him alone.

Application

- Jesus was far kinder to Peter than many of us would be to someone who betrays us. We should learn from Jesus' example and practice gentleness, patience, and mercy to those who offend us and hurt us.
- Have you been struggling with envy or jealousy in your heart? Follow Jesus' words and focus your attention on Him alone. What matters most is pleasing our Lord and being faithful to the task He has personally given us.

"Faith cannot be inherited or gained by being baptized into a church. Faith is a matter between the individual and God." – Martin Luther

Prayer Guide >> Adoration | Confession | Thanksgiving | Supplication

Do You Love God?

The outer life of a man is not the man, just as the paint on a piece of timber is not the timber, and as the green moss upon the hard rock is not the rock itself. The picture of a man is not the man; it is but a skillful arrangement of colors which look like the man. The man that loves God with all his heart is in a right state; the man that does not love him thus is in a wrong one. He is a sinner; because his heart is not right with God. He may think his life a good one, and others may think the same; but God counts him guilty, worthy of death and hell. The outward good cannot make up for the inward evil. The good deeds done to his fellow man cannot be set off against his bad thoughts of God. And he must be full of these bad thoughts so long as he does not love this infinitely lovable and infinitely glorious Being with all his strength.

God's testimony then concerning man is, that he does not love God with all his heart; nay, that he does not love him at all. Not to love our neighbor is sin; not to love a parent is greater sin; but not to love God, our divine parent, is greater sin still.

- *God's Way of Peace* by Horatius Bonar

A Letter to God Sovereign Lord, I thank You for the personal relationship I have with You. May I keep my eyes fixed on You and You alone, not looking to the right or to the left or to my neighbor. May I be faithful to Your calling. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



The Reluctant Prophet

Jonah 1:1-10

On the Run

1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai:

2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

4 Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.

5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.

God commands Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach a message of judgment. But Jonah runs away and sails for Tarshish. The Lord sends a great wind and the ship is about to break up. They cast lots and find out that the trouble has happened because of Jonah.

The Eye of the Storm

6 The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish.”

7 Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

8 So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”

9 He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.”

10 This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

• Memory Verse of the Week

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 35 □ John 14 □ Prov. 11 □ Eph. 4



On the Run (1:1-5)

Unlike the other books of the minor prophets, the Book of Jonah does not center around the prophet’s messages but rather on prophet himself and his narrative. It’s a succinct book of only 4 chapters and it begins as abruptly as it ends. The opening lines plainly tell us that the word of the Lord had come to Jonah to preach to Nineveh but Jonah runs. Jonah’s problem is that he loves God but despises the message and, even more, the intended recipients of that message. He runs in the opposite direction hoping that maybe God would leave him alone or ask someone else to go. But we cannot divorce God from His actions; in other words, we cannot love God and disobey what He asks us to do. Sometimes God will ask us to do the very thing that we do not want to do. Let’s pray for courage in these moments so that we might obey rather than run.

The Eye of the Storm (1:6-10)

Jonah runs but God does not let him run away—not that Jonah could outrun God. But that didn’t seem to bother Jonah, he is angry at God for even asking him to do such a task as to preach to his enemies! He runs and even during that storm that threatens to sink the ship that carries him, he sleeps perhaps hoping that the ship would sink before he had to go preach to Nineveh. When the other sailors wake him and ask him questions, his answers are precise and matter-of-fact—Jonah knows exactly who he’s running from. He doesn’t care what happens to anyone as long as he doesn’t have to preach repentance to Nineveh. He does not even want to give them a chance to live. But that’s not Jonah’s call to make and God will use this reluctant prophet to deliver the message of repentance.

Application

- It’s hard to obey God especially when He asks us to go beyond what we believe our hearts are capable of. May we learn to obey God with all our heart.
- Our consciences are not an accurate barometer of our obedience to God. We can easily convince ourselves that what we are doing is right or justified. Let us become more sensitive to God so as to make His will our will.

Jonah’s Past as a Leader?

My past directly impacted what kind of leader I was becoming. I began to see that I would never lead well until some of my damaged past was healed. I needed to forgive some key people in my life whom I felt had let me down...

Some of us, maybe most of us, have episodes or relationships from the past that either freeze us in our tracks or so overwhelm us with guilt or shame that we hit the “delete” button whenever it comes up on the screen of our minds. I know I did this with Mom. It was easier to forget that she was part of my life than to admit how mad I was that she had abandoned me.

Don’t hit the delete button on those things from the past that keep coming up on the screen of your mind... The God who owns the book that contains “all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed,” is never surprised or caught off-guard. He is the one who comforts us in all our troubles.

Dealing with our deep secrets and wounds will liberate us to become better leaders. It won’t be easy and it may take years or even decades of exploration and hard work. There may be valleys where our leadership suffers for a season. Mine did. But seasons do end and what emerges is a healthier leader with much more to offer their followers.

- *Invitation to Lead* by Paul Tokunaga

A Letter to God Dear God, I pray for obedience in my everyday tasks and especially during those times when I do not want to listen. Give me the courage to overcome my own narrow desires. Help me to expand my heart to include Your kingdom vision for all people. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



25 Thu. Under the Sea

Jonah 1:11-17

Appeasement

11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”

12 “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.

14 Then they cried to the LORD, “O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased.”

The men tried to row back to land but they could not for the sea grew even wilder. So they threw Jonah overboard. Then the raging sea grew calm. The Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and he was inside the fish three days and nights.

15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm.

16 At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

Big Fish

17 But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.

• **Memory Verse of the Week**

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

• **Bible-In-One-Year Reading**

□ Exodus 36 □ John 15 □ Prov. 12 □ Eph. 5

Appeasement (1:11-16)

The sailors know that God is angry at Jonah and so they look to him saying, "He's *your* God! Tell us how to appease Him!" Jonah's answer is to throw him overboard. God is angry and he knows that he's the one who has caused this storm—there's no need for anyone else to get hurt. However, the sailors are determined to save Jonah's life and their actions on behalf of this troublesome stranger stand in stark contrast to Jonah's, a prophet of God who ran away because he could not bear to preach repentance to a wicked city. When they realize they have no choice but to throw Jonah overboard, they ask for forgiveness for taking a life and leave the rest up to God. The actions of the crew demonstrate the compassion for life that Jonah should have had for the city of Nineveh.

Big Fish (1:17)

When Jonah was thrown overboard, he didn't expect a big fish to come and save him. In fact, he was ready to die for disobeying God—he knew the penalty for his disobedience and was willing to pay it rather than go to Nineveh. This reveals to us that Jonah misunderstood a couple things about God; (1) His love and compassion for *all* people including the Assyrians, (2) His love and compassion for Jonah. Rather than let Jonah perish with a bitter heart, God decides that it is worth the fish's time to allow Jonah to learn what true compassion is from the Lord's perspective. For three days and three nights Jonah is in the fish's stomach, uncomfortable to say the least but alive and left to meditate on why God would put him in such a position. Simply put, God loves Jonah too much to leave him alone.

Coming Clean Before God

As I lay there on the floor before the Lord crying in repentance, I asked for His mercy. From now on I'd speak out in real praise for my former leaders, grateful again for them and for my godly heritage. I'd let God defend the vision, if it was from Him. Lying there on the green carpet, I knew that God had heard me and forgiven me.

The scalpel probed again. And again. Throughout the day, hour after hour. My pride suddenly loomed before me—I saw the times I had acted for the recognition of men rather than God. Mom's words in my bedroom-turned-office a long time ago suddenly dropped into my mind: "Son, if you get proud, God can't use you." Then God put His finger on sins of the mind, sexual fantasies. As each sin—of thought, or attitude, or action—came to my mind, I confessed it, asking God to forgive me and help me to turn away from it.

When I knew the soul surgery was finally over, I sensed in my spirit that I had one more act of repentance to do. I found stationery and a pen and began the first of several letters I knew I had to write in order to make my relationship right with certain people... It was excruciating to have to write and bare my soul, but that night I settled back into bed with a brand-new feeling of cleanness.

- *Is That Really You, God?* by Loren Cunningham

Application

- As Christians we should be compassionate. When we receive unexpected and undeserved acts of kindness, let them remind us of God's compassion and inspire to pay it forward.

- The punishment for sin is death but God does not leave it at that. Like Jonah—and ultimately Christ—God goes out of His way to save us. Remember His kindness to help you through the tough times.

A Letter to God Dear God, I pray that Your compassion would stir in my heart. Remind me daily of Your deliverance so that I too might be compassionate to those around me, friend or foe, neighbor or stranger. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



26 Fri. Jonah's Prayer

Jonah 2:1-10

Distress Calls

1 From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God.

2 He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry.

3 You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me.

4 I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'

5 The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.

Jonah prayed to the Lord inside the fish. He prayed earnestly saying how God answers and listens to his cries. The Lord then listened to his prayer and commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land.

6 To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God.

7 "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.

Salvation Belongs to God

8 "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

9 But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD."

10 And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

• Memory Verse of the Week

"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 37 □ John 16 □ Prov. 13 □ Eph. 6

Distress Calls (2:1-7)

When Jonah was thrown overboard, it was with an expectation of death. He would've rather died than go to Nineveh but God isn't so easily thwarted by the likes of man. Jonah was the messenger that God had chosen and he was going to go. Drowning was just a little hiccup along the way—a much needed one that reminds Jonah of who God is. In the gross-ness of the fish's stomach, Jonah begins to come to terms with his mission and his disobedience. In his distress, he calls to God for help and in verse 4, we see that same fierce boldness that led him to defy God outright but in a very humbled light. Though God has banished him, he will still continue to look towards the holy temple. God is still his God, regardless of Nineveh, Tarshish or the big fish. It just took a little reminding.

Salvation Belongs to God (2:8-10)

Doing time in a fish's stomach must be a sobering experience because this is also when Jonah begins to understand God's grace—God saves people regardless of their disobedience because salvation belongs to God alone. He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy—this includes the Ninevites and this includes Jonah at the height of his disobedience. Though he deserved and even expected death, God saves him. And just like Jonah who had forfeited his life for disobeying God but found life, God desires to give a chance to the Ninevites who “forfeit the grace that could be theirs” (v. 8). With a renewed resolve, though perhaps still a little reluctant, Jonah thanks God for grace and salvation and prepares to fulfill his mission. By the grace of God and for the grace of God, he's going to go to Nineveh.

Application

- We run from a lot of things in life and we often find ourselves in difficult situations. Let's spend some time today in prayer, asking God to show us His will and give us the courage to obey.

- God often puts us into hopeless situations so we can learn to trust Him *and* His will. The outcome might not always be what we want but it's what we need. Let's allow God to mold our hearts in all circumstances.

The Power of Repentance

The prayer of repentance is the most powerful act on Earth. It releases heaven on Earth. It establishes God's rule and Lordship in your life. It establishes God's kingdom and dominion into all of society. The prayer of repentance is what opened the heavens over my life for miracles to happen. The prayer of repentance is the foundation for releasing revival in you and your generation. Without true repentance prayer, you cannot know God and you cannot fully enter into His kingdom or into the power of His presence.

Many people believe the prayer of repentance is simply saying you're sorry to Jesus or attending a church service and feeling remorseful for sinning. Others think repentance is saying a prayer of casual faith in God's grace, or think it is only necessary for those who have sinned big-time.

A prayer of repentance is none of the above. A true prayer of repentance is not a feeling; it is a decision. It is the beginning of true freedom. It is where life starts. Repentance is the moment you make the conscious decision to completely surrender your will and selfish ambition to God. It is the ultimate act of humility. It is when you begin to turn from your way of thinking and back to God's way of thinking.

- *The Blueprint* by Jaeson Ma

A Letter to God Dear God, I've run away from You so many times, thinking that I know better. I've been hurt and I've hurt others along the way. Help me hear Your voice and do Your will. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Back on Dry Land

Jonah 3:1-10

Going to Nineveh

1 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time:

2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

3 Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days.

4 On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.”

5 The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Jonah proclaimed how in forty more days Nineveh will be overturned. Then the Ninevites and their king put on sackcloth, sat down in the dust, and repented. God saw their repentance and did not bring upon them the destruction.

Repentance and Forgiveness

6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.

7 Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink.

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.

9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

• Memory Verse of the Week

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 38 □ John 17 □ Prov. 14 □ Phil. 1

Going to Nineveh (3:1-5)

After Jonah was vomited onto dry land, the Lord once again tells him to go to Nineveh and this time he goes. The visit to the Assyrian capital takes three days and Jonah spends the entire time preaching repentance to his enemies. As Jonah brings God’s message, the entire city declares a fast in repentance. When they heard Jonah’s message, the people chose to repent and be saved rather than being destroyed. It’s obvious from his first attempt to run from the assignment that Jonah didn’t like what God was asking him to do but obedience isn’t contingent upon us liking it. Jonah should’ve trusted God’s plan that there would be a time when Assyria would pay for the evil that they had done but now was not that time. It would not be until 612 BC that Nineveh would fall to the Babylonians.

Repentance and Forgiveness (3:6-10)

The response of Nineveh is pretty impressive. They hear the message, believe it and immediately repent, from the greatest to the least. What a marvelous sight it would have been to see this “very important city” (v. 3) come to its knees before God in repentance! Jonah had delivered the message and because of his obedience—albeit the second time around—the entire city was saved. People had heard of the Lord and turned to Him. It has always been God’s desire to have all the nations know Him, turn to Him and be saved. Forgiveness is available for all who choose to repent for God is loving and compassionate. His desire is to forgive, save and bless and when we repent, it opens up those floodgates of mercy and grace.

Application

- It’s not up to us to withhold the message of salvation from anyone—even our enemy. Let’s learn to forgive as we have been forgiven and love as we have been loved.
- We can certainly learn how to repent from this pagan city! When we know that we’re doing something wrong, let us turn to God without hesitation. His compassion is greater than we know and His love is unconditional.

Revival and Fasting

That this hunger for God should awaken a renewed interest in fasting is not new and not surprising. It has happened before at times of awakening. While the winds of the first Great Awakening in America were still blowing in 1742, Jonathan Edwards, its strongest defender and most penetrating analyst, longed for God to continue the blessing and increase it around the world. One of the means he commended was fasting... although they [ministers] recommend and much insist on the duty of secret prayer, in their preaching; so little is said about secret fasting. It is a duty recommended by our Savior to his followers, just in like manner as secret prayer is... Though I don’t suppose that secret fasting is to be practiced in a stated manner and steady course as secret prayer, yet it seems to me ‘tis a duty that all professing Christians should practice, and frequently practice. There are many occasions of both a spiritual and temporal nature that do properly require it; and there are many particular mercies that we desire for ourselves or friends that it would be proper, in this manner, to seek of God.

I should think the people of God in this land, at such a time as this is, would be in the way of their duty to do three times so much at fasting and prayer as they do.

- *A Hunger for God* by John Piper

A Letter to God Gracious God! Give me the humility and good sense to repent when I am in disobedience and grant me the love to share that message of repentance and forgiveness. Let me be the bearer of the Gospel to all the nations! In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



The Angry Prophet

Jonah 4:1-11

Angry at Compassion

1 But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.

2 He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

3 Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

4 But the LORD replied, “Have you any right to be angry?”

An Object Lesson

5 Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.

6 Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.

When God did not bring judgment upon them, Jonah became very angry. He went out and made a shelter and waited to see what would happen to the city. God provided a vine and a worm to let Jonah know that he has no right to be angry and to let him know how much God cares for Nineveh.

7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered.

8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”

9 But God said to Jonah, “Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?” “I do,” he said. “I am angry enough to die.”

10 But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.

11 But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?”



Reflection

Angry at Compassion (4:1-4)

Jonah knows God—he *knew* that God would forgive the Assyrians for their wickedness and therefore spare them from destruction and that’s what Jonah did *not* want. This is why he ran in the first place! He wanted to see Nineveh destroyed! Sometimes we’re so consumed by anger and bitterness that we cannot stand it when God loves that person (or people). How could God love Assyrians? They were bitter enemies of God’s people and would even go on to conquer Israel in 722 BC. Would God have such compassion for these people? Jonah doesn’t understand it and a lot of the times, we don’t either. But that’s how deep God’s love runs. It doesn’t make sense on human terms because there are things and people beyond our capacity to love. And that’s why we need God—because we are those very people to someone else.

An Object Lesson (4:5-11)

As Jonah settles in to see if God would suddenly wipe out the city “Sodom and Gomorrah style,” he’s more than disappointed when it is not wiped out. He’s also furious when the vine that God provided withers away because of a worm. As he lies in the scorching heat, he’s angry enough to die. Jonah’s hatred for the Assyrians has taken such a deep hold in his heart that he’s become cold. He wants his enemies to die, he hates that the vine is dead, and he’s angry at God for not doing things his way and for him. Jonah seems to have missed the whole point of his own message! Should God not be concerned about a city full of people just like Jonah was concerned about the vine? God’s compassion is big enough to go around. It’s bigger than our anger. It’s bigger than us—and it *includes* us.

Application

- Are you angry at God for forgiving someone? Let go of all that anger. It has no place in our hearts and God longs for us to be free from it and able to love as He loves.

- When we’re so preoccupied with other people’s misdeeds and sins, we miss God’s compassion for them—and ourselves. God died for all which includes the unlovable. After all, we were all at one point “objects of wrath.”

Sunday Worship

Sermon Title

Bible Passage

Notes

Application

*A Letter
to
God*

Dear God, I ask that You help me love others, especially my enemies. Help me forgive and love just as You have first loved me. I don’t want to be angry and bitter. I want to love freely and without restraint. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



My God, My God!

Psalm 22:1-11

God Forsaken

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?

2 O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.

Never Too Far

3 Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.

4 In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.

5 They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.

6 But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people.

The psalmist cries out to God saying that He is not answering. People around him mock him and hurl insults. The psalmist asks for God's help whom he has trusted since he was in his mother's womb.

7 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:

8 "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

9 Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast.

10 From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.

11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

• Memory Verse of the Week

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Exodus 40 □ John 19 □ Prov. 16 □ Phil. 3

God Forsaken (22:1-2)

The heart-wrenching cries of the Psalmist and the Messiah (Matt. 27:46) strike a familiar chord with anyone who has endured suffering. In those moments of despair, we become acutely aware of our helplessness, our dependence, our mortality, our limits, our vulnerability, our flaws—our humanity. As the Messiah hung upon the cross, the sins of mankind weighing on His spirit, He is plunged into the depths of sorrow and abandonment. A place that is all too human and real for all of us. We are reminded of Jesus’ humanity in His last words before He gives up His Spirit and we realize that God on earth, Immanuel, truly does understand our pain and struggles. That’s why we can trust Him. No other God would dare die for mankind. God did not forsake us—He forsook Himself *for* us.

Never Too Far (22:3-11)

When we go through difficult times, our vision of God is understandably obscure. It’s similar to when we feel like time goes by so slowly when things are boring or hard—we are subjective beings and we are affected by our circumstances. This is why we have the community of God to help remind us of God’s faithfulness. The Psalmist refers back to others who trusted in God for deliverance and were not disappointed (vv. 3-5). Even in the darkest moments of loneliness, confusion and pain, God is there. We don’t feel Him because we feel the pain but there is a hope in the desperate cry for God not to be far from us (v. 11). We can trust in God. It was His goodness and love that sent His own Son to die for us. Let us trust in the Lord for He is *our* God.

Application

- Have you ever felt like God has forgotten you? Such moments pierce our hearts as we struggle to find God in our pain and suffering. But He is there, not in some distant place, but right beside us, helping us through.
- God delivered us from the eternal death of hell. He took upon Himself sin. He is constantly fighting for us, beckoning to us, loving us. In our despair this is difficult to understand but let’s not give up on God.

Suffering for the Sake of Christ

By meditating on the Word of God, the Lord strengthened me to endure. I realized any suffering I was to go through was nothing compared to what Jesus had suffered for me, and that no pain I could ever experience was beyond the understanding and compassion of the Lord Jesus. *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” Hebrews 4:15.*

The Lord didn’t allow me to feel as much pain as I should have. The officers stood on my hands and my feet, electrocuting me again and again. They pulled my eyelids, lips, ears and other body parts to humiliate me.

I still refused to speak. I was a half-dead pile of skin and bones lying motionless on the cold cement floor.

- *The Heavenly Man* by Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway

A Letter to God Abba Father, I feel lost and I pray that in these moments, You would grant me relief and encouragement. Strengthen me from the inside out, remind me, renew me, please, be not too far from me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



30 Tue. The 11th Hour

Psalm 22:12-21

Against All Odds

12 Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

13 Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me.

14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me.

15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.

16 Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.

The psalmist compares his enemies to bulls, strong bulls of Bashan, lions, and dogs. He says how he is dying because of attacks of the enemies. But he asks for God's help trusting that the Lord will deliver him from the enemies.

17 I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.

Deliverance

18 They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

19 But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me.

20 Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs.

21 Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

• Memory Verse of the Week

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

• Bible-In-One-Year Reading

□ Lev. 1 □ John 20 □ Prov. 17 □ Phil. 4



Reflection

Against All Odds (22:12-17)

There are moments in life when everything is conspiring against you to discourage and stop you from achieving your goal. Whether it's a bad day, a long week, a hard month or a difficult year, these are phases of life that are a real battle to survive—physically, emotionally and spiritually! We feel surrounded just like the Psalmist describes. Our strength is gone and we can't go on another day. We've been waiting for God and it's the 11th hour. As Christ hung on the cross, He was abandoned by all who loved Him, His accusers seemed to have triumphed with their lies—Satan had worked hard to conspire and the battle was closing with evil's victory at hand. But we know that the ultimate victory is Christ's—good triumphs over evil and life over death. Remember that in your struggle and let it be your hope when all is hopeless.

Deliverance (22:18-21)

The rest of this Psalm takes on a tone of hope and praise. The Psalmist knows that the Lord is faithful and that He will come to deliver and save His people. He cries out to God to come quickly. Even though all else fails, God will not. Our strength will go, our youth will pass, our money will run out, our friends will fail but not God. And therein lies the hope of the Psalmist—the steadfast love of God, His perfect record and perfect timing. Even though we might feel like He's late, He isn't. There is a plan and a purpose, and He will deliver His people. He will save you. As Jesus dies, He knows that the victory is His. After three days, He will rise again having secured the salvation of all who believe! This is true hope. This is our hope.

Application

- It's difficult to hold on to faith in the face of intense trial. When we are at the end of our rope, cry out to God. Ask Him for strength or ask Him to come. He will answer with one or the other.
- Who or what do we turn to during trials and trouble? Do we rely on ourselves and others or do we turn to God? Let's learn to call on God first and not as an afterthought.

"Deep unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state."
- George Eliot

Prayer Guide >> Adoration | Confession | Thanksgiving | Supplication

Pain and Truth

One holiday I was visiting my mother... We reminisced about times long past, as mothers and sons tend to do. Inevitably, the large box of old photos came down from the closet shelf...

Among these photos I found one of an infant, with my name written on the back. The portrait itself was not unusual... but the photo was crumpled and mangled... I asked my mother why she had hung onto such an abused photo...

There is something you should know about my family: when I was ten months old, my father contracted spinal lumbar polio. He died three months later... My father was totally paralyzed at age twenty-four, his muscles so weakened that he had to live inside a large steel cylinder that did his breathing for him...

My mother explained to me that she had kept the photo as a memento, because during my father's illness it had been fastened to his iron lung...

When my mother told me the story of the crumpled photo, I had a strange and powerful reaction. It seemed odd to imagine someone caring about me whom, in a sense, I had never met...

I mention this story because the emotions I felt when my mother showed me the crumpled photo were the very same emotions I felt... when I first believed in a God of love. *Someone is there*, I realized... It was a startling feeling of wild hope, a feeling so new and overwhelming that it seemed fully worth risking my life on.

- *Disappointment with God* by Philip Yancey

A Letter to God Dear God, You have secured for me. It is my hope in this life. Give me the strength to continue on especially in trial and suffering knowing that You are our Deliverer. Come quickly in my trouble when I call on Your name. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Our Lord and Savior

Isaiah 52:13-53:6

Unexpected Savior

13 See, my servant will act wisely ; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

14 Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—

15 so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

Amazing Love!

1 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

The servant of the Lord was crushed but the Lord will make him highly exalted. Many nations and kings will be surprised because of him. He suffered for our transgressions and iniquities. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Unexpected Savior (52:13-15)

Isaiah’s prophecies of the Savior of Israel and the world: a servant who humbly accepts the role of the sacrificial lamb to be slain on behalf of a people unworthy of salvation. He is appalled and disfigured, weak in the world and nothing we would expect in a Savior. Do we really want a Savior who seems so weak? But it’s in this weakness that we are saved. Because He must die not for His sins but for ours. This is not weakness—it’s profound, inconceivable strength. The kind that will vindicate the Servant on the day He is glorified. All the kings will shut their mouths because of this Servant (v. 15). Whatever the world may think of Him, His death secured for us salvation. Nothing else can do that. He might not have been what we expected but He was exactly what we needed.

Amazing Love! (53:1-6)

Salvation was always God’s plan—to save us from ourselves. To deliver us from sin so we can be with Him for eternity. He had no other purpose for coming to earth—no other reason except you and me. As Isaiah proclaims, all of us have sinned—no one could have saved us. No one was good enough to take our place. Even the innocent child, the devoted monk, the diligent theologian—all of us are tainted with sin and our sacrifice just doesn’t cut it. Though the Servant was someone everyone disdained and ignored, He took upon Himself the sins of the world. What incredible power in His humility! What amazing love in His suffering! The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is a book about God’s love. The Cross is the fullest expression of that love. Accept it, live it, love it!

Application

- As we continue in this Easter Season, let us be reminded of the Almighty God who condescended to earth to love and live with us. It shouldn’t shame us. In fact, it makes us worthy. You are dearly loved.
- It’s hard to believe and accept something so priceless. But we must. That is how we honor the Giver of this gift of eternal life. Tell someone about this gift so they too might enjoy it with us!

We Need Servants Not Leaders

We tend to think we need leaders who serve, but really we need servants who lead. Servanthood is not an adjective to describe a good leader, as if it is one of many qualities of a good leader. Servanthood is what we need, even more than leadership. Leadership is just a function for the servant. A servant leads others in the path of being a servant, and that is what the church truly needs if we are to change the world for the better. And that pretty much describes Jesus and therefore should describe those who live with the Spirit of Jesus incarnate in their lives.

We don’t first find leaders and hope they take on the qualities of a servant. We need to find servants and let them be just that. Servanthood is not the path to leadership; it is the leadership that the kingdom requires. Jesus was clear that those who want to be first will be a servant to all, *not a leader to all*. If we had a lot more servants and a lot fewer leaders, we would be much better off. And if we had enough servants, we wouldn’t really be lacking in leaders at all.

If we all lived like Jesus, leadership would not be an issue, because it would be a *by-product!*

- *Organic Leadership* by Neil Cole

A Letter to God Dear God, thank You for Your Son. I pray that as I remind myself of Your sacrifice, I would again, show my gratitude to You. You are good and it is supremely good to be loved by You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

1st week

| John 15:1-17

The “Secret” of Christian Maturity

Focus

Growth comes from abiding.

Into the Story

One of the things I enjoy is to browse in a bookstore. There is something about a bookstore that makes you feel smart after you’ve had about 30 minutes to browse. If the bookstore has a great Christian book section, my joy increases threefold. And there’s always that title that never fails to catch my attention; the one that starts with “The Secret of Christian (Maturity, Growth... something to do with growing and maturing).”

The title offers all kinds of wonderful stuff any Christian would just drool over. It offers Christian maturity... who wouldn’t want that? And best of all, it is a “secret.” Once you’ve read this book, you get to belong to that elite group of Christians known as the “mature”—that group of respectable, dependable and top notch group. All it takes is 10 steps or 20 steps and 30 to 40 days.

Here is John 15. John offers the original “secret” to Christian maturity and the best part is that it is really not a secret at all...

Into the Word Read John 15:1-17

1 According to John 15:1-2, what kind of relationship do we have with Jesus?

2 According to John 15:4-5, what is the “secret” of Christian growth?

3 According to John 15:7, 10, what does it mean to abide in Jesus?

4 According to John 15:8, what is the result of abiding in Jesus?

Into the Life

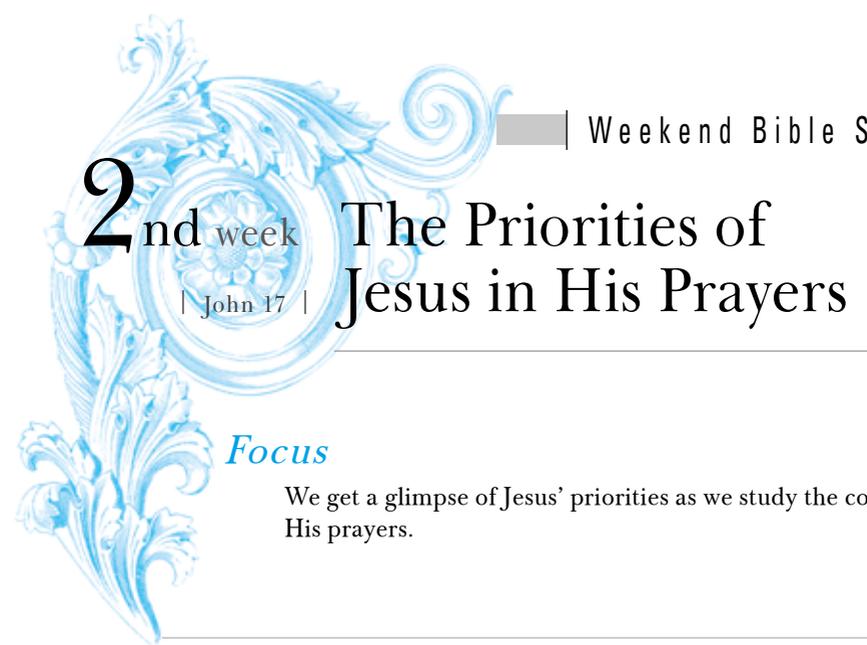
5 In verse 12, John tells us concretely what it means to abide in Jesus’ love. Why do you think there is more emphasis on loving one another than... loving God?

Into the Message

Of course, the 10 or 20 steps in 30 or 40 days are a helpful breakdown of what John tells us is the “secret” of Christian growth and maturity. But we must not lose our central focus in the midst of the 20 steps or 30 days—that the most important thing necessary for our growth is abiding in Jesus. This means, as John has mapped out, we abide in his word and in his love. It means keeping his word close to us and keeping his love real in our lives. And when these twin pistons of abiding are active in our lives, John tells us, the result is that our lives will begin to bear much fruit—to the glory of God.

Into the World

6 What are some ways, this week, for you to abide in His word and abide in His love?



Focus

We get a glimpse of Jesus’ priorities as we study the contents of His prayers.

Into the Story

One professor at a seminary I attended used to say, “Let me hear you pray and I will write your theology.” What he meant was our theology is not just made up of the words we write down for others to see but made of something rooted much deeper. Our theology is composed of our deep desires and hopes—the stuff that our prayers are made of. It is in our prayers that we get a better glimpse of what is important to us and what is foremost in our thoughts. This isn’t referring to the kind of prayers that are offered for the benefit of advancing someone’s reputation; but to the earnest and honest kind. It is in our prayers that our priorities and our deepest concerns are revealed.

In John 17, we have a rare opportunity—we get a glimpse of Jesus’ prayer. As we take a deep look, perhaps we can glean what some of Jesus’ priorities were, what were some of His concerns, and what was important and foremost in His heart...

Into the Word Read John 17

- 1 According to verse 17:1, what is the primary reason for Jesus asking God to glorify His Son?
- 2 What is the “work” of verse 17:4 referring to (vv. 6, 8)?
- 3 What are some of Jesus’ primary concerns in his prayer, according to verses 11-12?
- 4 What do you think is the utmost concern in Jesus’ prayer concerning “those who will believe in me through their word (v. 20)”?

Into the Life

- 5 Do you think that some of Jesus’ priorities are reflected in your church, your family or in your own life? Why or why not?

Into the Message

One of the startling passages in Jesus’ prayer is found in verse 15, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.” We can gather from this passage that one of Jesus’ priorities was missions. Jesus makes this explicit in the following verse, “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world (v. 18).” Putting together elements found in Jesus’ prayer—a picture begins to emerge. We know that Jesus was concerned about God’s glory (v. 1). We know that Jesus’ primary work was concerned with “glorifying” God’s name (v. 6) and that this was done through the giving of the word (v. 8). We also know that Jesus was concerned with our sanctification in the truth (v. 17). Lastly, we know that Jesus was concerned about the unity of his followers (v. 23) and whether they recognized that they were loved by God (vv. 23, 24, and 26).

Into the World

- 6 Are you able to write out Jesus’ “theology” from Jesus’ prayer? What does it look like?

3rd week

The Breakfast of Restoration

| John 21 |

Focus

Even when we have failed Him, He invites us to a breakfast of restoration.

Into the Story

I enjoy all my meals, but my favorite is the breakfast. There is something about a good breakfast after a long night without food. There is something magical about eggs, bacon—mmmmm bacon and some well-made home fries... And lest you think I am prejudiced, I also love Korean breakfast. There is something hearty about a bowl of rice, sumptuous side-dishes and some good soup. Just thinking about it makes my mouth water.

As much as I love breakfast, there is something better than eggs and bacon in the morning. In John 21, John tells us about the most amazing meal—the breakfast of restoration.

Into the Word Read John 21

1 In John 18:15-18 and 18:25-27, what do we see Peter doing? Why?

2 Describe the mood of John 21:1-3?

3 John 21:15, what question does Jesus ask Peter? Why?

4 Why do you think it grieved Peter that Jesus asked the third time? Why do you think Jesus did this?

Into the Life

5 Was there a time in your life where you longed for Jesus' breakfast of restoration? What would you do if He invites you to breakfast tomorrow?

Into the Message

A chance to begin again... Perhaps that is what John is trying to convey to us as he draws this picture of Jesus standing at the shore waving to us to come and have breakfast with Him. It certainly was for Peter. Peter, out of fear of a servant girl, denied his Lord whom he faithfully served for three years. This was the same Peter who once boldly said, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away (Matt. 26:33)." He was warming his hands by the fire, as his heart grew colder towards his Lord. Peter in John 21 is a foil for all of us who have denied our Lord so many times that we've lost count. John is telling us—you are invited!—tomorrow morning, to the breakfast of restoration.

Into the World

6 Has someone wronged you? Why not invite him or her over for a breakfast—for a breakfast of restoration?



Into the Story

We learn early on about "us" and "them." As we break into teams we learn about "our" team versus "their" team. I remember as a young boy growing up in Korea how I learned about "us" and "them" early on. There was "us," the South Koreans, and there was "them," the Communist North Koreans. I remember the posters that depicted this "us" against "them"—while the South Koreans were drawn with gentle looks and pleasant smiles, the North Koreans were drawn to resemble pigs. My guess is that it was important for the North Koreans to not have human faces—it made them too human.

As we open the pages of Jonah, we see another person struggling with "us" against "them." A surprising twist here is that this is not just an ordinary person—this is a prophet, a mouthpiece of God. But as we will see, God wants us to teach us a new lesson regarding "us" and "them."

Into the Word Read Jonah

- 1 What did Jonah do when he was commanded by the LORD to go to the city of Nineveh? Why? (Jonah 4:1-3).
- 2 What do we know about the relationship between Assyria (modern day Iraq) and Israel in Jonah's time that sheds some light on Jonah's actions?
- 3 What was God trying to teach Jonah by granting the plant to comfort Jonah and then taking it away?

Into the Life

- 4 How would you answer God's question found in Jonah 4:10-11?

Into the Message

Martin Buber in his wonderfully profound book, *I and Thou*, draws a distinction between an 'I and Thou' relationship and an 'I and it' relationship. He tells us in an 'I and Thou' relationship there is a true recognition of the other whereas in an 'I and it' relationship we only see an object for its use. Buber points out in his book how we often get this two relationships mixed up. He tells us we often have 'I and it' relationships with people we should have 'I and Thou' relationships with, and have 'I and Thou' relationships with things we should have 'I and it' relationships with.

Jonah, whether through circumstance or through education (Perhaps he saw some posters depicting the Ninevites as pigs when he was growing up), was no longer capable of seeing the people of Nineveh as 'Thou'. Where he should have recognized people, he was only able to see them dehumanized—as 'it'. This explains the fleeing, the anger that is fiery enough to die for. Jonah knew what the LORD will do, "I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster..." Jonah knew the great characteristics of God, and desired it only for himself and his people, "us." It meant something totally different, when they were meant for "them" as well.

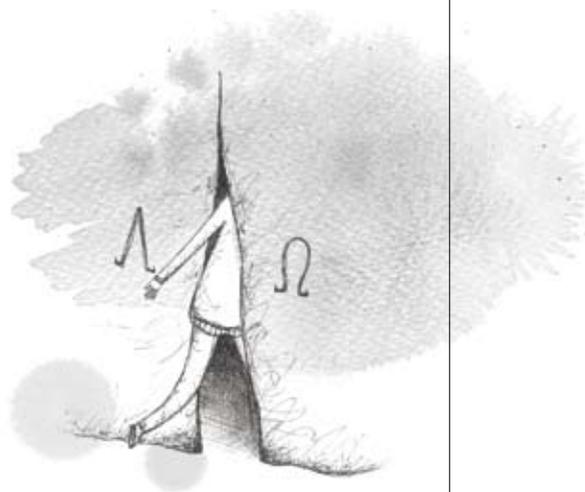
But God doesn't just let Jonah flee, He doesn't let Jonah stay angry... He wants Jonah, and presently He wants us, to relearn the distinction between these two important relationships, 'I and Thou' and 'I and It', properly.

Into the World

- 5 Examine the relationships in your own life. Are there any relationships you are treating as '*I and it*' relationships when they should be '*I and Thou*' relationships?

The Worship Leader

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body. . . .”
(Heb. 10:19-20)



Although many Christians now use the word “worship” as a synonym for singing praises, a biblical perspective on worship points to so much more. Worship is the whole-person offering of ourselves as living sacrifices to God, all in response to the profound mercy revealed to us in the Gospel (Rom. 12:1). The worship that God requires involves conducting ourselves in justice and mercy toward our neighbors and walking humbly with our God (Mic. 6:8). The worshipers that God seeks for Himself do not regard worship as a part-time activity but as a perpetual spirit and truth

interaction with the God who *is* Spirit and who has perfectly revealed His truth to us in His Son Jesus Christ (John 4:23-26).

While worship is something that should occupy us always, there are times when we intentionally gather together with God’s people for specific acts of worship. From the New Testament onward, the most important time to do this has been on the Lord’s Day. Christians gather with one another on the first day of the week to honor Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead on the first day. In such gatherings we: offer

prayers; greet one another in the Lord; offer praises and thanksgiving to the Lord; speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; hear God’s word read among us; receive instruction in that Word; celebrate the Lord’s Supper, and more. All this we do not only in obedience to the God who commands us to worship Him, but also in joyful gratitude that we are actually able to fellowship in this manner with the living God and with one another.

No matter where we are worshipping, there is one critical truth about worship that always applies: we are enabled to worship only by Jesus Christ. He is, in other words, our true worship leader.

The fact is that we—because of the sin and disobedience that mark our lives—were dead to God and destined for wrath (Eph. 2:1-3). Our hearts, sinful and deceitful beyond measure (Jer. 17:9) made us God’s enemies (Rom. 5:9), alienated from Him and from one another (Eph. 2:11-12). What worship, then, could we possibly offer the good and holy God? That disqualifies all of us. But God sent His only Son into the world to save sinners (John 3:17) and reconcile us to God. Jesus lived the life of obedience and righteousness (Rom. 5:19, 1 John 2:1, Rev. 5:9, Phil. 2:8) that Adam and all his descendents—including each of us—failed to live. He lived justly, loved mercy and walked humbly with His Father. There He offered

Himself in our stead. He who had never known sin of any kind actually became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor.



No matter where we are worshipping, we are enabled to worship only by Jesus Christ. He is, in other words, our true worship leader.

5:21). He became a curse for us, to redeem us from the curse due us for all our violations of God’s holy law (Gal. 3:13).

In light of all these wonders, the author of the letter to the Hebrews describes Jesus as our great High Priest who offered the once-and-for-all perfect sacrifice for our sins and has made true communion with the Father finally and actually possible (Heb. 7-10). It is on this basis, then, that we worship the living God.

Jesus is the proper focal point of all Christian worship. But there is more: Jesus is the author of our worship, our true and perfect worship leader.

Written by Gary Parrett

TELEVISION: THE REALITY OF REALITY TV

Relatively inexpensive to make, with an unending source of drama and people desperately wanting their 15 minutes of fame, reality TV has become a worldwide phenomenon.

In the past decade, the explosion of reality television has filled the global airwaves to revolutionize entertainment for a whole generation of TV viewers. Defined by Wikipedia as “a genre of television programming which presents supposedly unscripted dramatic or humorous situations, documents actual events, and features ordinary people instead of professional actors,” reality TV is nothing new to television, but the genre truly burst onto the international scene with the genesis of the show “Survivor,” now in its 19th season. These shows are showcased in various settings in a myriad of approaches to satisfy every kind of palate hungry for entertainment. Some of these

are simply “cinéma vérité” or “cinema of truth,” giving the viewer a keyhole into the personal world of others in a documentary-like style. Others focus on helping people find their true love, while competition-based shows are also widely popular.

However, it is no surprise that there is not much “reality” to reality TV. Of course, there are realistic people, but they are generally those who are vain and hungry for fame, put into scripted situations that are contrived, manipulated, and edited for the purpose of entertaining people. Real life is a far cry from that. Even some reality show creators will admit to the unreality. Mark Burnett, creator of “Survivor” does not



(Up) Cast from “Survivor”—Season 19, shown in the United States (Down) Susan Boyle, who became a worldwide sensation after her appearance on “Britain’s Got Talent”

even use the term “reality” in reference to his shows. He explains in a 2003 article, “I tell good stories. It (Survivor) really is not reality TV. It really is unscripted drama.”

So why do people continue to watch reality TV? Why has the popularity of this genre spawned such interest? Perhaps it makes people feel better about their own lives and provide perspective on their own problems. Sometimes, seeing the train wrecks of the lives of others offers a sort of comfort in knowing that we are merely observers watching from a safe distance. For some, it might be a sort of escapism, giving a glimpse into the views of the “real” lives of others. Yet, others watch for the very reason we hate these shows—to see the behaviors of real people in al-

beit contrived situations. It is hard not to get emotionally involved as our ravenous appetites for revenge are satisfied in watching those we despise suffer for the consequences of their malicious actions and behaviors, our curiosities appeased as romances and crushes blossom, or our competitive natures inspired in seeing those we root for become victorious.

In any case, one thing that continuously emerges and that every one of these shows shares in common is the reality of human nature and the evil that resides in each of us subsequent to the fall. The Apostle Paul knew this quite well as he wrote that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Moreover, the adversity created by these shows reveals the foundation of idols upon which we build our lives. Hardships expose our true selves and the way you know a person is by how they handle hardships. Proverbs 10:25 states, “When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever.” Under stress, most people will choose not to be good and you will see the worst in you as your selfishness, pride, anger, anxiety, and ego, begin to surface. When you don’t rest in Jesus, and He is not the emotional center of your heart, you can only blame others around you, become harder, more cynical, and more distant from God. That is real reality.

Written by Leo Rhee

True Worship

by Vaughan Roberts

“Worship never begins with us; it is always a response to the truth...”

So much of worship in the church today is misunderstood. When Jesus referred to ‘true worshipers’ who are ‘the kind of worshipers the Father seeks’ (John 4:23), He was also implying that there is such thing as a ‘false worshiper’ that *does not* please God. As this month’s designated theme for *Living Life* is “worship,” I wanted to share a book that the worship team at our church uses for its worship team training. Vaughan Roberts’ *True Worship* (Authentic Lifestyle, 2002) is the staple reading on worship. Only 135 pages in length, six chapters long, and extremely simple in style, it is one of the most essential books on worship for this generation. Vaughan offers foundational truths for those who desire to worship God in spirit and in truth.

The book is broken down into six chapters, as listed below:

1. The Foundations of Christian Worship: “In Spirit and in Truth”

- 2. The Nature of Christian Worship: “Living Sacrifices”
- 3. The End of Religion: “He sat down”
- 4. The Purpose of Christian Meetings: “Encourage one another”
- 5. The Place of Music and Singing: “Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord”
- 6. Understanding the Lord’s Supper: “Do this in remembrance of me”

The author’s premise is that three things must be present in order to truly worship God: 1) The Lord Jesus Himself, 2) The Holy Spirit, and 3) The truth. The author states that by nature, we worship ourselves and live for our own desires, comforts and ambitions. But Jesus challenges our lifestyle. We know that if we truly start worshiping Him, that worship cannot be contained in a little building on Sunday morning. To ‘worship in Spirit’ does not necessarily mean speaking in tongues or exercising particular spiritual gifts; nor does it mean becoming extra-emotion-



al. But it simply means “to acknowledge Jesus as God and live accordingly... It is the Spirit who brings us to Jesus and enables us to worship God in the first place and then empowers us to continue doing so.”

I especially appreciated the author’s addressing worship as being a focus off ourselves, as so much of worship today is entertainment-oriented, or oriented on the worship leader or team: “Worship never begins with us; it is always a response to the truth. It flows out of an understanding of who God is and what He has done for us in Christ.”

The concept of worship being a *response* comes up several times in the book. Usually, we think of worship as merely the introductory time before the sermon. But the author states that worship requires an understanding of God’s mercy and is a response to what He has done for us. In other words, worship is not about us trying to win

favor from a reluctant God, but it is always a response to God’s initiative in sending Jesus to be our Savior: “It flows out of a grateful heart as we remember what God has done for us.”

Generally, in the English, we use one word for worship, but the author further goes into detail on the four different Greek words for worship and how each plays an important role in offering our worship to God. Each word gives insight into how we ought to worship the Lord: 1) prostration / rendering homage, 2) service (duties), 3) respect / reverence, 4) obedience / adoration.

Overall, a very insightful book, and a must-read for anyone who desires to expand their heart of worship.

Written by Leo Rhee

Equipping Christians for a Helping Ministry Books List

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