

Upper Room

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PREFACE

If you knew that you had only one day to live:

- What would you want to do?
- Who would you want to spend it with?
- What would you talk about?

Most likely, we will not have that choice. We will either be caught off-guard or not in good enough health to fulfill those wishes. However, Jesus knew what was going to happen and that this was His last evening before He would be crucified.

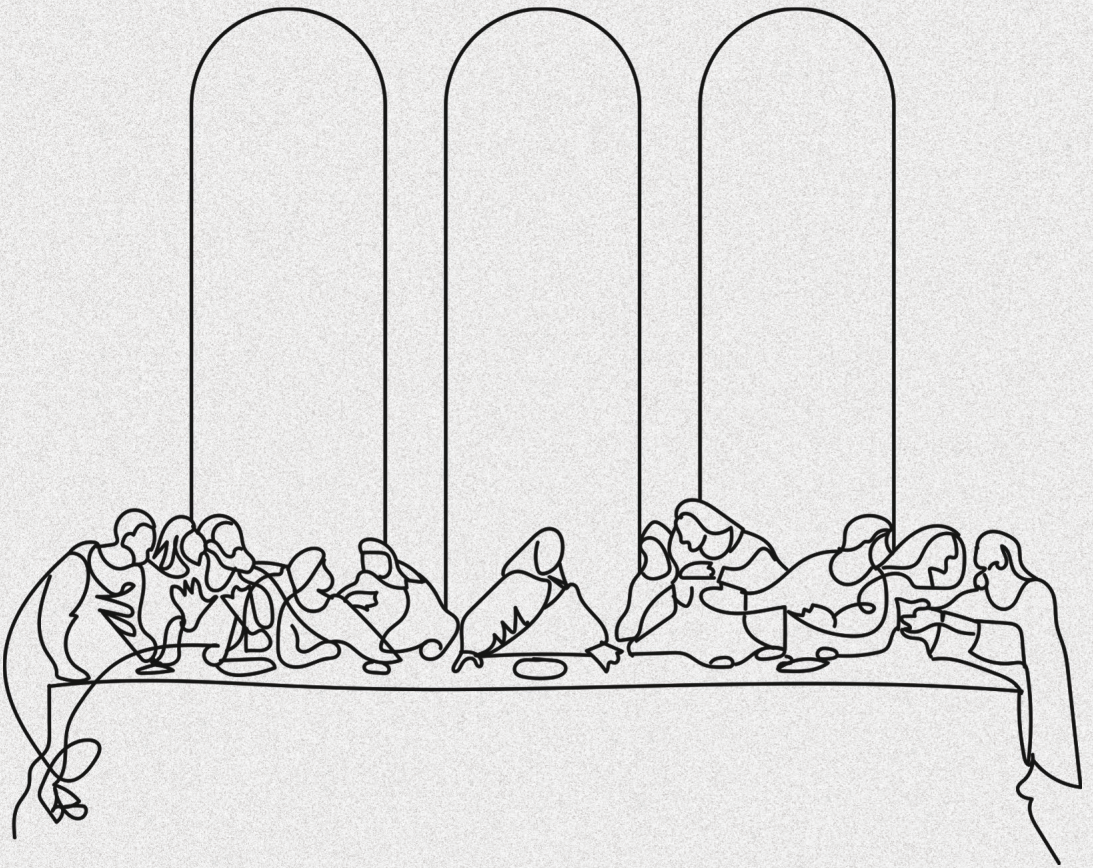
Upper Room examines some of the events and discussions Jesus initiated at His last supper. He reminds them of the importance of love and that He is giving them peace. He points out that although He is leaving to prepare a place for them, He will send the Holy Spirit to help them. These discussions from John chapters 13-17 still encourage believers today.

Upper Room contains six study guides for personal growth and group discussion along with thirty-six devotions that help guide our daily walk. *Upper Room* will help you understand the depth of Jesus' mission and what He has for us today.

01

FINAL CLASS

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY



UPPER ROOM

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

1. If you knew that you had one day left on planet Earth, how would you spend it?

Would you spend it at work? Probably not. Would you spend it playing golf or working on the house? Again, not likely. Most people would want to be with the people they love. My final day would be spent with my wife, children, family, and friends.

2. Now, if you only had one day left, gathered together with those you love, what would you say to them?

Would you talk about what the Tigers were going to do this year, the current political situation, or the grievances you have against someone else? Again, not likely. I think most people would want to try to say all the things that mean something; things that are meaningful and important. It would be a time to impart important life lessons to our children. We would convey the love we have for someone. We would express our thankfulness. We would ignore the trivial and say the important things, the things that matter.

On the night before the Lord Jesus would suffer and die, He was with us, His people. He was with His disciples. He loved them. They

(with the exception of Judas) loved Him. Although He was going to the horrors and suffering of the cross for our sins, He spent His last night with them, with us. He wanted to be with them. Not only was He with them, but He spoke to them. He said many things, each of which is rich with life's most important truths. As you come into John chapter 13 and begin to read of Jesus eating with His disciples, it is immediately clear that He was not there for a meal. He was there to be with them, to gather them close, and to say important things.

3. What are some of the details you remember from the time at the last meal?

One of those great truths is found in the words of John 13:34 where Jesus says to His disciples, ***“A new commandment I give to you.”*** Now, right there, because of the word Jesus used for ***“commandment”*** (Greek “entole”), their minds would have immediately flashed to the Ten Commandments given to Moses on the mountain. Jesus’ words, first and foremost, make it clear that He is God. Who can add to “the Ten Commandments” except God? God gave Moses the ten, and Jesus adds another. He does so because He is God. John 10:30 says, ***“I and My Father are one”*** (NKJV).

4. How many of the Ten Commandments can you list?

Jesus says, ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.”*** This ***“new commandment”*** seems simple enough. In fact, it is rather easy to say. However, in practice, it is like all of

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the other commands, impossible to keep apart from the Spirit of God at work in us. More on this in a moment. First, we see that the word Jesus uses for **“love”** (Greek “agape”) is infinitely greater than the world’s ideas of love. The Greek word “agape” is by definition, a love that can only come from God. It is not human in its origin. It is divine. It is selfless. It is sacrificial. It is giving and serving. It is always doing what is best for the other person. It is God’s love toward us. Here, Jesus tells us to **“love”** (agape) other Christians. Yes, we are to love the lost and unsaved, but here Jesus is telling us to love our fellow believers. We are to **“love”** them with a love that only comes from Him.

5. Why do you think He emphasized loving believers at this time?

The words **“as I have loved you,”** shows the extent to which we are to love fellow Christians. The new command is not: “be fond of, or friendly with, put up with or endure each other.” It is to genuinely, deeply, selflessly, and sacrificially love our brothers and sisters in Christ. It has no simulation. This is real. It is as Hebrews 10:24 says to **“consider one another.”** It is as Philippians 2:3-4 (NKJV) says, **“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out only for our own interests, but also for the interests of others.”** In short, we are to go against the human “norm” of focusing primarily on myself and my needs and to be like the Lord Jesus who **“loved us and gave Himself for us”** (Ephesians 5:2).

6. What are some ways in which we can show love to fellow believers?

It bears repeating, that this kind of **“love”** is not human. It comes from God. God is its source. He is the well of agape love. Therefore, it cannot be retrieved from within, it must be received from above. Galatians 5:22 (NKJV) tells us that this kind of love only comes from the Holy Spirit of God at work in us, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love”** (Greek agape). **“Fruit”** means that it is something the Holy Spirit of God produces in us as we see our need for Him, His work, and depend on Him and His power. This means that instead of trying to muster up love from some magical well we think we have inside of us for someone, we should rather admit our need and ask for Him to fill us, work in our hearts, and give us agape love.

7. What is the rest of the Fruit of the Spirit?

8. What could be some reasons for **“love”** being listed first?

As we show this kind of love to fellow Christians, Jesus says it shows something to the unsaved world. It makes a statement. He says that this is one of the primary ways that the world will know that we are His people. John 13:35 (NKJV) says, **“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”** Fish stickers,

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Christian t-shirts and hats, cross necklaces, or even the Bible in your car are all well and good as some kind of indication that you are a follower of Jesus Christ, but none of it is as effective as actually loving fellow Christians. When the world sees all kinds of people, every race, from every place on Earth, and every imaginable walk of life (with all the quirks and uniqueness that make us people) lovingly committed to each other, it makes no earthly sense. It powerfully says that we are held together some other way, some unknown way to this world. It says that we are His people. It should be clear, that the world does not do this! The unsaved world is constantly walking away from and quitting on each other. Relationships get strained and words are said. The response is "I am done, I don't need this." Things are done, and the response is "I'm out." That's the way of the unbelieving world.

It is truly and dramatically counter-cultural to remain lovingly committed to each other as Jesus commands us to do. I think this is the reason that the devil attacks our unity as Christians so often and so fiercely. When the world sees Christians fighting, churches splitting, "Jesus people" belittling each other, and taking each other to court, it says that we are not any different than they are. It tells them that there is nothing to this Christianity "thing." How tragic it is to see professing believers fighting. Our Lord hates it. Proverbs 6:19 (NKJV) describes them as ***"one who sows discord among brethren."***

Do you want people to know that you are a follower of Jesus Christ? Agape love, which can only be received, is the way to both show and prove it.

9. Who do you want to ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with love for?

NEW COMMANDMENT

FINAL CLASS, DEVOTION 1

Ferdinand Sanders

“When he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’” John 13:31-35

Amidst all the significant events in the final days leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus, throughout the four Gospels, we get a first-hand look at some of the events and conversations that took place. When we have this sort of “plot” or “storyboard” of the events of Holy Week, mixed with the records of conversations that take place, at times it really feels like we can almost insert ourselves into the story as a fly on the wall.

One of these recorded conversations between Jesus and the disciples is documented near the end of John chapter 13. At this moment we find ourselves within the Passover feast. Jesus had begun by washing the feet of the disciples which they all found to be odd or backward. Jesus informed the group that one of them would betray Him, selling Him out for just a few pieces of silver. I would imagine that the room was dead silent after Judas was called out and then proceeded to storm out. In what seems like the next breath, Jesus wastes little time in continuing to lead, teach, and challenge the disciples. He does this by implementing a new commandment.

John 13:34 says, ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”***

When we look at this commandment some 2000 years later, personally, I think the overall concept is relatively easy for us to wrap our minds around. We have had years and years of preaching, teaching, books, and songs from incredibly wise and inspired minds that all, to some extent, communicate the message of this ***“new commandment.”*** Not saying that it is always easy for us to live out, but I think Christianity recognizes this as a foundational principle. Although we can easily rally behind this ***“new commandment,”*** we should take a moment and recognize just how pivotal this statement really was.

Context is defined as “the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed.” At times, I wonder if, because of the context we have, we can at times glance over and miss out on some key or crucial aspects of the text. Sure, we can study and gain a better understanding of the context of the setting and world at that time, but I think there is something to be gleaned by placing ourselves into the shoes (sandals) of the disciples who did not have the full story or picture that we have today. Jesus taught of a ***“new commandment,”*** but what the disciples did not fully grasp at that moment was that He would also be implementing a ***“new covenant”*** (Luke 22:20). Their relationship with God and the atonement of their sins would be changing forever. Essentially, their context of interaction and relationship to and with God would not be built on what they did, but on what Jesus did.

For many of us, we fall back into an outdated context of God and think we have unqualified ourselves from a relationship with God.

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We lose sight of the freedom, forgiveness, and life we have under the “***new covenant.***” Our response should be to love others in that same context that Christ demonstrated His love for us, the “***new commandment.***”

UNFATHOMABLE LOVE

FINAL CLASS, DEVOTION 2

Josh Thayer

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” John 13:34

Being a father to a 1-year-old little girl, I finally understand what it means to really love. Not to say that the love I have for my wife, family, and friends was not real, but when you helped create something from nothing, it really puts into perspective the concept of love. Now that I am a father, I think it has elevated the love I have for others in my life. I know how much God loves me and I did understand that love even before I was a father, but I feel like now it is more tangible than ever before. To say that if my wife and daughter were ever in harm's way or needed something, that there is no limit to where I would go or what I would do to protect them is an understatement. That is just a very small picture of how much God loves you and me!

At the time when Jesus made this statement in John chapter 13, the concept of loving others was not anything new. Leviticus 19:18 was written some fifteen hundred years earlier, ***“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”***

The concept of loving others like Jesus loves us was an insane next level. God literally sent His Son to be with us and allowed His Son to live, laugh, love, be in pain, suffer, and eventually die for you and me. I know there is no way I would ever do that as a father. Not in a million years, not for any amount of money would I send my daughter

to endure what Jesus went through. An even crazier thought is before God sent Jesus, He knew every detail of what was going to happen, and He still did it. That love for me is something I do not think I will ever understand, but I am extremely appreciative that I get to receive that love from God.

Now as believers, it is our responsibility to attempt (I say attempt because it is literally impossible to love as Jesus loves us) to love every person we ever come into contact with like Jesus loves us. No matter what the past, present, or future holds in any relationship, we are called to love them. That is real love, a love that holds no grudges or puts up any walls, and a love that will do the unfathomable for someone else. That is our calling, our command, and our purpose.

IF YOU LOVE ME

FINAL CLASS, DEVOTION 3

Patrick Bicknell

“Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’” John 14:23

Continuing this Easter series of looking at what took place in the upper room with Jesus and His disciples on the night of His betrayal, we get some of the best teachings of Jesus during His earthly ministry. Up to this point in the night, we have seen Jesus wash His disciples’ feet giving them an example of how to serve. Earlier in John 14:6, Jesus gives the great proclamation, ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”***

Only a few verses later, we read, ***“Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him’”*** (John 14:23). A common misconception with this verse is that it is teaching that the way to love Jesus is by keeping His Word, or the commandments given to us within Scripture. In other words, many people will try to twist this verse and try to tell us that we must do the commandments in order to love Christ and have a true relationship with Him. They will use this verse to back up their works-based salvation.

However, this is not what Christ is teaching. As I stated earlier, Christ just got done teaching what the only way for salvation was through Him. There is no other way to God but through Christ. There is no other truth in this world but the one that comes from Christ. There is no other true living but the life that lives for Christ. Therefore, He is not teaching us that in order for us to love Him we must do what He

has commanded. Rather, Christ is telling us that the only way to do what He has commanded, we must first love Him.

I think a good analogy for this is professional athletes. They work their tails off trying to get to the highest level. Ever since they were little kids they would stay up all night working on their craft. Doing drills over, and over, and over again until it was ingrained into their mind. Now, did they do all of this practice so that they could love their sport? Of course not! They did all of that work because they loved their sport!

The same thing goes for us as believers and followers of Christ. We do not do what Jesus has commanded us to do so that we can eventually learn to love Christ. We love Christ; therefore, we do what He has commanded us to do. In doing His commandments, you will find that you grow deeper in your love for Him. However, it is essential that your work for God first flows from a love for Him and nothing else.

WORD AND DEED

FINAL CLASS, DEVOTION 4

David Hudgens

“Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.”

John 14:24

All throughout my elementary and secondary education, I experienced a relatively high level of success and command over all the subjects matters, except for one class, English. Each year, and with every progressive degree of difficulty, I struggled to grasp this most basic literary concept: show the reader rather than tell the reader. The best writers use carefully crafted language to paint unique but recognizable words and characters in order that audiences not simply be told a series of messages or lessons devoid of the agents of learning; but instead, be provided a universe of thoughts, emotions, motivations, and more that supply the how and why, and not merely the what.

It would take many years after high school for me to truly understand this concept. Looking back, I suppose I struggled against the reason for this literary method. Regrettably, I realized much later that I stunted my development by insisting on asking these two questions over and over again: “Why do I need to provide so much detail? Why are the basic facts not enough?” Strangely, for me, the answer to these questions would actually come from my personal study of God’s Word and from living in a relationship with Him through Jesus.

Consider John 14:24, ***“Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.”*** In this section of John’s Gospel, the time of Jesus’ crucifixion is soon approaching and Jesus is sharing

some final wisdom and instruction with His beloved disciples. Just before verse 24, Jesus is asked how He would manifest Himself to those who love Him and not to the world (verse 22). His reply, verses 23-24, at first glance appears to be an odd response, but a deeper meditation of His answer reveals something simple but no less profound.

Jesus is presenting perhaps the primary conduit for how God the Father will be made known in the world through the believer, how He will be made manifest. Here it is: one's expressed love for God. However, Jesus clearly points out that this love is not only to be expressions made through verbal confessions alone. Rather it is a love that is expressed through one's demonstrated faith-filled obedience to His Word. In other words, one's actions should speak louder than one's words.

The New Testament writers highlight this precept routinely. James addresses a faith without works, calling it dead (James 2:14-26). Paul exhorts the Roman church to not ***“just pretend to love others. Really love them”*** (Romans 12:9 NLT). John, in his second epistle, puts it this way, ***“And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments”*** (2 John 1:6). Finally, Paul again in his letter to the Philippians encourages believers to live and love with the same attitude of Christ Jesus who was obedient to God even to the point of dying on a cross for us (Philippians 2:1-8).

To me, it is clear throughout the whole of John chapter 14, and the surrounding passages, that biblical love is explicitly complete and therefore God made manifest in our lives by the bonding of word and deed, deed and word. Furthermore, it is understood that obedient love is sourced in the person of Jesus and our being connected to Him, just as He is to the Father. The depth of this mystery, I suspect, will continue to be revealed to me throughout my life on Earth as I

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continue to meditate upon the need to show my love for God in the way I live and not only concern myself with what I think and say alone.

The challenge of John 14:24 remains, do you love Jesus? Do you really love Him? How do you know? Do you only say that you love Him or do you demonstrate your love for Him by faith-filled obedience to Him and His Word?

GREATER LOVE

FINAL CLASS, DEVOTION 5

Caroline Roark

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13

Gift-giving is often a source of stress for me. I love giving people gifts but I always want to give people a great gift. You know that great gift. It is the gift that makes you smile and feel loved. A gift that was exactly what you needed at that moment from someone that genuinely cares about you. Personally, the gift that jumps to the front of my mind was a new journaling Bible I received a few years ago. At the time I was using the same Bible from high school. It was covered in writing, highlights, and post-it notes, meaning there were some unreadable passages. This Bible had been with me through some formative seasons in my walk with Christ. I had been saying for months I wanted a new Bible with some more room to write, but I had not found the exact Bible I wanted. Then for my birthday, my two best friends surprised me with a new hardback journaling Bible, and it was the Bible I had pictured during those months of searching. This Bible has since become my most frequently used Bible. It was simply a great gift that revealed how much my friends actively listen and care for me.

As I sat down to begin studying John chapter 15, I noticed one singular highlight in the chapter from verse 13, ***“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”*** My best friends, before giving me the Bible, had gone through and highlighted five verses, with one of them being John 15:13. In chapter 15, Jesus is talking to His disciples. He genuinely cared for each of them and for how they treated one another. Jesus knew that He was

going to be crucified. Jesus was going to make the ultimate sacrifice and He used that to set a tone for how the disciples were called to love one another.

When my friends highlighted John 15:13 in my Bible, they were not highlighting their love for me but they were highlighting Jesus' love for me. The love when Jesus laid down His life so we could live in relationship with Him and have eternal life. There is no greater gift than Jesus' sacrificial love. Ephesians 5:2 says, ***“And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*** Christ's sacrificial love should guide how we love one another and is the greatest gift we will ever receive.

THE KEY OF LOVE

FINAL CLASS, DEVOTION 6

Sierra Combs

“These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”

John 15:17

This morning as I was looking through my jewelry box, I came upon a bracelet that I bought several years ago at a vintage market. Between two sets of dainty chains lies a small aged brass key with the word “love” stamped on the metal. While I completely forgot about the bracelet (it had found a place in the very back of the box underneath some other things), as soon as I saw it I was hit with a flood of emotions. Just a few days before the market day, I was betrayed by a close friend. At first, I was devastated, which then turned to hurt and then anger. That is where it started to get ugly and my flesh allowed that anger to turn to bitterness and was starting to spiral out of control when the Spirit intervened. As I walked around that market with an equally moping and fuming attitude, I came across that little bracelet. I have always collected old keys, and when I picked this one up to see what it said I was instantly convicted - love. I was not feeling loving, nor did I feel any intention of being loving at that moment or anytime soon. I would have rather sat in my spite and anger, but I knew that the Lord was telling me to love. This was not the first or the last time that I would be reminded of this command. Because I often have a hard time being obedient in this area, I bought the bracelet to serve as a reminder that regardless of my feelings. God always commands me to love.

Loving others does not come naturally to me. I, of course, find it naturally easy to love those who are nice and kind to me. I will always love puppies, kittens, and newborn babies. Loving feelings and

actions pour out with ease upon those groups. However, what about those who actively try to hurt me, my friends, and my family? What about the neighbor or co-worker who hates God and mocks Him at every turn? Perhaps you have suffered deeply and are left with a lifetime of trauma at the hands of an abuser or bully. The natural response to any of these situations is certainly not love. Yet, God requires it every time. In John 15:12, Jesus tells His disciples very clearly, ***“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”*** If that was not plain enough, just a few verses later He reminds them again that ***“These things I command you, so that you will love one another”*** (John 15:17). This command was not just for them, but for all of those whom He has saved, and we have the entirety of God’s Word to prove it.

What else does the Bible say about love? In 1 Corinthians 13:13, we are reminded, ***“Faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*** We are encouraged to not only give the bare minimum, but to ***“love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor”*** (Romans 12:10). In 1 John 4:7-8, we read, ***“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”*** He goes on to say, ***“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother who he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother”*** (1 John 4:20-21). Ouch! These can be hard words to read, but they are His words. He does not just ask us to love, He requires it. Not only that, it is the evidence of our love for Him! If we say we love God, we must love others.

How then do we love? Like the early church, we should be known for our love, not just in words but in action. We should make a point to go

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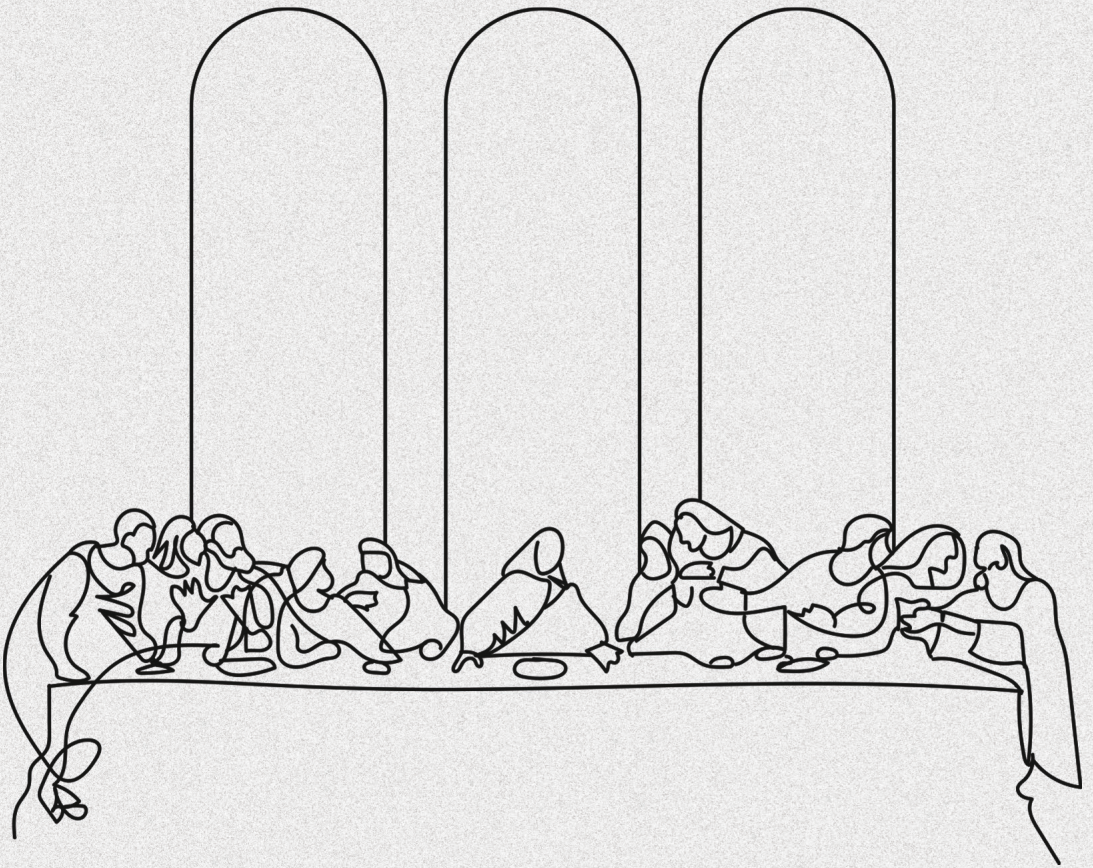
out of our way to help meet the needs of others. To the lost world, we should always be prepared to give the truth of the Gospel of Christ - that we are all sinners in need of a Savior, and because of this we are separated from a perfect and holy God. However, because of His love, God sent His only, perfect son Jesus to die on a cross to pay the sin debt that we owe and cannot pay. When we believe and confess His lordship over our lives, He is faithful to forgive us of our sins and make us new. Of course, there is no greater example of how to love than that of Jesus, who loved sacrificially and unconditionally, even forgiving those who nailed Him to a cross.

As Jesus loved, so should we. God knows that this is not an easy task, and He does not leave us on our own. If you have been born again, you have the Holy Spirit living inside of you! When we walk in the Spirit, He will grow fruit in our lives with the fruit of love being the first of many other wonderful things that we cannot produce well on our own. Praise God for His help as we obey His command to love!

02

A PLACE FOR YOU

PHILIP PIASECKI



UPPER ROOM

In the spring of 2021, my family and I had the incredible privilege of beginning construction on our brand-new home. Personally, I got to be heavily involved in many aspects of the build. I was able to oversee the project, even jumping in to build or fix things when there was a need. There were days when we got to see so much progress, each day it slowly turned from a house into our future home. I spent a lot of time out at the house, which many times meant I was spending a lot of time away from my family. As much as my son loved playing with all the nails and scrap lumber, a construction site really is not the best place for a three and five-year-old. However, every time I left them to go work on it, I was filled with so much joy because I knew that one day I would be bringing them to it for them to move in and actually live there. In November of 2021, that became a reality. We got to move into our dream home. The look on the kids' faces as they explored every room made all of the hard work and hours spent on it totally worth it. In the midst of it I could not help but think of the joy that Jesus must have known; that even though He had to leave this Earth, He was doing it to prepare a place for all of us to be with Him again one day.

1. Do you often build things? If so, what? What is your favorite thing you have ever built?

John 14:1-4 says, ***“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”***

2. Do you think it was easy for Jesus to leave His disciples?

3. Why did He have to leave?

At this point in the Gospel of John, Jesus is still preparing His disciples for what is to come. He knows that after His death and resurrection He was then going to ascend to Heaven. This was going to be difficult for His followers to understand, He had just died, risen, and after 40 days of being back with them, He was going to leave again, this time until eternity. However, unless He left them, He could not do what needed to be done. Jesus prepared a place for us by going to die on the cross, going through death just as we will go through death, and just as He was raised into eternity, we will be raised into eternity with Him.

4. What do you think the significance is of Jesus saying, ***“In my Father’s house are many rooms?”***

In 2 Peter 3:9, we read, ***“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”***

I absolutely love the thought of these two verses going hand-in-hand. Jesus describes His Father’s house as having many rooms,

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and then in 2 Peter 3:9 we read the truth that the Lord does not wish that any should perish, but all should reach repentance. When Jesus describes His Father's house this way He is describing a place that has room and is open to all people. The only prerequisite for entering the Father's house is that you believe in the Gospel. People for centuries, and for centuries to come, will try and construct an eternity that is exclusive. They push one that requires works, achievements, social status, the forgiveness of men, and the list could go on and on.

5. How is it encouraging and meaningful to you to understand that the Father's house has many rooms?

6. How should this impact the way that you live your life?

I believe that we should daily be trying to fill up the rooms in the Father's house. I want it to be our desire as a church that none ***"should perish, but that all should reach repentance."*** I believe we should burn for that as believers, and it should impact how we live our lives each and every day. Please never look at someone and count them out as hopeless. I have been guilty of looking at someone who is so caught up in the depth of their sin that I start to believe there is no chance they will ever give their lives to Christ, but every person on this Earth is one moment away from their lives being forever changed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

7. Do you ever find yourself thinking that maybe there is no room in the Father's house for certain people?

John 14:3 adds, ***"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."***

8. Do you ever feel like an outcast or left out?

This life can be lonely sometimes. We try to live in a community with people but it is not always easy. Many times it can get pretty messy; we can feel like no one wants to be around us or hang out with us. However, I hope that we can find encouragement in what Jesus says in verse 3, ***"That where I am you may be also."*** Think about the incredible fact that where Christ is, He wants you to be with Him also. That is such a simple idea, but with profound ramifications in our lives. God loves each and every one of us so much that He wants to spend eternity with us. I hope that when you find yourself being beaten down by the circumstances of life you, can be encouraged by the thought that the Lord desires you to be where He is. He wants a relationship with you here on this Earth, but He also wants to have you in eternity with Him.

Of course, just from these few verses of Jesus talking to His disciples they become quickly confused (just like we so often do).

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John 14:5-6 continues, ***“Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”*** I love how Thomas just honestly lets the Lord know, “Hey, we have no idea where You are going.”

The beautiful thing about the Father’s House is that He clearly makes it known how to get there. There is no hidden secret, no confusing directions, it is straightforward. Jesus tells us that He is the way. The only way is through Him. This is one of the most controversial things that Jesus says in all of Scripture. He makes it clearly known that there is no alternative route to the Father. Many people want to say all religion is just different roads to the same place, but Jesus vehemently stands in contradiction to that thought. We are not able to get to God unless it is through Jesus. People have tried and tried to come up with different ways to the Father’s house, and all other roads lead to a dead end.

9. Why do you think Jesus saying, ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life”*** is controversial?

10. What are some other ways you or others try to get to the Father?

However, there is so much hope in these verses as we have studied them. The Father’s house has room for all, so let us live in a way that tries to bring each and every person with us into eternity that we

can. Jesus wants to be with us in the Father's house, so let us be encouraged knowing how much He really loves us. The way to the Father's house is clear, so let us be encouraged knowing that we can understand how to have salvation and that we can know, without a shadow of a doubt, that we are following the right path.

UPPER ROOM

PREPARING FOR A VISIT

A PLACE FOR YOU, DEVOTION 1

Pastor Patrick Rowland

In the final moments Jesus has with the disciples, He has much to say and is very intentional with those words. The disciples, sensing something is about to happen to Jesus, were filled with anxiety, fear, and sadness. Yet, comforting them, Jesus tells them He will be leaving soon, but not to worry He will see them again.

John 14:2 says, ***“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”***

Some of my best memories as a child were traveling to see family. I have a large extended family on both sides, yet we did not live close to them. Multiple times a year we would go see them or they come to see us. It was always great seeing my cousins, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. There was never a feeling as if we were a burden, or they to us, on visits.

Rooms and beds would be prepared with fresh sheets. The fridge would be stocked and wonderful meals prepped. We would clean and straighten up. All day long I would ask my parents when our family would arrive. Once they did arrive, it was a celebration of days together, of course, until they had to leave. Saying goodbye would always include when we would see them next. We would have to hold on to that promise of seeing them again in the future.

For those who have faith and trust in Jesus, like the disciples, we are holding on to seeing Him. Even today we are promised that Jesus is preparing a special place for each of us. There is room in His

Kingdom for you. I imagine Jesus asking the Father, when are “they” coming? I do not wish to rush my time on Earth, but I know when it is done there can be a celebration as I arrive in Heaven.

He is prepared for you, are you prepared to see Him?

THE HOPE OF HOME

A PLACE FOR YOU, DEVOTION 2

Jeannie Yates

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” John 14:3

I grew up in the beautiful Pacific Northwest in the heart of the Willamette Valley just one hour from either majestic mountains or the scenic ocean. My grandparent's house overlooked that beautiful ocean and we were fortunate enough to visit often. Just thinking about it brings to mind the smell of salty, ocean air mixed with the aroma of freshly baked cookies. Sometimes, I still find myself homesick, even after 19 years of living in Michigan. I am even tearing up as I write this with a longing for “home.”

My parents now live in Idaho, and although I never had a permanent residence in Idaho, it now feels like home. All this time, I thought I was homesick for the place, for Oregon; but in reality, I was homesick for my people. The advancements in technology are so amazing and I am extremely grateful for Facetime calls with my mom and dad, but nothing beats being with them in person. Nothing can compare to the comfortable silence, casual conversation, a fresh cup of coffee, and the real-life hug that is found only at home.

We have just seen the disciples go on quite the emotional rollercoaster from Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the prediction of betrayal. I can only imagine the upheaval and confusion they must have been experiencing. That is where we start in this 14th chapter of John. The hope of “home” is what Jesus is promising to His disciples here in John 14:3, ***“And if I go and prepare a place***

for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

I remember trying to leave my girls in the nursery when they were going through the separation anxiety phase and attempting to calm their little hearts with promises of my return. “I will be back soon. Don’t worry. After this, we will go home and have lunch together.” Jesus is speaking straight to the separation anxiety of the disciples’ hearts. He gently reminds them not to worry (John 14:1), not only will He go prepare a place, not only will He return, but He will take you to be with Him. In his commentary of the book of John, R. Kent Hughes says, “In our fallen world, we can gain relief for our troubled hearts from the fact that Jesus is going to take us to be personally with Him. Not just the place, but the person, Jesus, is going to be ours.”

The disciples heard this precious promise from their Rabbi that not only would He prepare a place for them, but He would, once again, be with them. They would have a true home with Him. We can have a true home with Him. So, when we look at the unsettling events happening in our world and we begin to get anxious and homesick for Heaven, we can remember that we have the hope of “home” in Jesus.

“This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God’s inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us.” Hebrews 6:19-20 (NLT)

NOT SUGAR COATED

A PLACE FOR YOU, DEVOTION 3

Kendall Hine

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” John 14:6

I am a person who is bad with confrontation. My mind makes a nightmare movie roll of all the worst ways that the conversation could go and I begin to panic. My natural reaction is to sugarcoat things and skirt around the truth that can often be harsh. If we are honest, it can be hard to win people over when you lay down the law!

As a Christian living in a world full of a lot of “haters,” as the youth say, it can sometimes be hard to proclaim the truth of the Gospel, at least if you are bad at confrontation like me. It is easy to tell the world that we have a Heavenly Father that loves us despite every mistake we have ever made, but the story does not end with “God is love.”

John 14:6 says, ***“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”***

In a world that needs the Gospel so desperately, let us be reminded to not only show God’s love but to proclaim the clear truth of how to really know Him. There is coming a day where we will stand before the Creator of the universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and it will be made abundantly clear if we have accepted Him as our Savior and acknowledged our sin. It is not if we believed a sugarcoated version of the Gospel.

In our young adults’ Growth Community in Holly, Justin Dean challenged us to think about how we show our love to our non-Christian friends. He told us the story from the Gospel of Luke

chapter 5 that depicts a paralyzed man whose friends wanted to bring him to Jesus to be healed. They carried him across town on a mat; and when they saw how crowded it was, they climbed onto the roof and made a hole in the roof. They did all of this so that he could be lowered to the feet of Jesus. Can you imagine how tired, out of breath, and sweaty those friends were? Can you also imagine their joy when this friend was healed and his sins forgiven? I would say all the effort was worth it.

So here is the challenge: Are you willing to carry your non-Christian friends across town and up on a roof just so they can meet Jesus? It is not just telling your friends that God loves them, but that they are in desperate need of a Savior. Yes, God is love, but He is also the only way to eternal life.

GOD IN FLESH

A PLACE FOR YOU, DEVOTION 4

Caleb Jones

“If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’ Philip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.” John 14:7-10

I have often thought about what it was like to physically walk with Jesus. Surely, it was easier to believe in Him when you are standing next to Him, watching Him perform miracles. I would have never doubted Him, disrespected Him, sinned against Him, or questioned Him. Yet the disciples, who were the closest to Jesus, did all of these things. Here in John chapter 14, we see Jesus trying to teach His disciples a few things.

Jesus did not just come to Earth as the Son of God, He came as God in the flesh.

He is God, the Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End (Revelation 22:13), Jehovah Jireh our provider (Genesis 22:14), Jehovah Rapha our Healer (Exodus 15:26), Jehovah Nissi our Banner (Exodus 17:15), Jehovah Shalom our Peace (Judges 6:24), Jehovah Raah our Shepherd (Psalms 23:1), Jehovah Tsidkenu our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6), Abba Father (Romans 8:15), and Adonai our master (Colossians 1:16). God became flesh and lived among us (John

1:14). This means that the Creator of the universe walked exactly where we have walked. He faced the same temptation that we face (Matthew 4:1-11).

He is also teaching them about His deity. John 1:1-5 says, ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”*** In verse 14, it says, ***“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”*** This is the Christ. He is our Authority because He is God.

What are the things you are questioning God about right now?

Are you lacking in faith in any areas?

What does it mean to walk with Christ today?

What community do you have to wrestle with these questions?

Who is in your life that is encouraging you and challenging you?

DO YOU BELIEVE?

A PLACE FOR YOU, DEVOTION 5

Will Kinney

“Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.” John 14:11

Why is it so hard to believe what God says is true? Yet, it seems so easy for us to consider the lies of Satan and our untruthful thoughts. We can too often accept, “If you were saved, you wouldn’t think like that,” or “If God loved me, He wouldn’t allow this terrible situation to happen in my life.” These thoughts and lies make us feel like we are not under God’s grace and provision, and when we believe these lies, we let Satan win. If you have thoughts like this, be encouraged, because you are not alone. Every Christian believes Satan’s shaming lies at some point in their lives.

We need to be even more inspired by what Jesus is saying in John 14:11! Jesus is saying that He is God, and God is Him. He says to believe Him and not the lies of Satan. If we do not trust His words, we are to look and reflect upon His deeds. Most importantly, we need to focus on Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. If Jesus were not in the Father and the Father in Him, He would not have been able to take the sins of the world upon Him or even have the authority to forgive us.

I think sometimes we forget the importance of the cross, which leads us to question our faith and belief in God’s Word. Without the miraculous works Jesus did on the cross out of love for us, we would not have had a chance to have a relationship with God, our Creator and Father in Heaven. With our relationship restored with God, we can now believe that He is walking with us, preparing our steps,

and that He loves us! Because of that love, God literally died for us! We sometimes do not believe this because we cannot fathom this unconditional love. We are all undeserving of Jesus' actions on the cross, for His actions forgave us of all past, present, and future sins!

For us to genuinely believe this, we need to persevere through the doubts and continue to worship God in everything we do, for this is how we beat the lies of Satan. If we continue our disciplines of worship, Scripture reading, and giving glory to God for all things despite doubts and struggles, God will restore our hearts and minds. So, let us stay faithful to God, even when we have doubts and believe lies because that shows God that we are willing to sacrifice how we feel out of love and commitment to Him. It is the least we can do after the ultimate sacrifice, show of love, and faithfulness He displayed on the cross for each of us.

GLORIFY THE FATHER

A PLACE FOR YOU, DEVOTION 6

Pastor Ben Kirkman

“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” John 14:13

We find this verse in an incredibly powerful conversation between Jesus and His disciples. I can only imagine them trying to keep up with what He is telling them, “One of you will betray me. I am going away. I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” This is so much to try to grasp and deal with. Remember, Jesus is talking to real people with real opinions and emotions, and He is saying some hard stuff.

In John 14:12 He tells them, ***“Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do.”*** I picture the disciples raising their hands at this point: “Jesus, we have seen you do the impossible. You have healed people, provided thousands with food with only a little bit of bread and a couple of fish, turned water into wine, cast out demons, and even brought the dead back to life! You are telling us we will be able to do that stuff and more? How is that possible? You are God in the flesh, we are retired fisherman!” I doubt anyone really verbalized that, but how many of them were thinking it?

In John 14:13, Jesus clears up some of the questions they may have: “How are you going to be able to do such incredible things? It is all going to be possible through me and my power. The key to the great work is doing exactly what I have for you to do, the way I have called you to do it.” This promise was not a “genie-in-a-bottle” situation for the disciples to make all of their wildest dreams come true. The promise was to propel the Gospel throughout the world.

The guideline for its effectiveness was that what they asked for was according to the will of Jesus and through His name. You can see a glimpse in the book of Acts of their obedience to operate according to those parameters and how effective it was.

Jesus also answered the question of why He would allow them to do such great things. His purpose in using them in such a way was ultimately about God being glorified. All praise, honor, and glory for the amazing things that would happen would point back to the Father. People would be able to see His amazing love and power on display.

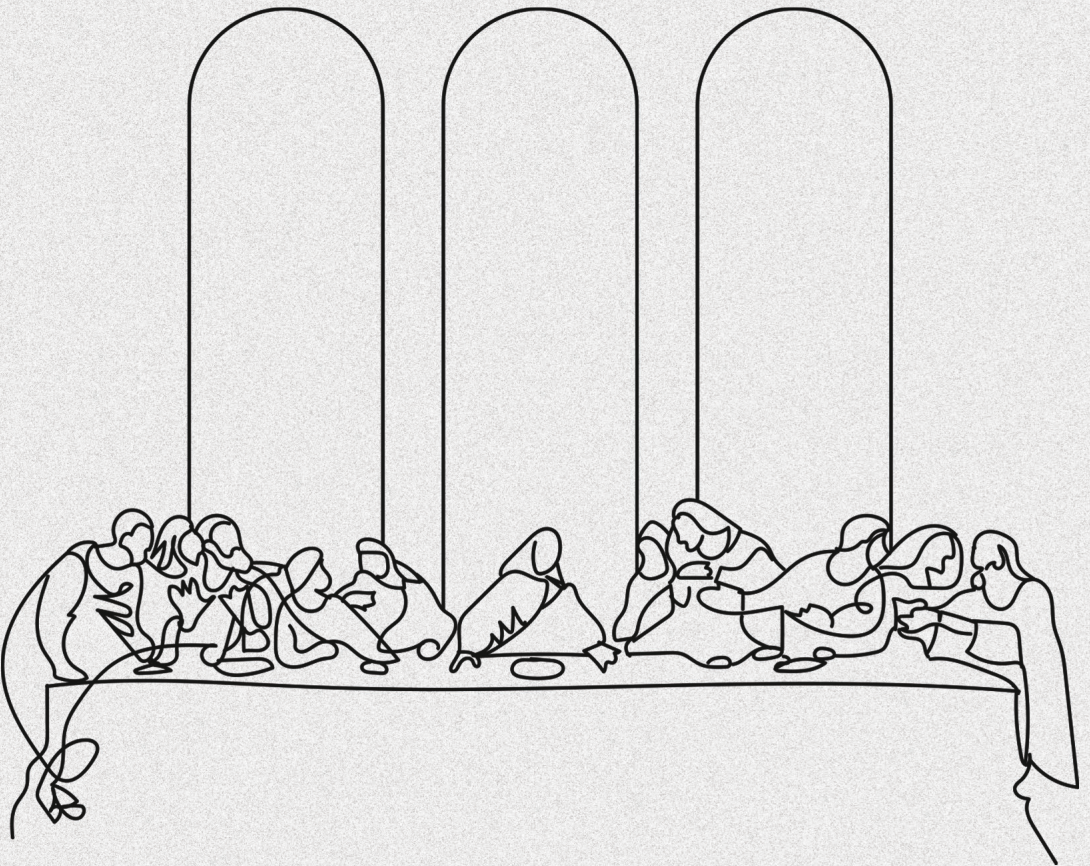
Matthew 5:16 says, ***“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”*** I would like to encourage you to walk through every part of your day looking for opportunities to point praise back to God. He is worthy of all praise!

UPPER ROOM

03

**THE
HELPER**

PASTOR NOBLE BAIRD



UPPER ROOM

Whenever I hear the word “help,” the first thing that comes to mind is a song from one of the greatest bands ever, “*Help!*” It was released in July of 1965, The Beatles’ song “*Help!*” shares a message, that many of us can relate to. Lennon and McCartney begin with the words, “I need somebody, not just anybody, you know I need someone, Help!”

1. Is there a time in your life when you found yourself truly in need of help? What were the circumstances?

2. Has there been times in your life where you knew you needed help; yet pride, and fear, maybe some worry, held you back from seeking help?

In John 14:15-17, Jesus is at a moment in time that has become infamous no matter the religion or political beliefs. The setting of this passage is the Last Supper. However, this conversation that Jesus had with His disciples can often be overlooked and people do not know where or when it took place. Yet, as we look at the context of this passage, Jesus has just finished breaking bread with His disciples and washing their feet; this is simply a continuation of their conversation that night. Beginning in verse 15 Jesus says, ***“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”*** It is truly so amazing to read of Christ’s love not only for His disciples but us, His followers.

Jesus is literally in the penultimate movements before His brutal murder, yet He comforts and encourages His disciples reminding them that they will never be alone.

3. What are the “**commandments**” that Jesus references here in this passage?

4. Did the Holy Spirit ever dwell within a follower of Christ before Pentecost? What are some stories and passages where the Holy Spirit came upon a follower for a time?

There is such comfort and true peace we can receive through the promises of Christ. These are not promises made flippantly or off the cuff to receive something in return. No, the promises of Christ are sure and always fulfilled. So, Christ tells His disciples that they will not be alone, the Spirit will come and dwell within them, but then what? In John 14:25-26, Jesus continues saying, ***“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”*** Not only will the Helper, who Jesus clearly tells us is the Holy Spirit, bring comfort in Christ’s physical absence from this world, but the Spirit will also teach, instruct, reveal, and bring remembrance. It is truly amazing - Christ’s love for us. He understands the grieving process. He knows that when He is gone from this world, His disciples and followers will need help, comfort, and guidance. Knowing this, we see the working of the Trinity; in that

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God the Father will send the Holy Spirit, to dwell within us (those that confess and believe in Jesus Christ as Lord) and this will all be done in the name and through the finishing work on the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ the Son. Wow!

5. Do you know of other passages of Scripture where we see the Trinity?

6. Is there a time when you truly felt the leading of the Spirit in your life? Did you heed the leading or contemplate?

Continuing in John 16:1-15, Jesus again shares about what the Spirit will do and furthermore, upon whose authority the Spirit works. Beginning in verse 1, Jesus says, ***“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning***

sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” What a challenging, yet encouraging passage. Jesus reminds His followers of the reality of the life and decision they have made to follow Him. He says in verse 2 that we will be chased after and sought after for death. As followers of Christ, we must know the reality of the times we live in. The truth is this: things are no different now than they were during the lives of the disciples. In fact, all except for John are recorded as dying brutal and untimely deaths because of their faith and drive to share the Gospel of Christ! Yet, Jesus uses this reality and the sorrow that the disciples are experiencing (in regards to Christ's departure from them) to yet again encourage them on the coming of the Helper. Jesus goes so far as to say, ***“It is to your advantage that I go away.”***

7. What are the advantage of Christ's departure and the coming of the Spirit?

8. Have you ever experienced the fear of change? What was the outcome? How did you overcome or deal with the change?

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One of the biggest advantages to Christ's departure means that He has fulfilled His purpose of reconciling us to the Father. Just as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, it is only through Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection that we are saved. So, yes it was and is to our advantage that Jesus ascended, so that the Spirit would come, but also within this departure that meant that the veil was torn and the ultimate sacrifice was made on our behalf!

Within this passage, Jesus teaches about an incredible truth of the role in which the Holy Spirit plays not only in our lives but in our world and in our mission of spreading the Gospel. Again, we see the Trinity displayed in verses 10-15. Unfortunately in our world, there are churches, leaders, and pastors, who ignore or just blatantly reject this truth Jesus shares at the end of this passage. Jesus says, ***"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."*** It is very clear here that the Spirit submits to the Son as the Son submits to the Father. However, it is not through the authority or the power of the Spirit through which we are saved or through which we are called. No, Jesus clearly taught His disciples and is teaching us that it is only through Him by which we are saved and it is through Him that we are called to the Gospel!

The Beatles sing these words in one of the final verses in the song "Help!"

*When I was younger, so much younger than today
I never needed anybody's help in any way
(Now) but now these days are gone (these days are gone)
I'm not so self-assured
(And now I find) now I find I've changed my mind
And opened up the doors*

Now, I know that not everyone is a huge fan of The Beatles and that is okay (We all are wrong at times). This verse, however, truly resonated with me and I hope it can be a challenge for us all. When we are young, oftentimes we think we can do it all and we do not actually need anyone's help. Even as we get older, learn more, and advance in our careers more, we can become even more stubborn. Yet, I hope that no matter the circumstances and no matter the situation we face; we take a step back, change our minds and open that door allowing the Spirit to teach us. Allowing for the comfort of the Spirit to fill our lives is essential to growth. Allowing for the prompting and leading of the Spirit to be our guide through all we do should be a priority. Jesus said that He would never leave us alone and that as followers of Christ the Spirit literally dwells within us. We know that Jesus has called us to share His Gospel boldly, yet with that call, He knew we would not be alone. He knew that the Spirit would come and fill us so that we would be bold for His glory! So, it is my prayer that we do not neglect, quench, or shun His guiding, teaching, comfort, and leading in our lives. I am not sure about you, but I truly need the Helper's help every day!

UPPER ROOM

A HELP FOREVER

THE HELPER, DEVOTION 1

Angela Cox

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.” John 14:16

Jesus promises the Holy Spirit. I love, in this portion of Scripture, how reassuring Jesus’ love is for us. With the simple truths of our obedience, He promises our salvation. What a loving Father! Enjoy these words again, ***“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.”*** The word ***“Helper”*** can be translated as a “comforter” or “advocate.” Here, Jesus is explaining that He will be our helper.

I grew up in the church and remember very clear moments in Sunday School being asked to accept Jesus into my heart. I am positive I did this several times throughout my childhood. However, I can recall the moment it felt like a life change. I can recall when I knew this ***“Helper”*** was truly in my heart. This is such a beautiful transformation; because not only is Jesus explaining that our obedience leads to salvation, but this ***“Helper”*** in our hearts can be seen by many people. Can you think back and remember the song, *“This Little Light of Mine?”* This is what He means! He is the comforter, the advocate, and the helper in times of need. The Father promises this forever. Through this promise, comes great light and love that we get to use in our daily walks through life.

When I was about 18 years old, I was shopping at a local Meijer. Someone I knew had spotted me and came over to greet me. They proceeded to ask me if I knew Jesus. I replied, “Yes,” and they responded with, “I could tell, you just have a glow around you.”

Friends, I cannot stress enough how much this Scripture really means to me. Knowing the love of our Father and how He is reassuring us that He is in our hearts. The truth of it is deeper than the protection and comfort from Him, it is a life change that many can see. Like the good Father He is, He uses that change for His good.

HEALTHY CHOICES

THE HELPER, DEVOTION 2

Cathy Story

“Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” John 14:17

Can you guess what one of the greatest tips for living a healthier life is? People will tell you over and over, that it is all about nutrition! While one could attempt to work out daily while consuming a never-ending pile of doughnuts, chances are that person will not actually receive the results that they are hoping for. Having a healthy, well-balanced diet is key to beginning to see any physical and health changes. What we put into our bodies is what will fuel us. Those who train for extensive physical events such as marathons or triathlons often have specific meals and plans for eating that they follow leading up to their event. They understand the importance of having the right fuel in their body for when they need it.

In John chapter 14, Jesus is talking about a helper who would come. John 14:17 states, ***“You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”*** After Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and return to Heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to live in us and be our help. When we believe in our hearts and profess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord, we are filled with His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is meant to be our help, to lead and guide us. In the same way we want and need to make healthy nutrition choices if we want to see improvements to our physical bodies, we need the Holy Spirit inside of us if we want to see improvements to our spiritual selves.

While this may seem like a rather simple thought, we have to realize just how difficult it can be to make healthy choices. There is a fast food industry that makes billions of dollars a year. It is not because they are healthy, but because they are convenient. We should not pretend like we do not choose the fast food options in our spiritual lives at times too. Sometimes the snooze button is just so tempting! We may feel good attending a Gathering on the weekend, enjoy the worship, and like hearing a good sermon; but unfortunately, those good choices are not the same as making sure we have the Holy Spirit in us! I can go to the store and buy all of the healthy things that I want, but if they just sit in the fridge, they are of no benefit to me.

I would challenge you to think about yourself today. Do you have spiritually healthy ingredients at the ready? When was the last time you independently took time to pray, read the Word, and worship the Lord? Maybe you do spiritually healthy things but still are not sure that you actually have the Holy Spirit in you. Romans 10:9 says, ***“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*** If you are not sure that you have the Holy Spirit in you, you can confess to the Lord today to be saved, and His Spirit will be in you!

DON'T BE TROUBLED

THE HELPER, DEVOTION 3

Pastor Roy Townsend

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” John 14:18

Have you ever been troubled by something? A basic definition of troubled in the Oxford Dictionary is defined as being “beset by problems or conflict,” or “showing distress or anxiety.” In this section of Scripture, it is not a coincidence that Jesus Christ was telling His disciples to not be troubled. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to work with those of us who believe and trust in Him. Jesus understands that the disciples are really concerned about Him leaving and in need of comfort.

John 14:16-18 reads, ***“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. ‘I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.’”***

Through these Scriptures, we are introduced to the doctrine or concept of being adopted into the family of God. Some translations use the word comfortless, but as I studied this Scripture the concept of being without a mother or father is more than without comfort in the context of this passage. We are taught that God is the Father, and through the Son’s sacrifice, we have been adopted.

In Romans 8:14-18, it reads, ***“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of***

adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Longtime pastor and biblical scholar R. Kent Hughes writes, "God had fellowship with Jesus, and he has fellowship with us by virtue of our adoption." This quote reflects the concept of being adopted and Christ states, ***"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."***

Who are these orphans? The disciples completely understood this concept. In New Testament times the orphan was in a particularly difficult spot. They did not have someone watching over them. They did not have someone caring for them. They did not have guidance from a parent, and there was not a good system to protect the orphans from the evils of this world. I can only imagine how comforting this statement was because the disciples did not have a full understanding and were shaken by Jesus' comments that He was going to leave them. So they questioned Jesus, and He revealed the promise of the Holy Spirit to watch over, care for, and provide guidance.

In John 14:25-27, Jesus says, ***"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."***

Church, as we persevere through this world, let us remember that we are adopted children into the family of God and that God the Father

UPPER ROOM

and God the Son sent God the Holy Spirit to be our guidance and comforter. We are not orphans but adopted children. ***“Let not your hearts be troubled.”***

THE GIFT OF PAIN

THE HELPER, DEVOTION 4

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

“And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” John 16:8

My wife and I are new grandparents. It is so exciting. Recently, our son and his family came back home to visit us. They named our grandson Remy Oliver. My paternal grandfather's name was Oliver. Seeing Remy melted our hearts. However, we were quickly reminded that our house is not childproof. We were constantly jumping up to move things or distract Remy. Low “hanging” breakables and outlets were his toys of choice. The kitchen and especially the oven/stove were off limits. Already we were saying, “Hot!”

We do not want Remy to get hurt. Pain is such an intriguing concept. Although we hate it and avoid it, we should be thankful for it. Pain helps us avoid getting seriously hurt.

Conviction is the same way. Although it bothers us, it is a gift to help us from getting seriously hurt. John 16:8 speaks of the Holy Spirit being sent after the Son returns to Heaven, ***“And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”*** The Holy Spirit came to convict us. Warren Wiersbe points out that the Greek word for convict is a “legal word that means to bring to light, to expose, to refute, to convict and convince.”

Not only does the conviction of the Holy Spirit direct us away from sin and help us avoid getting seriously hurt, but His conviction also does more. Our sinful life and need for a Savior are clearly realized. We acknowledge that we are in a dire situation that only the work of Jesus Christ on the cross can rectify.

Therefore, conviction by the Holy Spirit should direct us away from self (sinful ways) and to the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

A beautiful example of the Spirit's function is that of Nathan the prophet, who challenged King David for his sins against Uriah. Nathan gives a story of someone abusing his neighbor exposing immense greed. David is furious and wants to know who did this. In 2 Samuel 12:7, we read, ***"Nathan said to David, 'You are the man!'"*** Nathan pointed out David's sins and David responded properly. He was a broken man. David writes in Psalm 51:4, ***"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment."***

Is the Holy Spirit convicting you of sin right now? Do you realize your need to come to the Lord for salvation? Is the Holy Spirit convicting you of some poor choices that have pointed you away from the Lord? Be thankful for the conviction and come back to Him.

“HE”

THE HELPER, DEVOTION 5

Emilou Irwin

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” John 16:13

The pronoun **“He”** is very important. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force. He is the third person of the Trinity. He is equal with God the Son and God the Father. When He, ***“the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”***

The word guide means to lead, teach, and give guidance. It is so cool that Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit comes He is going to lead you, guide you, and give you guidance into the truth. Jesus said it was to our advantage that He would go away. The Holy Spirit would not only be with us but He would be in us 24/7. You and I never have to worry about being leaderless or not having anyone in our life to guide us as a Christian. We always have the Holy Spirit who Jesus promised will guide us and lead us.

Note this, He will not speak on His own authority. In other words, the Holy Spirit will not speak just by Himself, He speaks in concert with Jesus and the Father. He speaks whatever He hears and will tell us what is to come. Jesus is simply emphasizing again the fact that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all work in concert together. They all work together in concert for the advantage of the believer.

Notice that Jesus, once again, is reminding His disciples that He is a straight shooter and does not sugarcoat things. It is going to get worse. It is going to get really bad and He does not want His

followers to be under any kind of disillusionment at what lies ahead. What He is doing is preparing them and strengthening them to be able to face the difficult challenges that are coming.

Jesus is doing the same thing today. Very few times in life will He want us to escape from what is out there. He knows that avoidance does not bring greater faith to our life. Also, avoidance does not strengthen us in any way. The best thing for us is to learn to go through, with God, what life brings no matter how difficult it is. We need to see the resources, strength, and grace that you and I can have with Jesus.

THE WORD

THE HELPER, DEVOTION 6

Gary Wright

“He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” John 16:14

Growing up, my mom raised me in church. I learned about all the stories in Jesus' life but had a hard time understanding how they all fit together. I learned about the Gospel of Jesus, how He lived a sinless life, died on a cross to pay my sin debt, and how God raised Him on the third day. When I was thirteen, the Holy Spirit convicted me that I was a sinner and I needed a Savior. I gave my life to Jesus that same day.

Although I was saved, I did not read the Bible. I never spent time personally growing in my relationship with Jesus. Because of this, I had a hard time walking with Christ consistently. When I graduated from high school and went to college, I totally fell away from Jesus and quit going to church altogether.

I did not start attending church again until my teenage kids got involved in a student group at a church in our hometown, which was almost twenty years later. My wife, Kim, and I started attending that church as well. We ended up getting plugged into an adult Bible study. As a class, we studied the book of John verse by verse. The teacher's name was Bob Goodwin and he was fantastic. Through that study of John, it was like a light bulb went off. I started understanding how all the stories that I had learned about Jesus fit together and made sense. I developed a passion for reading and learning God's Word.

The Holy Spirit has used the truth of Scripture to transform me to be more like Jesus. He continues to guide and transform me on a daily basis. My walk with Jesus has never been more consistent.

In John 16:14, Jesus is talking with His apostles and reassuring them that when the Holy Spirit comes the Spirit is going to glorify Jesus by guiding them in the truth and reminding them of what Jesus had taught them. The Holy Spirit would eventually inspire the apostles to write the New Testament. It is through these New Testament writings that the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus and leads us into the truth today. If you know Jesus as Savior and you want to have a more consistent walk with Him, I want to encourage you to set aside time in your schedule each day to read God's Word and spend time with the Lord. The Holy Spirit will use this to take you to a deeper understanding of who Jesus is and it will transform your life and make your walk with Jesus more consistent. I highly recommend not waiting twenty years to figure this out.

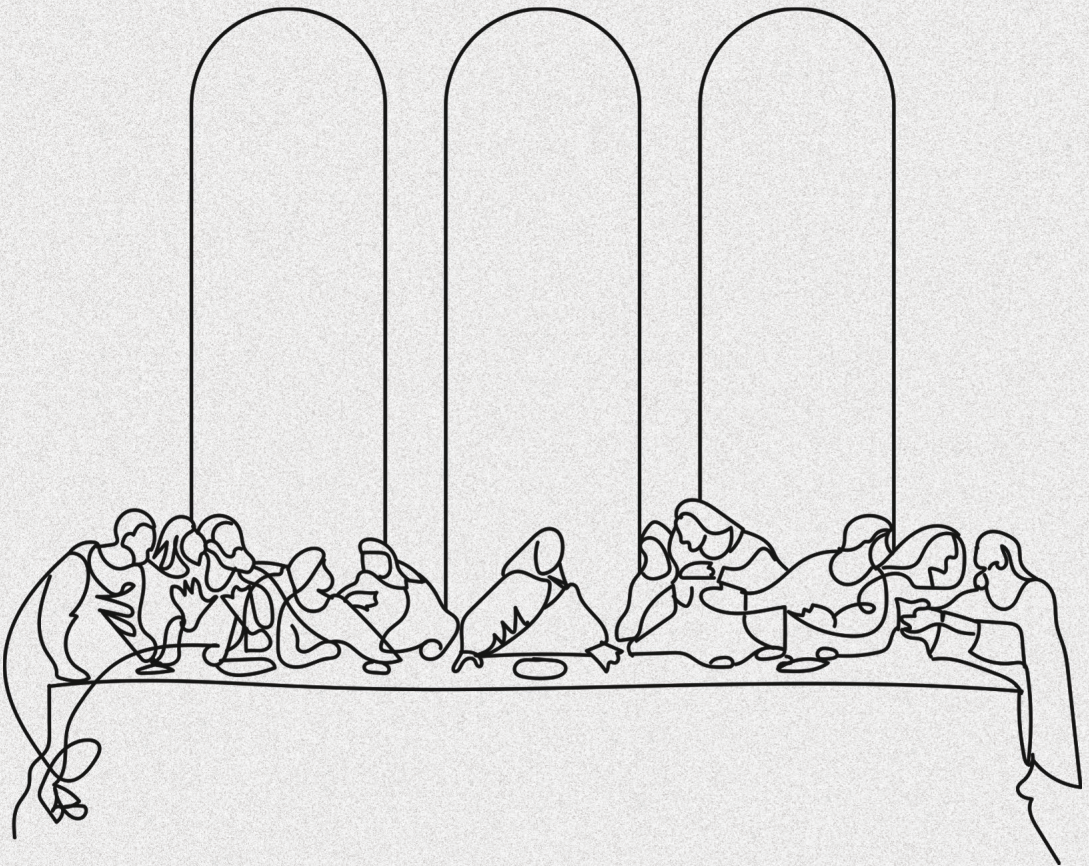
In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul says, ***“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”***

UPPER ROOM

04

**TRUE
VINE**

PETER MASON



UPPER ROOM

1. What would a sketch of your dream house look like? What style would it be (Tudor, craftsman, colonial, mid-century, modern)? Any specific color? What would be some of the unique features (pool, garage, air conditioning, theater)?

We can dream all day long about our dream houses because having a home is paramount to our existence. We spend thousands of dollars decorating and rearranging our homes each year so that we feel “at home” when we walk in the front door. The desire to be “at home” is an image of what Jesus speaks about in John chapter 15. Our desire to put down roots and cultivate an abode where our bodies and souls can rest is a spiritual desire, too.

We pick up the story in the springtime when the night air is simultaneously humid and cool as Jesus and His closest friends walk together after sharing their last meal together. They are headed to the Garden of Gethsemane. The world as they know it is about to change. These are some of Jesus’ last words to them.

Read John 15:1-6.

Jesus describes Himself as a vine and His Father as the vinedresser. For us, that may sound like an awkward idea out of left-field, but for the disciples who grew up reading the Hebrew Bible, this would have set off little alarm bells in their heads.

2. In the past, what/who did “the vine or vineyard” refer to? (Psalm 80:7-11)

3. Why might Jesus refer to Himself as the **“true vine?”** (Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 15:1-8)

In this organic metaphor, Jesus declares that we are the branches connected to the vine, intended to bear fruit. However, in verses 2-12, Jesus unpacks the consequences of whether we (the branches) are currently bearing fruit or not.

4. What are the two responses of the Father (the vinedresser) to the two types of branches in verse 2? Why?

The purpose of the vinedresser pruning the vine is to ensure that the branch remains healthy and can properly produce large sweet grapes. As it relates to viticulture, pruning includes pinching off little “sucker shoots” (springs that draw away resources from the production of big, juicy grapes) from the branch. Left to itself, the branch will favor more leafy growth over more fruit, so the vinedresser has to prune or clear away unnecessary shoots to promote even greater fruitfulness.

As mentioned, it is springtime when Jesus speaks these words to His disciples. Springtime was a time of cleaning; autumn was the time for harvesting. In the days and weeks surrounding this event, vinedressers would have been cleansing the branch of insects and parasites and pruning their vines.

UPPER ROOM

5. As it relates to our life, have you ever felt that God the Father was cleansing and trimming you as a branch to bear more fruit? How did it feel? What was the result?

6. Besides life's circumstances, what is the primary tool God uses to cleanse and prune us (verse 3)?

We have talked a lot about the vinedresser's actions and response to our fruitfulness or unfruitfulness. However, we have not discussed yet what we are supposed to do as branches.

7. Are we meant to focus on trying to produce good fruit in our lives? If so, how do we do that? If not, what is the one thing we are supposed to focus on?

In my home growing up, my family was notoriously known for keeping our Christmas tree up for far longer than needed. Have you ever kept your Christmas tree up way past Christmas time? The longest we kept the tree up was until mid-March due to the busyness of life. In the evenings, the tree still looked good with the lights on as the ornaments sparkled in the light. However, with the lights on, you could easily see the brown sagging branches and the needles all over the floor. "Real" Christmas trees will only ever last a few weeks from the time they are cut off from their roots. Even though they are

dying and shriveling underneath, it can be easy to cover them up with more ornaments and lights.

Similarly, we can sometimes cultivate a “Christmas tree” faith where our response to a shriveling soul is to put more ornaments (fruit) on display to convince ourselves and the rest of the world that we are actually healthy and full of life.

8. Have there been times when you have been tempted to show off your ornaments (fruit) to yourself, God, or the church to cover up a lacking spiritual life? What was that like? How did it make you feel?

The branches’ responsibility is not to produce the fruit they bear. Their responsibility is to abide, remain, and make a home in the vine. Jesus directs us to this one priority for our lives: abiding in Him. The fruit comes when we are focused on abiding and nothing else.

9. What does it look like to **“abide”** in Jesus? What does it look like to not abide in Jesus?

10. What have you found helpful for remaining or abiding in Jesus? Any rhythms or practices?

UPPER ROOM

11. When we do abide or make a home in Jesus, we see in verses 5-12 that multiple promises are given for our life. What are these promises?

Jesus gives His disciples the reason behind these words and command to abide in Him in verse 11, ***“That my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”*** Far too often we can fall into the trap of thinking of living a holy life of good fruit as a necessary part of following Jesus which is tiring and often too demanding. However, Jesus’ call to abide in Him and thus produce fruit is a call to find peace and joy in a world of adversity and exhaustion.

12. How does this purpose reframe Jesus’ command to ***“abide”*** in your life? How does abiding in Jesus lead to a life full of joy?

THE VINEDRESSER

TRUE VINE, DEVOTION 1

Adam Moore

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.” John 15:1

Today’s verse uses the term “vinedresser” found in the ESV translation of John 15:1. Other translations use terms such as husbandman, farmer, gardener, vintner, and vineyard keeper. I will be the first to admit that I did not always fully understand the term *“husbandman,”* found in some translations, but I love the way the ESV uses the term, *“vinedresser.”*

According to the dictionary, a vinedresser is a person who prunes, trains, and cultivates vines. Today’s verse states that Jesus is the vine, but that God the father is the vinedresser. In other words, “the vine” (Jesus) gives life and nourishment, but the life and nourishment are sustained when “the vinedresser” (God the father) cultivates and prunes. You could say that both the vine, and the vinedresser have quite distinct roles, but work together as one to sustain life and growth.

I have a large Concord grape vine growing towards the end of my backyard. I always enjoy watching the grape clusters grow and turn dark purple, but I am not a fan of the actual fruit itself. A few years back I started doing nothing with this vine and figured that since it was towards the back of my yard nobody would care if it were a little overgrown. What I did not realize is that without pruning the vine, the vine would continue to grow, but have very unintentional consequences. Instead of the vine growing across the grapevine arbor for which it was intended, it started growing up my only fruit-producing apple tree and has created a huge mess. It is fair to say

that there are now more grapes hanging from my apple tree than there are apples. The vine has choked out much of my apple tree due to neglect on my part for not being the proper vinedresser.

I am glad that our God never gets tired of pruning and shaping us. I am glad that He does not see us as something to be neglected left in the far corner of the backyard. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, then new life runs through you. You got connected to the life-giving vine that only Jesus can provide. In just a few more verses Jesus will refer to Himself as **“the vine”** again and refer to His people as **“the branches.”** I challenge those of us who have accepted Jesus to go out and bear much fruit as the branches. You can only bear more fruit by staying more connected to **“the vine.”** Humble yourself before **“the vinedresser”** and let Him prune and shape you. Do not be like my grapevine which had unintentional consequences when I decided to stop pruning. God is the **“vinedresser”** that is willing to shape and prune our lives if we only submit.

BRANCHES

TRUE VINE, DEVOTION 2

Mitchell Holmes

“Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” John 15:2

The relationship between followers of Christ and God has been described in many ways in the Bible. Jesus describes us as sheep that need constant guidance and attention that are unable to fend for ourselves. We see God described as our Heavenly Father; One that looks down at us admiringly and delicately loves and corrects us. However, one description of this relationship in the book of John is unlike the rest.

In John 15:2, Jesus says, ***“Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”*** What Jesus is saying here is that all believers are branches on a tree that must be connected to the ***“vine”*** (Jesus) from verse 1.

Every believer must be rooted in Jesus. We must seek connection to Him every day. A tree branch that becomes disconnected from its root, simply cannot live. Every person that loves Christ should be living a life that is glorifying to God, made evident by the “fruit” that can be witnessed in their everyday life. If we truly love the Lord, our actions, mannerisms, and characteristics should point others to Jesus. The way that Jesus compares our actions to fruit is very interesting. For a fruit-bearing plant to produce fruit is something that takes no effort. It does not have to think about it. It is no surprise when it happens, the plant just does what its biology is designed to do. For

Christians, it should be the same: love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness should be an unconscious thought for us. We should not have to put any thought into these “fruits,” it should be the standard and it should be no surprise to those around us. When we do not bear fruit, Jesus says the vinedresser or the Father takes away those branches. There are several interpretations of what that means but I personally do not believe this to be a pleasant thought.

The relationship between the believer and God does not end at bearing fruit. The most interesting thing about this description of vine, branch, and vinedresser is the way that it discusses how the Father will prune the branches that are connected to the vine and producing fruit. Pruning is the process of cutting away excess growth or decay in a plant. Left unattended, a fruit-bearing plant will produce its fruits but with some care, cultivation, and painful pruning, that plant can achieve even greater fruit production. The process of cutting away dead or overdeveloped areas of our lives is a painful one for us, but our Father and vinedresser cares about us enough to painfully remove those parts of us to help us fully bloom and better glorify God.

BEARING FRUIT

TRUE VINE, DEVOTION 3

Rich Sawicki

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” John 15:4

Jesus is the vine. The vine chose us to be grafted into it, to become part of it; but it is our choice to stay connected to the vine and feed off the vine. If we stay connected to Him we will be fed by the vine. When we are fed by the vine, we will grow fruit according to the vine we are connected to.

The word abide means to accept or act in accordance with. Before we can abide in Jesus, we must first accept and believe that He is God. Once we have accepted that He is God, then we have to confess it with our mouths. As we abide, we grow more and more. I am not talking about just giving lip service. It is about serving our King with our lives through loving others.

The only way we can know how to love is to have Him living in us. If He is living in us, He is going to be loving others through us.

There are at least three ways we can abide and stay connected to Him:

1. Reading the Bible. It is very important to know the Word of God. It is how we can know God, how He acts, and how He expects us to act. Satan will try to twist God's Word; we need to know the truth so we can recognize any lies.

2. Prayer. This is the first way we get connected to God and it is the best way to stay connected to Him. The Bible tells us to pray about everything all the time. God is always listening and He is always there.

3. Church and a Growth Community. Studying with other believers is an important way to stay connected. God did not call us to live out our faith in Him all by ourselves. When Jesus sent out the disciples, He sent them out in pairs.

The Bible tells us if we stay connected to Jesus we will see His fruit in our lives. Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) says, “***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.***” The fruit of the Spirit is the fruit that comes from abiding in the True Vine, Jesus.

GOOD VS. FALLEN

TRUE VINE, DEVOTION 4

Joe Wilson

“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” John 15:8

As I sit here this morning studying these words, I cannot escape the imagery of a nice bright red apple still on the tree just waiting to be harvested and used for good. I am thinking of a nice warm homemade apple pie with some freshly churned vanilla ice cream.

Now picture this, you are walking underneath the apple tree looking up at the “good fruit” with great desire and hope for what is to come. Have you looked down? There are rotten apples that will, no doubt, be lying around waiting to be stepped on, thrown away, or in the King James Version verbiage, ***“purged.”***

Looking back over the past 20 years or so, I see where I have had instances where I have confused the two. I mean, the fallen fruit lying on the ground rotting away is still fruit, right?

Matthew 7:17-18 says, ***“So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.”***

I believe God's inspired Word clears this issue up for us. Good fruit is full of hope, to be desired, and profitable in our walk with Christ. Fallen fruit is diseased, rotten, and decayed.

Without Christ, it is impossible to bear good fruit. John 15:5 adds, ***“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I***

in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

I caution you today to truly take a look at what we are calling ***“fruit.”*** Is it good fruit or fallen fruit? Is it profitable or is it rotten? Is it from God or from ourselves?

Matthew 7:16 says, ***“You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?”***

My prayer for all of us is that we bear good fruit and at the same time be cautious of the fallen fruit.

BRUSH PILE OR FRUIT PRODUCER

TRUE VINE, DEVOTION 5

Mark Pittenger

“If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” John 15:6

At the end of every winter, when the weather finally breaks, one thing that always needs to be done is to pick up the dead branches that have fallen off the various trees around my backyard. This is a tedious job but one that is necessary. The dead branches end up getting added to the ever-growing pile of brush in the back corner, where they will wait to be added to a fire. At that point, the branches are only good for burning.

In John chapter 15, Jesus likens Himself to a vine, and we, as His disciples, are likened to the branches that grow off of the vine. Jesus goes on to describe God the Father as the gardener who will tend to the vine and see that it bears fruit. Jesus tells us in John 15:5 that those who abide in Him shall produce fruit because He will also abide in them. In verse six Jesus tells us, ***“If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”***

Much like the trees around my yard, the branches that are dead and are not “blooming,” or producing fruit, are detached from the vine and set aside to be burned. This is a very straight-to-the-point warning from Jesus that those who are not fully dependent on Him, will be separated from Him. We need to be completely and fully attached to the vine, to be completely and fully alive!

Jesus knew His audience and that they would understand the metaphor of gardening, so He used that to paint the Gospel picture. God the Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the world, or, the vine being planted. The Holy Spirit works through Jesus, the vine, to create disciples or branches, and furthermore, sever any branches that are dead.

The bottom line is that if you consider yourself a Christian, then everything you do must start, and end, with Jesus. We must abide in Him fully or be severed from Him eternally.

John 3:36 says, ***“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”***

GOD WORKS IN ALL SITUATIONS

TRUE VINE, DEVOTION 6

Jeremy Smith

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” John 15:10

Jesus has just explained to His disciples how their relationship to Him and God should work. He used the example of a vine producing fruit and explains how the fruit (us) needs to be attached to the vine (Jesus) to continue growth. However, what happens when we do not feel God moving in our life? What happens when it feels like we are not moving forward in our relationship? It is those times when we are struggling and it feels like every tiny baby step forward we make results in a giant leap backward.

Our family hobby for the last few years is raising chickens and ducks. We planned to start with six chickens. Between minimum buys and just how cute a little chick or duckling can be, in the blink of an eye, we had just shy of 50 birds at the end of the first season. We were having a hard time keeping up with storing and selling eggs but had a fairly steady stream of people who loved the fresh eggs and were consistently wanting more. So, at the beginning of the second season, we decided to try adding a few more birds, which quickly turned into more than doubling the total amount we had previously. Season two was terrible. Our egg production was highly erratic, with almost no consistency from week to week. We started getting to a point of being beyond frustrated and almost ready to give up. We had tried increasing their space, changing food, upping the quality of food, changing protein levels, and giving them more sunlight. We were reading more and more about others' struggles and resolutions

to see what to try. It took months to get any type of consistent level of eggs, but we finally found something that was working. It felt like a switch had been turned on and we went from a handful of eggs one day to almost two dozen the next day. Then within a week, we had almost three dozen per day.

Sometimes this is how our walk with God is going to be. Some days it is going to be very clear, that we are headed in the right direction. If you continue reading John 15:11, Jesus says, ***“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”*** Those are the easy days to share that joy He is speaking of. Other times, we need to look back on those days and the joy they brought us as a reminder.

Something to remember when we may be facing a trial or hardship is that God has not left us. In 2 Corinthians 4:16, it says, ***“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.”*** Some days may feel like we are just wasting away, but if we focus on those positive times as difficult as they may be in the moment, it can be a reminder of God's grace and mercy to us.

Matthew 17:20 says, ***“He said to them, ‘Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.’”***

On those days when the struggle is really holding me down, I reflect back to the idea that all God is requiring of us is to have enough faith, the size of a mustard seed, and nothing would be impossible for us. If you were to look at a mustard seed and really consider that would be all it would take to accomplish unbelievable tasks, the idea is a total mind melt. In the way the world is, how negative the perception could be, and how easily we could fall into a pessimistic perspective, it is

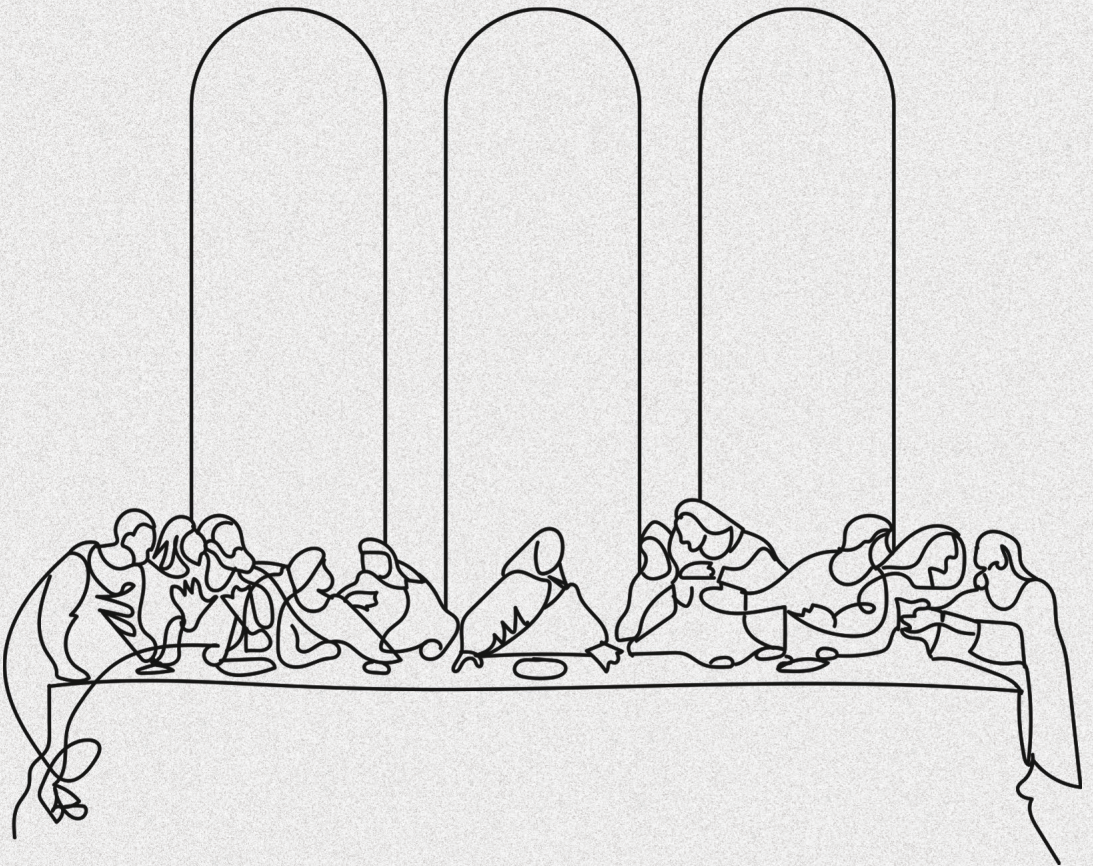
UPPER ROOM

an incredible reminder of how amazing and powerful our God truly is. Even when we do not feel it, see it, or understand it, God is still working all things for His glory to be a light in a dark world.

05

**THE
WORLD**

PASTOR JOSH YATES



UPPER ROOM

1. As we near Easter this year, how are you really doing? How is your family? How are your relationships? How is your world?

God is good. He has given us so much and loves us so much. I am hopeful that the answers given to the first question were encouraging. At the same point, there may be some struggles going on in your life. There may be strife going on in the world around you.

I am also hopeful that you are pointing your life at Jesus. As we are in the midst of the Easter season, we are continually reminded of all that God has done for us and the immense gift that we have in salvation. However, the world in which we live has largely rejected the gift that God has given. God has called us to live differently from the world and that can cause trouble for us.

Read John 15:18-26.

What a reality check that Jesus gives us here, right? Jesus talks about if the world hates you, but it is more of a comment like, "If, and trust me they will, hate you." Jesus is telling us that the hatred of the world is a certainty. This is an overall and general hatred from the world and its systems that stand against the Gospel of Jesus.

2. Have you ever felt the hatred or the oppression of the world? How?

Less than 24 hours after He made this statement He was arrested, stood trial for crimes He did not commit, was mocked, beaten, stripped naked, whipped, nailed to a cross, verbally assaulted on the cross, struck in the heart with a spear, and was killed. It brings tears to my eyes to even write these words. Yes, Jesus was hated.

Jesus was hated, and so would His followers. If you follow Jesus, you were chosen to be His. You were called out of the world in which we live. You were called to be ***“aliens and strangers in this world”*** (1 Peter 2:11 AMP). You were called to be a ***“chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for his own possession”*** that carries the name of Jesus to the world (1 Peter 2:9).

D.A. Carson is quoted as saying, “Former rebels who have by the grace of the king been one back to loving allegiance to their rightful monarch are not likely to prove popular with those who persist in rebellion.”

3. What does the realization that Jesus suffered and was hated do in your heart?

There is no way to follow a crucified Savior and not expect a cross. It is not that any one of us goes out and looks for persecution. The reality is that just by living for Jesus and His Kingdom, you will look different than the world and its systems. When that happens, friction is coming. The toughest thing to remember when that friction happens is that it is not personal. It is not really you anyone will have a problem with, it is Jesus living in you. I have had situations in my life where just going to church on vacation caused arguments and anger toward me and my family.

UPPER ROOM

4. How have you experienced friction and anger toward Jesus in your life? How did you deal with those situations?

Jesus reminds us in verse 15:21 that the world simply does not know Him. This gives us a reason why things are the way that they are. It is easy to think that those around us should act better than they do; however, we must not expect those that do not know Jesus to act as though they do. The world and its systems are living in open rebellion against the King, which is where we all were before we met Jesus.

5. In what areas of your life do you still struggle with living in rebellion against Jesus?

There are two sorts of exceptions to this, however. We can think that we are being persecuted because of Jesus, but in reality, we are being persecuted because we are being a jerk! We should never look for persecution, but it can be easy to bring it upon ourselves. On the other hand, if we do not face any persecution or struggle at all because of our faith in Jesus, it could mean that we are an “undercover Christian” that simply is not living out a life that follows Jesus. The world does not hate those that never talk about Jesus.

6. Have you found yourself in either of these positions (bringing persecution upon yourself like on social media or living as an undercover Christian)?

7. What does it look like to live a life that is following Jesus?

Jesus loved people and yet He was hated. Why was that? The biggest reason that the world hated Jesus then and hates Jesus today is that He exposes the guilt of people's actions. No one likes it when they are called out for doing something wrong, and this is exactly what Jesus did and does today through His followers. A Jesus-follower exposes sin just by living life differently for the Kingdom of God.

H.A. Ironside tells this story:

"Years ago, at the time of the opening up of inland Africa by missionaries, the wife of an African chief happened to visit a mission station. The missionary had a little mirror hung up on a tree outside his home, and the woman happened to glance into it. She had come straight out of her pagan environment and had never seen the hideous paintings on her face or her hardened features. Now, gazing at her own face, she was startled. She asked the missionary, "Who is that horrible-looking person inside the tree?"

"It is not the tree," said the missionary. "The glass is reflecting your own face." She could not believe it until she was holding the mirror in her hand. When she had understood she said to the missionary, "I must have the glass. How much will you sell it for?" The missionary did not want to sell his mirror. But she insisted so strongly that in the end, he thought it would be better to sell it to her and thus avoid trouble. A price was set, and she took the glass. Fiercely she said, "I will never have it making faces at me again." She threw it down and broke it to pieces."

UPPER ROOM

Jesus' followers become a mirror of something totally different than what is seen in the world. This causes others to pick up a mirror to see themselves and this either causes friction or a turning toward Jesus. Sometimes people will want to break that mirror and other times they may let Jesus change the person in that mirror.

Think about that, your life can help someone see Jesus. Do not ever stop living the Gospel. The Holy Spirit has been sent exactly for this purpose, to help you live the Gospel. He bears witness of Jesus through your life! He empowers you to live and share the Gospel as you live your life for God and as you learn more about Him.

8. How can someone's life speak the Gospel to others? Do you have to use words when you proclaim the Gospel (sort of a trick question)?

Read John 16:25-33.

How does it feel to be loved by God Himself? It should be an amazing truth that is daily changing your life as you realize it more and more. Jesus went back to His heavenly throne and sent the Holy Spirit that now dwells inside each person that knows Jesus as their Savior. We have direct access to the Father who knows and loves you deeply. This kind of access and friendship with God is necessary gifts to us as we face trials and tribulations while we are in the world.

No matter how alone you may feel in tough times, you are never alone, because God is with you just as He was with Jesus. Every one of us will have trouble, but we can know that we are never alone and that Jesus has overcome this world already.

John 16:33 says, ***“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”***

9. How does the fact that God is ever-present with you and loves you help you in your times of trouble?

Jesus told us that we would have trouble in this world. It is not a question of if, but when. We live for a different Kingdom. We have a different purpose in Jesus. However, Jesus has overcome the world. He offers salvation to that same world.

10. How can you share the Gospel with those around you today, this week, and this month?

No matter what you face today, you are loved. You are not alone. Carry that truth in the name of Jesus wherever you go today and proclaim His love to the lost and the captive. Will you face persecution? Yes. Will God use you to bring some people to know Jesus as you live for Him and proclaim the Gospel? Yes!

What a friend we have in Jesus!

UPPER ROOM

SAVIOR AND LORD

THE WORLD, DEVOTION 1

Keaton Washburn

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.” John 15:18

One of my greatest joys in ministry is getting to baptize students that have been part of our student ministry. Over the past two weeks, I had the privilege of baptizing eight students at and after student camp. It was amazing! As I have gotten more comfortable baptizing, God has transformed the questions that I ask before and during baptism. When I began I always asked, “Have you accepted Jesus into your heart?” While there is some truth to that, I believe the biblical truth of following Jesus is about more than just asking someone into your heart. One of the clarifications that I now make is quoting Romans 10:9, ***“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*** I now always ask, “Have you confessed Jesus as your Lord?” The difference between these two questions is a matter of lordship.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian, in his book titled *“The Cost of Discipleship,”* talks about an idea called cheap grace. He defines cheap grace as “the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.” Cheap grace sounds nice, but it ultimately leads to death. Jesus talks about this in John 15:18, ***“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.”***

Cheap grace is the promise of eternal life without the cost of one's earthly life dedicated to following Christ. Just two verses later Jesus reminds His disciples of His words in John chapter 13 that no servant is greater than their master. Another word for master is lord. If Jesus is your Lord and He was hated, you must expect to also be hated by the world.

If Jesus is your Savior, is He also your Lord? Are you willing to be hated by the world as Jesus was hated by the world? A lord is someone with power, authority, and influence over you. Would you define Jesus as having power, authority, and influence over you? Or is He just a nice addition to your Sunday routine and maybe the occasional Wednesday? The Greek word for savior is used 24 times in the whole New Testament. In contrast, the word Lord is used more than 600 times specifically referring to God or Jesus. Does your life emphasize the same things that the New Testament authors emphasized? Would others refer to Jesus as your Lord?

YOU BELONG HERE

THE WORLD, DEVOTION 2

Stephen Billings

“If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” John 15:19

Have you ever just wanted to belong? Have you wanted to be welcomed into a fun group of friends, classmates, work buddies, a band, or even a sports team?

When I was in high school, I loved to play baseball. It was all that I wanted to do growing up. As my passion grew I ended up playing more and more until I ended up playing baseball year-round. While I had a passion and a love for baseball, I never felt that I always fit in on the teams that I played on. While many of the players on my team would share about crazy parties, sinful habits, and so forth, I was trying to live for the Lord, but yet, had a strong desire to belong. I just wanted to feel like I was just one of the guys. I grew up in the church, so I heard many teachings on “being in the world yet not of the world.” Although I knew I was not to be of this world, I still desired to fit in with my teammates and friends who were partaking in activities that would not bring glory to God.

I share this with you because I believe that we all go through times in our lives when we desire to be a part of some sort of group or organization; yet when we are accepted into that opportunity, we feel out of place.

John 15:19 states, ***“If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own.”*** While we may desire to belong while here on

Earth, we will not feel accepted or “loved” by the world because we are not of the world. We are of God.

John 15:19 continues to say, ***“But I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”*** Because God chose us we will not feel like we belong to the world. In fact, David in 2 Chronicles 29:15, shares that we are like aliens and pilgrims when it comes to our experience on Earth. We do not belong to the world because we are not of it.

When we feel the need to belong it is easy to forget that our Bible directly says that the “world will hate” us. As we tend to forget this, we do our best to fit in. This is the exact opposite of what God calls us to do. The next time we feel the need to belong, we should turn and run to our Heavenly Father for comfort, wisdom, and strength, which will come through reading the Word of God and prayer.

Also remember that even though this world is not our home, there is great power when believers gather together (Matthew 18:20). Community is important, so make sure to find believers to study God’s Word with. If you are not already plugged in here at The River Church, visit our website, theriverchurch.cc, to find a Growth Community today and know that you belong to God.

ARE YOU GREATER THAN YOUR MASTER?

THE WORLD, DEVOTION 3

Kyle Wendel

“Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.” John 15:20

Persecution is defined as hostility and ill-treatment, especially because of race or political or religious beliefs.

How many of you like to be persecuted?

I would say that most of us do not like the thought of having to go through persecution. In our lives in America, we sometimes think that we are above persecution or that we are blessed to live in an age where it is not as strong.

I want to challenge this thought today. If we look at the Word of God, we see that persecution will be a guaranteed thing for us as followers of Christ. John 15:20 says, ***“Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.”***

Jesus says to remember these words that He has said to us. Remember that tough times are coming. If we look at the context of who He is talking to, it would be His disciples. If we look in the Bible and from history, we would learn that these men went through some extremely difficult times and persecution. Most were even killed for the cause of Christ in extreme ways. Why would they do this?

“A servant is not greater than his master.” Do we think that we are greater than Jesus? We would all say not a chance; however, our lives show what we truly believe. If we think that we are above persecution, we are placing ourselves greater than our master.

“If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” If we are true followers of Christ, we better expect the world to come after us just as they did our King. The world hated Jesus. The world will hate us as well. The reason for the hatred is that we are called to love and serve as Jesus did. People will hate us if they see Jesus in us. We better expect persecution rather than try to avoid it.

What does persecution look like for us? It can look very different depending on where in the world we are. In America, we are currently very blessed to not have to face the threat of losing our lives for following Christ as other believers face around the world. We do not have to worry about being imprisoned for preaching the Bible. In reality, we have it very easy in America. Our persecution comes down to people not liking us, making fun of us, losing friendships, society speaking out against Christians, not fitting in, and the possibility of being passed by at work. Rarely does it come down to the extreme persecution that we have seen in the Bible and history.

However, what if it ever did? How would you respond to extreme persecution? How do you respond to persecution now? Jesus said if they persecuted Him, we better expect persecution to also come our way. He does not specify exactly how, but just to expect it. We should not be surprised when we face opposition in any way. We should not be running away from every persecution that comes our way. Instead, we should be using our persecution to glorify God and to show the world who Jesus is through our actions and endurance through the persecutions.

UPPER ROOM

In 1 Peter 4:12-19, we are challenged, ***“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And ‘If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’ Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”***

Do you rejoice through the sufferings, persecutions, or trials?

Do you trust yourself to your Creator through everything that may come your way?

Are you living and following Jesus in such a way that persecution will come your way?

A GOD OF CLARITY

THE WORLD, DEVOTION 4

Sydney Kimball

“I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father.” John 16:25

Let me ask you a question, “Who can hold a candle to Jesus and His teachings?” Now, without speaking literally, I was able to ask you, “Who can compare to Jesus and how He teaches?” The answer to this question would of course be “no one,” and that is because Jesus understood the importance of clarity in His teachings. He utilized figurative language in order to bring ease to those attempting to process and learn the principles of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus spoke in parables and figures of speech because speaking literally of the things He was teaching would have been extremely confusing to those listening. They had no point of reference or experience with these kinds of ideas He was sharing. For example, religious leaders of the time were baffled by Jesus’ remarks about never tasting death in John 8:51. They could not wrap their minds around the concept of receiving eternal life after experiencing a bodily death. Jesus was speaking of the things of Heaven, but they could only see through the lens that their earthly understanding allowed for. They had only ever known a physical, bodily death. In his commentary, Ellicott explained what Jesus was saying, “He shall indeed die, but that death shall only be in this world, it shall not be in the world which is forever.” Of course, this “world which is forever” is a reference to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus knew that in order to share truth with those whose flesh would reject it and teach about the incomprehensible Kingdom of God, He would need to simplify the concepts and put them into terms that those at the time would understand.

Much like teachers do today, He used figurative language and stories that took objects and concepts common to those He was speaking with to teach them about the wonders and ways of God. Speaking figuratively helps students understand a new concept by placing it within the context of something they are familiar with. Just like marbles were used to teach mathematics, Jesus told stories or parables that took concepts such as farming or building a house to teach His important lessons. Jesus taught the disciples differently before their faith became sight. They were told of the events to come but could not even begin to wrap their minds around them. Just as we struggle to understand the book of Revelation and the events that have not yet occurred, those taught by Jesus struggled to grasp the Kingdom to come and all of the other amazing signs and wonders to follow.

Ultimately, our God is not one of confusion, He is a God of clarity and peace. The way in which Jesus taught displays this perfectly. He strived to preach the truth in love and did so in a way that was clear and intentional. This season, ask God to help you understand the Gospel with a new level of clarity. Take the time to meditate on the sacrifice of our Savior and attempt to see it with fresh eyes. The Holy Spirit is our helper! Partner with Him and allow Him to help you interpret the miraculous nature of the cross. The Gospel is clear and simple despite the incomprehensible love that brought it to us. We will never fully understand the grace and mercy of our Lord, but we can stand in agreement on the power of the events leading up to Easter and the beautiful events to follow. Our Lord paid it all so that we could have a new life and relationship with Him. That is a

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beautiful thing; slow down and let that soak in. God will bring clarity to your confusion. Partner with Him to see the world with new eyes and new understanding.

JESUS KNOWS ALL

THE WORLD, DEVOTION 5

John Rigg

“Jesus answered them, ‘Do you now believe?’” John 16:31

I am always amazed at the excitement that is in the atmosphere during the Easter season. Churches all around the world celebrate with varying degrees of worship styles and events. For some, it begins with fasting during Lent while others observe Passion week. However, most churches gather on the solemn day of Good Friday and meet again on Sunday to celebrate God raising Jesus from the dead.

You may already know this, but studies reveal that Easter is the most attended church day of the year. In fact, one church in Texas reports that over a 10-year period, on average, Easter attendance rose 230% above normal. Oddly enough, this is pretty much the norm in many parts of the world.

All this enthusiasm each year is generated as the world remembers Jesus’ death on the cross as payment for the sins of mankind and then God raising Him from the grave three days later. With this said, the statistics make sense. The greatest day in human history should be the day most celebrated! However, there is an element to Easter that continues to amaze me all throughout the year. It is that Jesus knows all things. Let me explain.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is communicating to His disciples that He had come from God and that in a little while He would be returning back to the Father (John 16:28). John also records how the disciples responded to this news. John 16:29–30 records, *“Ah, now you are*

speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God."

Although the disciples believed that Jesus had come from God and in turn, knew all things, Jesus replies with this loving rebuke. John 16:31–32 continues, ***"Jesus answered them, 'Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone.'"***

Jesus was revealing to His disciples that their belief was incomplete. His statement was in the form of a question, ***"Do you now believe?"*** It was to show them that their faith was not as strong as they may think. Ironically, because Jesus did know all things, He knew that those closest to Him would soon be scattered, leave each other, and leave the Christ they believed in.

This is the part of Easter that continually amazes me. Jesus knew that everyone who claimed to believe in Him would soon leave Him. Yet in the moment of total abandonment, He allowed Himself to be put to death by Roman crucifixion for the sins of others, all in the name of love.

As for you and me today, it is good for us to remember that Jesus knows all things. He knows our faith can sometimes be incomplete and weak. He knows when we sin, when we wander, and when we totally abandon Him altogether. Yet knowing everything about us, He still made the choice to die the death that we deserved (Romans 5:8).

This is the part about Easter that continues to amaze me. I wonder if the rise in church attendance that is experienced around Easter

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may be the norm if we all took the time to realize that Jesus knows all things.

I pray you are amazed this Easter.

“BUT”

THE WORLD, DEVOTION 6

Brianna Breen

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

John 16:33 is one of my favorite verses in the Gospel of John. This entire chapter is focused on the idea that we can rest in His peace because He has overcome the world.

So often in life, we focus and dwell on the trials, tribulations, suffering, and hardships that come our way. If you are anything like me, you are just waiting for something bad to happen. The quote, “You are either going into a storm, already in a storm, or coming out of a storm,” has always rung in my head. Why? Because until we get to Heaven, we will always be in a storm.

Genesis 3:6-7 says, ***“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”***

Dating back to Adam and Eve, the suffering due to sin has already entered the world and will remain in the world. John 16:33 reminds us that in this world, we will have tribulation. We will have fiery trials, pain, and deep suffering. However, I love that the verse does not end there. The conjunction, ***“but,”*** brings hope because the words that follow, ***“Take heart, I have overcome the world.”***

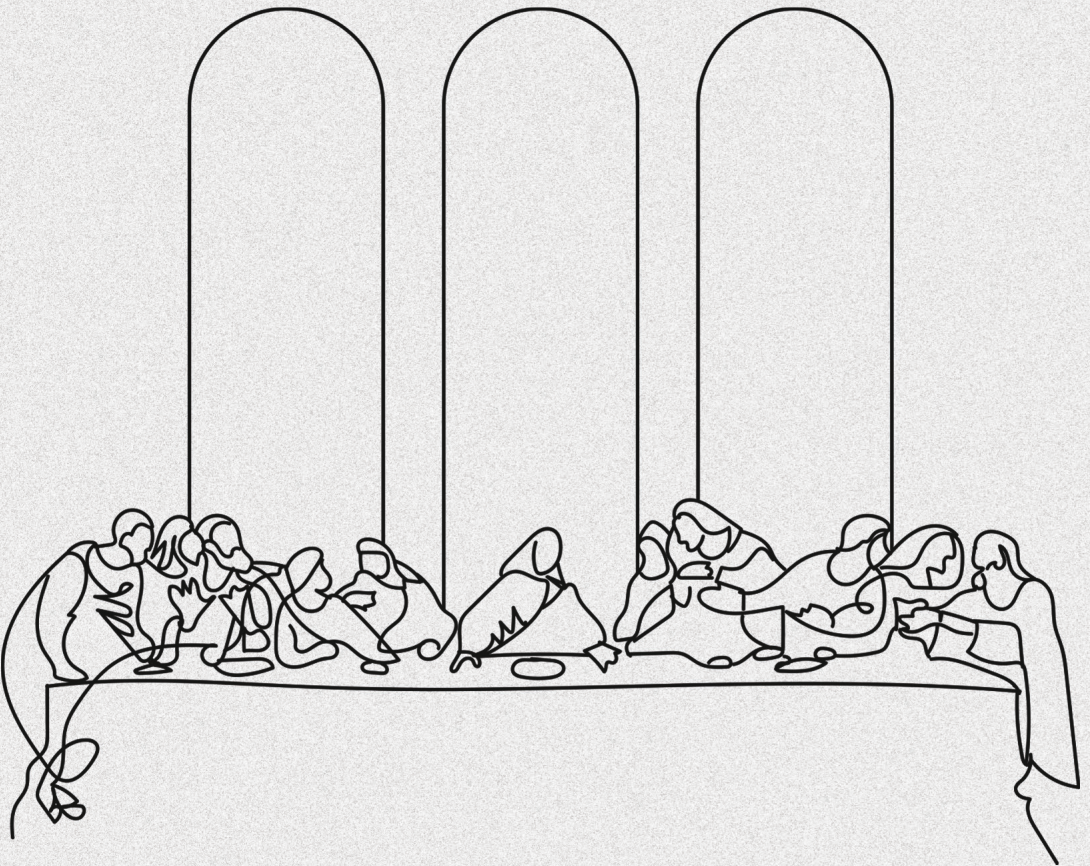
We will suffer on Earth because of the sin that reigns within us, ***“but”*** Jesus has paid the price for our sins and promises us eternal life where sin does not exist. Jesus took the weight of the world to the cross, died with it, buried it, and rose again to bring forth new life to those who call Him Savior. Jesus overcame the world, as nobody else in humanity could be that blameless sacrifice. I hope that you are reminded that Jesus took the suffering of the world off of you and now offers you the promise of eternal life. Also, I hope that brings you His peace.

UPPER ROOM

06

PEACE

JAMES MANN



“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me.” John 14:27-30

1. The passage above heavily relies on this concept of peace. When you think of peace, how would you describe it?

2. Outside of our relationship with Jesus, where do you find moments of peace in your life?

One of the most peaceful activities I enjoy is lying in a hammock in the middle of the woods. To experience the smells, sounds, and nature coming to life right before my eyes is just so relaxing and away from the world. I will typically turn the cellular off on my phone and just read the day away in complete and utter silence from the world. I bring this up because this is my earthly concept of what peace is. I often think in those moments how there is nothing in the world that could ruin this moment of peace and relaxation. Even in this moment of peace that I am describing, there are still flaws. There are still deer flies swarming me nonstop. My back begins to hurt after a couple of hours. Ultimately, this peace ends at some point when I have to make my way back home.

3. What usually ruins the peace that you find in your life?

The two worst things about the peace we find here on Earth are that it is imperfect and only lasts for moments. Eventually, we must go back to the stressful, nonstop, go-go-go of life. We have family, work, and other responsibilities in our daily lives that require our peace to only be momentary. Many of us work extremely hard throughout our lives because we have this idea of retirement at the end of the road, but even that peace has flaws.

During this Easter season, I am normally moving at a thousand miles an hour. I have church events, family events, and schoolwork to get done. Many of you can relate to the stress that comes with the holiday season. I do not believe that is what Jesus intended for this day. Jesus puts heavy emphasis on peace.

4. What is this peace that Jesus is talking about in the passage?

I believe there are many implications of the peace that He is discussing. There is a past, present, future, and eternal aspect going on.

The past peace is discussing that we no longer need to worry about the wrongs we have done in the past. So many of us are hung up on these ideas, and they sometimes stop us in our tracks while we stand there like deer in the headlights. These ideas can be crippling. It becomes baggage that we carry around everywhere we go. The

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Bible tells us that we are running a race in this life, but so many of us allow this baggage to slow us down.

5. What things in your past cause you to struggle with peace?

The present peace is discussing that we should not be stressing over our day-to-day lives. We are so focused on pleasing everyone around us that we let it consume us. So many people lie awake at night filled with anxiety about the life they will wake up to. We constantly have deadlines on our minds, and it is causing us to not live in the here and now. Many times, this lack of peace causes us to miss what God has put in front of us.

6. What present things cause you to struggle with peace?

The future peace is discussing that we should not be stressing over the things to come down the road. This is my biggest struggle. I am constantly trying to plan out what my life looks like. I am constantly stressing about how my life will look in five years. The truth is, God has a plan for what my life will look like in five years, and He is going to make His plan happen no matter what I do.

7. What things about the future cause you to struggle with peace?

The eternal peace discusses the afterlife. It discusses when we take our last breath here on Earth and what happens next. I do not know how a non-believer goes through their daily lives thinking that someday they are going to die, and that is it - black screen. Let the credits roll. That is terrifyingly haunting to me.

In this Easter season, I pray that you take a moment to evaluate your life. Jesus tells us in John chapter 14 that He is going to give us peace that is unlike the peace that this world can provide for us. It is better than any hammock in the woods. It is perfect and eternal peace. It is the peace in our soul knowing that when we take our last breath on Earth, our next one is in the presence of our Father. Easter is about remembering that the ruler of this world, Satan, has no power over Jesus, which He proved by rising from the grave.

8. Do you know without a doubt that you have this eternal peace?

John 15:13-15 says, ***“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”***

Jesus calls us friends. He tells us that what He has done shows us just how much He loves us. His love for us is greater than any other love you could possibly imagine. It is because of this love that He died for us. It is because of this love that we can have peace. Jesus tells us that one day He will return for us. Make sure you are not letting the stress of this world distract you from that fact. Meditate

UPPER ROOM

on the peace and reassurance that our Savior is coming to bring us home.

PEACE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

PEACE, DEVOTION 1

Elijah Edwards

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” John 14:27

To be honest, peace may be the hardest thing for me personally to have in my heart. My mind can be riddled with the worries of the world from time to time, or heavily focused on my own shortcomings as a sinful man. Peace continuously escapes not only me, but many of you as well. We are constantly on the move worrying and stressing about what is next in our life. Even in times when we should be at peace, we still find a way to disrupt it. On our own, none of us truly know what true peace looks like. That is why Jesus says in John 14:27, ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”***

The first question has to be, “What is peace?” To most of us, the definition of peace is “anything that is without conflict.” For example, it is making peace with an enemy instead of conflict. However, as we look at this passage, Jesus is not promising that His peace will bring no conflict. Jesus told His followers in John chapter 15 that they will be hated by the world because the world hated Him first. The peace that Jesus is explaining here is a peace that we can have even in the midst of extreme turmoil. No matter what we are facing or what may lay in front of us, we can have peace in Christ Jesus knowing that His will and plan will be done and that He will never forsake us. Jesus is explaining that our hearts do not need to be troubled and our minds do not need to be afraid, because the Holy Spirit is with us. Even in

the face of death, we have nothing to fear because of the sacrifice made by Christ and the promise He has set for all of His followers.

The context as to when and where Jesus is telling His disciples this is at the end of the Last Supper and right before Jesus is about to be taken to be crucified. The disciples are about to witness their Messiah be tortured and killed on a cross, feeling that there is no hope or peace in that scenario. He is telling the disciples that even though you will witness my death, have peace knowing Who I am about to leave with you. The Holy Spirit is coming. Therefore, Jesus had made a way that even in death, there is peace.

So I ask today, what conflict and trouble is going on in your heart? Are you truly letting the peace that Jesus left us fill your spirit and clear your mind? Let the Lord's peace He has left for us come into your life and know whatever you are facing that He has conquered it and knowing that will bring you peace.

NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES PEACE

PEACE, DEVOTION 2

Pastor Justin Dean

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” John 14:27

Our world admires peace as one of the noblest causes to strive after. Year after year, we award, honor, and prize people who strive after creating long-lasting world peace. Unfortunately, this goal has seemed to be futile. Our world seems more and more chaotic and violent than ever. The peace our world seeks is an end to hostility, but ultimately, there is more to peace than simply an end to war.

Read John 14:26-27.

It is not just the end of hostility, but the end of longing, emptiness, and falling short. It is a solution to the problem plaguing our lives, the battle with sin and doubt. We have been given the greatest ally in the war that is being waged on our flesh. Unlike the world, Jesus offers us the beginning of a new relationship with a helper, the Holy Spirit. When we realize this and rely on Him to fight our battles instead of trying to fight them according to our own strength, we begin to truly experience peace.

Peace is more than just an end to hostility, it is also a feeling of completeness. Oftentimes, we feel the most uneasiness when we feel that we are in need. For many of us, peaceful is the last word we would use to describe our finances. Jesus has some things to say about the lack of peace we exhibit over things we feel we need.

Read Matthew 6:30-33.

Unlike the way the world offers peace, which is through your own strength and accomplishments, Jesus offers peace through trust that He will provide and care for us. Many times, this is easier said than done because we are people who do not like trusting in things we cannot control. That is where prayer comes in.

Read Philippians 4:6-7.

If we need peace, we should be taking every situation to God in prayer. Taking time to stop and pray in times of chaos and anxiety is one of the simplest ways we can find peace. Our hearts and minds are unstable and shifting things and so, we need the peace of God that is given to us when we seek it to protect them.

Take a few minutes and write down a couple of things that you are worried or anxious about.

- Why are you feeling that way?
- How does worrying in those situations help solve them?
- How could God be using those situations to grow you?

I would encourage you to spend a few moments praying over the list of things you are anxious about and asking God to give you peace in those circumstances. Also, commit to praying any time you feel worried or anxiety starts to build in your mind and heart.

Peace is something worth seeking, and I guarantee you God will give it to you to protect you against the uncertainty that we face in our lives.

PEOPLE GET READY

PEACE, DEVOTION 3

Debbie Gabbara

“You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.” John 14:28

Check out that opening phrase, ***“You have heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’”*** It has been over 2000 years since Jesus spoke the words recorded in the Gospel of John to His disciples. Jesus told His closest companions about the plan the Father had to save the world through His death and resurrection. He told them that He was going back to the Father and He would prepare a place for them to be with Him. Jesus wanted them to know what to expect so that when He was gone, they would remember and believe.

John 14:3 says, ***“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”***

The disciples did not have the New Testament and the Gospel of John, they were living it. They were inspired by God to write down the things that Jesus did in and through them. They left an account of the things they witnessed, and what Jesus told them about who He was, where He came from, and how they could be with Him and live forever in Heaven.

Through the writers of the New Testament, Jesus left us with the same information. It is all in perfect order for us to read so that we too can know what to expect and know the way to get to where Jesus is.

There was a song that came out years ago titled *"People Get Ready Jesus is Coming."* The lyrics are so exciting for those who are ready and waiting for the Lord's return. They are also quite sobering for those who have not made the decision to believe and make themselves ready for that day when Jesus will come back.

Jesus was so clear when he told us in John 14:5-6 the way we can be with Him, ***"Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"***

Jesus is the only way to the Father. Jesus, God in the flesh, came from Heaven to live and die to save us all. He is in Heaven now, preparing a place for all who believe in Him. One day soon, Jesus will come back to take those who have chosen to believe to be with Him in Heaven forever. I pray you know the peace and joy that come from being ready.

"People Get Ready Jesus Is Coming" by Crystal Lewis

*Lord I'm ready now
I'm waiting for Your triumphant return
You're coming so soon
This world has nothing for me
I find my peace and joy solely in You
Only in You
I want the world to see that
You're alive and living well in me
Let me be a part of the harvest
For the days are few
He's coming soon*

UPPER ROOM

*People get ready Jesus is comin'
Soon we'll be going home
People get ready Jesus is coming
To take from the world His own*

*There will be a day
When we will be divided right and left
For those who know Him
And those who do not know
Those who know Him well
Will meet Him in the air
Hallelujah
God is with us
Those who do not know
They will hear "Depart, I knew you not"
For my friends you see
There will be a day when we'll be counted
So know Him well, know Him well*

*People get ready Jesus is comin'
Soon we'll be going home
People get ready Jesus is coming
To take from the world His own
People get ready Jesus is comin'
Soon we'll be going home
People get ready Jesus is coming
To take from the world His own*

NOTHING!

PEACE, DEVOTION 4

John Stone

“I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me.” John 14:30

As the chaplain of a local county jail, I can, at times, find myself in strange situations. This week I was asked to speak with an inmate to find out whether he was what he claimed to be: a Buddhist. Now, I am no expert on world religions, but a five-minute Google search can be pretty informative. Buddhists are known for being peaceful and striving for harmony in all things. Their lifestyles are marked by a pursuit of purity in what they eat, which was the reasoning behind this inmate's request to eat a vegetarian diet, or maybe because jail food is gross. There was only one problem. Since the day he arrived, this man has not ceased to verbally abuse those around him, act aggressively and, in general, treat other people like garbage. When I denied his request to be considered a Buddhist, he was angry, “But I told you I am a Buddhist!” My reply was that I will believe him to be one when he starts acting like one. This concept is very simple: actions speak louder than words.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are being constantly watched. Our words and actions measure us against a biblical standard that, in my experience, even unbelievers know very well. If we act unloving (1 Corinthians 13:4-8), they are quick to notice. If we are dishonest in business (Proverbs 11:1), we are not getting away with it. When we talk about binge-watching an immoral TV show (Ephesians 5:3), it prompts questions in their minds.

“The ruler of this world” in John 14:30 is the devil, Satan, ***“that ancient serpent”*** (Revelation 12:9), or our archenemy. He is also known as the accuser of the brethren. He has earned this title from thousands of years of deception, trapping the unsuspecting when they let down their guard and fall into one of his schemes. What is his goal? It is to discredit God’s children in front of their Heavenly Father and call into question the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, he is very, very good at it.

You and I would not have a chance if it were not for Christ’s intercession on our behalf (Hebrews 7:25). We would be cut off from the herd and devoured in short order (1 Peter 5:8). We know that ultimately we are safely held in our Father’s hand (John 10:29), but let us not presume on His grace while giving ammo to our enemy. Jesus Christ, our older brother and forerunner (Hebrews 6:20), has done something no one else can do. He lived a sinless life, never giving in to His flesh; always doing what was right. Beyond just sitting in a corner somewhere not sinning, He always did the Father’s will (John 6:38). He was perfectly obedient to accomplish what His Father required of Him including death on a Roman cross where He absorbed the Father’s wrath for sin; your sin and my sin. Jesus was able to confidently head to the cross knowing that His sacrifice would be acceptable and satisfy the righteous requirement of the Father. The accuser, who had been so carefully watching and hoping for Him to slip, had nothing on Him. Nothing!

We need to consider what our actions are saying to those who are watching. Do we confess Jesus as Lord but live for ourselves (Luke 6:46)? Do we say we are Christian but our actions are indistinguishable from those of unbelievers? If someone had to look at our life to confirm or deny our claim to Christianity, what would they say?

UPPER ROOM

Walk in faith and holiness by the power of the Spirit so that we can glorify our Father and confidently say with Jesus about our accuser, “He’s got nothing on me.”

Isaiah 54:17 (NASB) summarizes it so well, ***“No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; and every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their vindication is from Me,’ declares the Lord.”***

TWO WAY STREET

PEACE, DEVOTION 5

Katie Pettibone

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13

It is hard to imagine a scenario that inhibits the willingness to die for a friend. I am more than sure we do not go around telling our closest friends that we love them so much we would die for them. Knowing that this verse comes from the mouth of Jesus, we can find peace.

Jesus explains to His disciples and to His servants (that He is now calling friends), that there is no greater love than laying down one's life for their friend. We could easily try and use our human morals to find a way to read this verse in a different light. Such as something less heavy, “Jesus means He would do anything for a friend,” or “He's just saying He loves us.” However, this verse has more meaning in that Jesus is explaining how deep love should be and in that we can find eternal peace.

As we look back on Jesus' death, we know that He did it for the sake of humanity. In 1 Peter 2:24, we read, ***“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”*** This verse says it all, in that Jesus took away our debts, and sins, and brought us into a new state of wellness in the Spirit. Jesus is our true friend, showing us that His love is abounding in everything He does. I mean, what better friend than having One who gifted you and me with free access to eternal life with God? There is no one in my opinion.

The more I ponder on Christ's devoted friendship to us, the more I realize the fact that friendship is a two-way street. How in the world can we be as good a friend to Jesus as He is to us? In all reality, we are not perfect and will never be perfect; however, that should never stop us from striving to be. Jesus says there is no greater love than laying down one's life. Does this mean, we have to die in order to be a great friend? Well, technically yes, we do. Going back to the 1 Peter 2:24 verse, it says, ***"That we might die to sin."*** When we ask Jesus to become our Lord and Savior, we are not only asking Him to wash away our sins, but we are repenting from our own ways of the flesh. When we make this promise with God and live by it, we will become dead to our old ways, or our old lives. This means that as we live a godly life, we are not only becoming one with the body, but becoming a new body in the Spirit. With that, we can also find peace.

When we truly ask Jesus to become our Lord and Savior and start living a life according to His will, we are stepping into a life where eternal peace in Heaven is our endgame. Jesus died on the Cross to not only wash away our sins, but to give us eternal life. As most of us know from our old Sunday School days, John 3:16 says ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."***

If you have not fully repented of your old ways and promised a new life to Christ, do so today. It is a life where you die to sin and begin to live in the Spirit of God. I urge you to take that chance now and become a friend to the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is the One who promises us eternal life with Him when we confess with our mouths that He is Lord, and believe in our hearts that He rose again that third day. There is no greater love.

INNER CIRCLE

PEACE, DEVOTION 6

Katrina Young

“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

John 15:15

I grew up in a small town in Indiana, a place where literally everyone knew your name and which family that you belonged to. In elementary school, there were twelve kids in my class, and I considered them my friends. Not necessarily were they friends by choice but because they were the only choice. As my world expanded, and options were opened, I quickly learned to use caution in whom I allowed in my inner circle. The book of Proverbs warns, ***“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm”*** (Proverbs 13:20). True friendships are rare, and I am so thankful for those that I have in my life today. Building those relationships required time and commitment, and each relationship is as unique as the individual. The more time that I spend with those closest to me, the more we share the same interests, values, and convictions. We are always eager to help carry out each other's dreams and ambitions.

Jesus chose twelve men to be His disciples. These men, all different in character and backgrounds, left their lives to follow Him. He brought them into His inner circle to reveal who He was and teach them the things that were about to take place. They traveled together, shared meals, and witnessed His character, teaching, and miracles. They knew Him well. After they had just shared their last meal together and His time was coming to a close, Jesus says to them, ***“I have***

called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15). He goes on to say in verse 16, ***“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.”*** He had shared everything about Himself to them and made it clear what He was asking them to do. They were to go and share His love, be an extension of everything they had learned from Him, and bear fruit.

It is not as easy to spend time with friends as it used to be. Now, it is adding a date to the calendar and committing to making it quality time. What do we share with our closest friends? Do we reveal that we are followers of Christ? Are we examples of Him in our daily walk? I admittedly fall short as a perfect friend, but if I fail to share Jesus with those closest to me, I am not sharing all that I am with them. I pray that I can be the example of Christ to my friends and love them the way that He loves me. What friend is God calling you to share His love? I pray that we can exhibit the heart of Christ to our friends by loving them as He has loved us. Be the example that He has given us.

UPPER ROOM

OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, “We don’t go to church, we are the Church.” We believe that as God’s people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

Weekend Gatherings at The River Church are all about Jesus, through singing, giving, serving, baptizing, taking the Lord’s Supper, and participating in messages that are all about Jesus and bringing glory to Him. We know that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it’s not only a refresher it’s bringing life-change.

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***“all things in common.”*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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