

got life?

How John's
Gospel leads to
truth and faith
in an age of
cynicism and
doubt



A Bible Study by Stan Key

—Answer Guide—

Volume III



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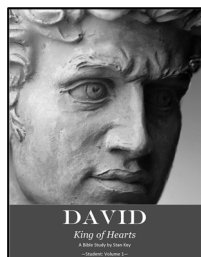
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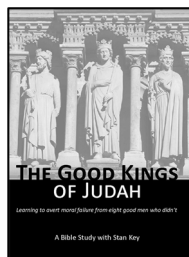
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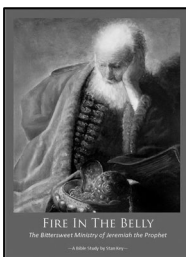
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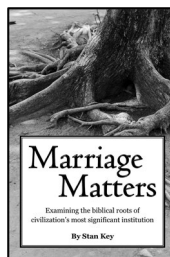
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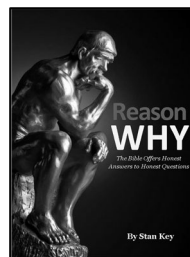
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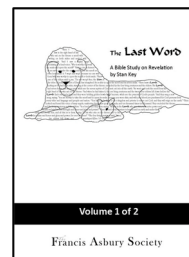
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Right Side Up

By Stan Key

*On Calvary's hill, just out of town,
My shattered world was upside down.
It seemed my life had been accursed
For all I knew had been reversed!
I'd turned my back on everything
So I could follow this new king;
I thought that he would be the key
To comfort and prosperity.
And now he's there; exposed; the shame!
Is this the reason that he came?
Is this a joke; some cruel mistake?
The world's Messiah on a stake?*

*But in the darkness of this hour
I catch a glimmer of God's power:
The power of love that took our hate
And did not once retaliate.
Such things are much too vast for me;
I cannot grasp, I cannot see,
Unless my eyes are touched by grace
to see his reassuring face.
I've come, dear Lord, to pause and think
About the cup you chose to drink:
Enable me to understand
The sovereign power of nail-pierced hand.*

*It seems like such a contradiction
That blessing comes from malediction!
But in your brokenness is health
And in your poverty my wealth.
Your death has brought to me my life
The war you fought has calmed my strife.
The cross, the cross! It's only here
That everything in life is clear.
So let this cross now be the norm;
Let all my ways be cruciform!
Thank you, Lord, you drank the cup,
At last my world is right side up!*



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got life?

The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

THE TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH

John 18:33–38a

I. Life's most important question

A. Three umpires were arguing about the **strike zone**.

- The first says: "I calls 'em as they is."
- The second says: "I calls 'em as I sees 'em."
- The third says: "They ain't nothin' till I calls 'em."

At the risk of over-simplification, we might suggest that these umpires represent the evolution of cultural thought about **truth** in recent decades.

- The first umpire represents the traditional view of truth (modernism). There is an objective reality called a strike zone.
 - The second umpire represents a moderate form of relativism. Truth is in the eye of the beholder. What's true for me may not be true for you.
 - The third umpire represents the **post-modern** view of truth. There is no objective truth, only subjective perceptions. We create our own realities.
- B. In our postmodern world of multiculturalism, pluralism and **political correctness**, perhaps the greatest casualty is truth. Today we have truths, but no Truth. The Oxford Dictionary's word of the year for 2016 was "**post-truth**."¹ Jeremiah and Isaiah faced a similar condition in their day: "Truth has **perished**" (Jeremiah 7:28). "Truth has stumbled in the public squares" (Isaiah 59:14). But can we be certain that everything is uncertain?²
- C. La-la-land. When truth dies the **consequences** are devastating. As in the chaotic days of the Judges, everyone does what is right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25). When truth is relativized, privatized, trivialized and politicized we become a law unto ourselves (auto-nomos). I think it was G. K. Chesterton who said, "Some people are so open-minded their **brains** fall out." "We have educated ourselves into imbecility" (Malcolm Muggeridge).
- D. The opening paragraph of Alan Bloom's culture-shaking book *The Closing of the American Mind* states the matter succinctly:

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative... Some are religious, some atheist; some are to the left, some to the right; some intend to be scientists, some humanists or professionals or businessmen; some are poor, some rich. They are unified only in their relativism and their allegiance to equality... The danger they have been taught to fear from absolutism is not error but intolerance... The true believer is the real danger. The study of history and of culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery,

¹ The word describes the cultural reality where objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

² "It is not certain that everything is uncertain." (Pascal, *Pensées*, #521).

*xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.*³

II. Pilate’s Question (John 18:33–38a).

A. Courtroom drama at its best!

Jesus’ trial before Pilate is surely one of the most dramatic moments in history: the kingdom of **this world** (Rome) judging the kingdom of **God**. Though Jesus is the one accused of crime, it is obvious that Pilate is the one who is really on trial!

1. This is one of the clearest statements of Jesus’ **mission** in the Bible. Surprisingly it has no obvious connection to saving souls or going to heaven. Facing Pilate, Jesus says that his mission is “to bear witness to the truth” (Jn 18:37). In other words, all **truth-lovers** will love Jesus!
2. Pilate, the quintessential politician, is not interested in truth; only **power**. His response is reminiscent of the conversation between Humpty Dumpty and Alice in the book *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) by Lewis Carroll:

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.” “The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.” “The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

B. A more intelligent approach

In contrast to Pilate, **Thomas** has a very different attitude toward truth (Jn 20:24–29). Absent from church the Sunday that Jesus showed up (bummer), he simply could not (would not) believe that Jesus was risen from the dead. “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails... and place my hand into his side, I **will never** believe.” (Jn 20:25). Comparing Pilate’s response to Thomas’ is instructive.

Thomas	Pilate
“Show me the truth.”	“What is truth?”
Struggles with the evidence .	Struggles with the concept of truth.
A doubter (skeptic)	A cynic
A modernist	A post-modernist
He becomes a Christian	He remains an agnostic forever

III. What is Truth? Five Truths about Truth

One of the primary themes in John’s Gospel is truth. Thus, the book itself can be used to answer to Pilate’s question. Pilate may not have been interested in the answer to his question, but John’s readers are! This Gospel gives us five truths about truth.

A. Your **Word** is truth.

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17)

1. For Jesus, the word of God is synonymous with truth. God is the source of all truth and he **does not lie**. The Bible is not man’s word about God but rather God’s word about man. Truth is not something we make up. It is something

³ Bloom, 25.

that God sends down. Like the law of **gravity**, it is a reality that exists regardless of how we may feel about it.

2. Will believing this make me a **fundamentalist**? If the term refers to a narrow-minded, right-wing, bigoted obscurantist wacko; no, of course not. But if the word describes someone who actually believes that the God of Abraham has acted in history to reveal the meaning of human existence and that this revelation is recorded in a book—yes, we should wear the label gladly.
3. God's word is **self-authenticating**. It speaks for itself. Read it, you will see! Story of a young philosopher in a garden in Milan (5th century AD). *Tolle lege, tolle lege* ("Take up and read"). He found a Bible and turned, at random, to Romans 13:13–14 and was converted. The name of this man was **Augustine**.

B. Truth is **narrow** and **exclusive**.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6)

1. Nothing Jesus said was more **controversial**, politically incorrect and scandalous than this! If only he had said, "I am a way, a truth, and a life; one of the ways to the Father is through me," the world would have received him gladly. If Jesus is the way, then Buddha, Mohammed, Krishna, etc. are **not the way**.
2. Jesus knew that the Tabernacle had only **one door** (contrast the Baha'i Temple in Wilmette, Illinois). He not only points to the door, he is the door (Jn 10:9). Note well that this door that leads to truth and to God is **narrow**.
*For the gate is wide and way is **easy** that leads to **destruction**, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are **few**. (Matthew 7:13–14)*
3. But this feels so harsh! Why does Jesus have to be so narrow? Answer: For the same reason a **math teacher** has to be narrow. 2+2 has only one correct answer. But when we submit to the exclusive demands of math, it opens up a universe of freedom and possibilities (algebra, geometry, calculus, etc.).
4. This helps to explain Western civilization's discovery of the **universe** and the origin of the **university** (not a multi-versity). Rather than stifling learning, summing to absolute truth is the key that unlocks the door to knowledge.

C. Truth is **personal**.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6)

1. Other religious teachers have said, "I will *teach* you [*show* you] the truth." Jesus is the only one who ever said, "**I am** the truth." Jesus not only witnesses to the truth, he *incarnates* (embodies) truth (see Jn 1:14).
2. This means that truth is personal. It's not just an abstract set of propositions or a philosophy of life. It's not knowing some *thing*. It's knowing some One! The purpose of salvation is not that that we learn *about* Jesus, but that we **know him** (Jn 17:3; Phil 3:9–10; 2 Tm 1:12).
3. Christianity is not so much the proclamation of a **religion** as it is the invitation to a **relationship**.

“Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his strength, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this; that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord...” (Jeremiah 9:23–24)

D. Truth is **liberating**.

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31–32)

1. Truth sets us free. But how? By breaking the power of **lies**. The devil “is a liar and the father of lies” (Jn 8:44). Believing something that is not true puts us in chains! Consider the enslavement that occurs when we believe a lie:
 - I am worthless, stupid, and ugly.
 - I can’t change.
 - I’ve done things so bad that God can’t forgive me.
 - God doesn’t speak.
 - The universe is the result of chance.
 - My gender identity is a matter of personal preference.
2. Preaching the Gospel of Truth is the only path to **freedom**: personal freedom, intellectual freedom, interpersonal freedom, political freedom, etc.

E. The ministry of the **Holy Spirit** is to guide us into all truth.

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth....” (John 16:13)

1. Jesus calls the third Person of the Trinity the **Spirit of truth** and says that his primary purpose is to **guide** us into all the truth. Thinking of Pentecost and the infilling of the Holy Spirit in these terms could cause a **reformation!**
2. In other words, the blood of Calvary and the Spirit of Pentecost are meant to transform our **minds** as well as our hearts! Paul stated the matter this way:

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewal of your **mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)*

IV. Two final thoughts from Blaise Pascal (1623–1662).

In his book *Penseés*, Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) formulated two “thoughts” that help us understand that the biblical concept of truth is not just a philosophical abstraction. It has a very **personal application**.

- A. Pascal imagines passengers on a ship far out at sea where everything is fluid and changing; including where they are standing! How does one get one’s bearings and chart a course when everything is in flux? If only one could find a **fixed point** (an island or the North Star, for example), then one could find one’s way. In claiming to be “the truth,” Jesus is saying that he is that fixed point.

Those who lead disorderly lives tell those who are normal that it is they who deviate from nature... just as those who are on board ship think that people on shore are moving away... We need a fixed point....⁴

⁴ Pascal, #697.

- B. But we cannot reason our way into faith. Rather we must believe our way into rationality. God has planned it so that there is enough evidence to make faith **possible** but not enough to make it inevitable. A **choice** must be made!

There is enough evidence to condemn and not enough to convince, so that it should be apparent that those who follow it are prompted to do so by grace and not by reason, and those who evade it are prompted by concupiscence and not by reason.⁵

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What point is Chesterton making when he says, “some people are so open-minded their brains fall out”?
2. What is the difference between a skeptic and a cynic? Why is this difference important?
3. What is the main thing you learned in this lesson? How will it make a difference in the way you think? In the way you live?
4. Which of the five truths about truth do you find it most difficult to grasp? Why do you think this is so?
5. Have you ever thought about the Spirit-filled life in terms of transforming the way we think? Why not?
6. Philosophers have noted that we cannot be certain that everything is uncertain. Discuss this.
7. Discuss Pascal’s two “thoughts.” How will you apply these realities in your own life?

*I do not seek to understand that I may believe,
but I believe in order to understand. (Anselm of Canterbury)*

⁵ Ibid, #835.

O God of Truth

Thomas Hughes (1857)⁶

(Sung to the tune “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name”—Coronation)

*O God of truth, whose living Word
Upholds what'er hath breath,
Look down on thy creation, Lord,
Enslaved by sin and death.*

*Set up thy standard, Lord, that we,
Who claim a heavenly birth,
May march with thee to smite the lies
That vex thy groaning earth.*

*We fight for truth? we fight for God?
Poor slaves of lies and sin!
He who would fight for thee on earth
Must first be true within.*

*Then, God of truth, for whom we long,
Thou who wilt hear our prayer,
Do thine own battle in our hearts,
And slay the falsehood there.*

*Yes, come: then, tried as in the fire,
From every lie set free,
Thy perfect truth shall dwell in us,
And we shall live in thee.*

⁶ Thomas Hughes (1822–1896) was an English lawyer, judge, politician, and author. He is most famous for his novel *Tom Brown's School Days*, a semi-autobiographical work set at Rugby School.



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The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

THE WOUNDED HEALER¹

John 20:19–21

I. Sent to Suffer, Sent to Save (read John 20:19–21).

A. Beautiful scars.

We tend to be embarrassed by scars, think they are **ugly**, and want to cover them up. With Jesus, however, it is different. The risen and **glorified** body of Jesus continues to bear the marks of his passion. These scars will remain in the Son of God forever (Rev. 5:6)! The redeemed love those scars!

B. Jesus has a shocking message for his followers.

It is easy to overlook the little word “**as**” (Jn 20:21). Jesus is sending his disciples into the world **in the same manner as** the Father sent him into the world! In other words, the pattern of Jesus’ mission is to be the pattern his followers are to **imitate**. Lest the full meaning of this be lost, Jesus showed them his hands and side!

- The scars **reassure** the frightened disciples. Jesus is recognized by his wounds. The scars **authenticate** his identity. Zeus, Krishna, Buddha, Mohammed, Marx, Freud... they have no scars! These wounds are the assurance of our redemption.
- The shock comes when Jesus says that similar kinds of scars will be evident in the lives and ministries of his followers. Woundedness **validates** all true ministry! The church is the **body of Christ**.

“It will not be enough for the church to place a cross on the top of its building or in the center of its altars or on the robes of its clergy. The marks of the cross will have to be recognizable also in the lives of its members if the church is to be the authentic presence of the kingdom. I find it remarkable that this aspect of the biblical teaching has been so much neglected in the missiology of the past two hundred years, and that missions have been seen—by contrast—in triumphalistic terms.”²

C. How did the Father send Jesus?

The Father sent Jesus to **lay down his life** for others (the scars show this to be true). No one *took* his life. Jesus was no victim. He freely *chose* to give up his rights and privileges so that others could be redeemed from their tragic circumstances.

- Many were scandalized and offended by such a mission and **rejected** the gift of abundant life Jesus came to offer. In refusing Jesus’ scars they remained a prisoner to themselves (Satan’s lies, sin, worldliness, hell).
- Some welcomed him and **embraced** his message. They loved his wounds! “With his stripes we are **healed**” (Is 53:6).

D. How does Jesus send us?

In showing his scars, Jesus is sending his disciples on a mission similar to his. The cross is not only *the content* of their message; it is to *characterize* their lives. Their lives are to be **cruciform**; marked by self-giving love. “If anyone would come after

¹ The title is borrowed from a book by Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*.

² Newbigin, 23.

me, let him **deny himself** and take up his cross **daily** and follow me.” (Lk 9:23). Though full of glory and joy, such a life will be **painful**.

E. The way **redemption** comes to the world.

The call to give up our rights and lay down our lives is not a call to suffer for the sake of suffering. That would make us masochistic and psychologically sick! We are called to embrace the pain of love so that others might live. Any sufferings we may experience are a type of **labor pains** (see Gal 4:19).

II. Good Grief! A Survey of 2 Corinthians

Perhaps no one in the New Testament understood scars better than **Paul**. Not only did he embrace the wounds of Christ for his own salvation but he grasped the reality that he too was called to **suffer with Christ** for the sake of others! He believed his scars **validated** his apostleship (see Gal 6:17)³ and that his sufferings played a role in the redemption of others (see Col 1:24)⁴.

Nowhere does he express this more clearly than in 2 Corinthians. This is perhaps the most **personal** of all his correspondence, giving expression to his inner thoughts, struggles, fears, and hopes. He refers repeatedly in this book to **difficult experiences** related to life in general and to Christian ministry in particular.⁵

Paul is under attack by some “super-apostles” (2 Cor 11:5; 12:11). Preaching a type of **prosperity theology**, these self-appointed ministers have no place for pain and suffering in their understanding of the Gospel. Paul calls them “false apostles, deceitful workmen,” servants of Satan (2 Cor 11:4, 13–15). The conflict forces Paul to speak plainly about what authentic ministry looks like —or **smells** like (see 2 Cor 2:14–16). The nose knows!

Authentic, apostolic ministry has the **distinct aroma** of:

A. **Comfort** for those who are hurting.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, **so that** we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3–4)*

In verses 3–7, the same root word is used ten times. It comes from the Greek work *parakletos* (*para* = alongside, *kaleo* = to call). It can be translated comfort, console, **encourage**, and exhort. Such comfort is much more than sympathy or strategies of grief management. Those who have experienced God’s comfort are best able to offer it to others. **Wounded healers** are the most effective ministers of the gospel.

B. **Selflessness** and other-centeredness.

*For what we proclaim is not **ourselves**, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your **servants** for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine*

³ While mystics have viewed “the marks” (Greek, *stigmata*) of Galatians 6:17 as scars of Jesus’ actual crucifixion miraculously reproduced in Paul’s body, the more likely meaning is that they refer to the marks left by the stonings, beatings and scourgings he had received for bearing the Name of Jesus.

⁴ “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col 1:24).

⁵ The vocabulary used is instructive: affliction (2 Cor 1:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4), suffering (2 Cor 1:5, 6, 7), hardship (2 Cor 6:4), despair (2 Cor 1:8), death (2 Cor 1:9; 4:10–12; 6:9), anguish (2 Cor 2:4), perplexed (2 Cor 4:8), groaning (2 Cor 5:2–4), fears (2 Cor 7:5), grief (2 Cor 7:7–11), etc.

out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:5–6)

True ministers know “It’s **not about me.**” The light of Jesus, in all his crucified glory, has shone in our hearts to reveal the perversity of **ego-centrism** and **selfish ambition** that lurks within. They look not to their own interests but to the interests of others (Phil 2:4). **Timothy** is a case in point (see Phil 2:19–22).

C. Transparent **vulnerability.**

*But we have this treasure in **jars of clay**, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So **death** is at work in us, but life in you. (2 Corinthians 4:7–12)*

Leslie Newbigen calls this “the classic definition of mission” in the New Testament.⁶ True ministers are “jars of clay”: fragile, flawed, earthen. The **messenger** is part of the message!⁷ When it comes to gospel ministry, cracked pots are more effective than fine china! God has chosen the foolish, the weak, and the despised people of this world to proclaim the gospel—so that no one might boast (1 Cor 1:26–31). A witness should **be open** about his/her brokenness and weakness, not conceal it!

D. A sure and certain **hope.**

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal **weight of glory** beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16–18)*

Those who have found healing for their own wounds through the wounds of Christ and the self-giving love of his ministers have a message of hope for a world in bondage to **cynicism** and **despair**. This hope is not limited to this life but is especially oriented toward the coming Kingdom of God. We’re **not home yet!** Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) said: “In light of heaven, the worst suffering on earth will be seen to be no more serious than one night in an inconvenient hotel.”

E. **Agape-love.**

*For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live **for themselves** but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Corinthians 5:14–15)*

Jesus’ act of giving himself for others can only be explained by agape-love (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 3:16; etc.). Paul’s goal as a minister is to **love like Jesus** loved. This means that we no longer live for ourselves. Other’s needs are more important than our own. We

⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁷ Balaam’s donkey may be the most dramatic illustration of this truth (Nm 22).

have experienced a kind of Copernican Revolution (a paradigm shift from a geo-centric universe to a helio-centrix one!)—from ego-centrism to Christo-centrism.

F. Proper **credentials** (2 Corinthians 6:4–10; 11:22b–30).

*As servants of God we **commend** ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. (2 Corinthians 6:4–10).*

*But whatever anyone else dares to **boast** of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that.... with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.... If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my **weakness**. (2 Corinthians 11:21b–30)*

When forced to defend himself and his ministry, Paul did not talk about educational degrees, family pedigree, titles, positions, salary, or gifts and abilities. He spoke rather of what he had suffered for the sake of Christ and the gospel. These were his credentials. This was the only **validation** for ministry that really mattered!

G. Ministry out of our **weaknesses**.

*So to keep me from becoming **conceited** because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for **my power** is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am **strong**. (2 Corinthians 12:7–10)*

Paul felt he could be a more effective minister if God would only **remove** the “thorn in the flesh.” God said no, explaining that Paul’s greatest ministry impact comes when he serves others from his **weaknesses** rather than his strengths.

For I myself... owe my papists many thanks for so beating, pressing, and frightening me through the devil’s raging that they have turned me into a fairly good theologian.... (Martin Luther)⁸

⁸ Quoted in Hafemann, 481.

III. Conclusion: The wounds that heal.

A. Jesus' ministry was **cruciform**.

Jesus came not to be served but to serve and to **give his life** for others (Mk 10:45). As the Second Person of the Trinity, he **emptied** himself of all his divine prerogatives and came as a servant, humbling himself to the point of death (Phil 2:5–11).

B. We are to **imitate** Jesus' model of ministry.

Jesus sends us into the world even as he was sent by his Father: to pour out our lives for others (Jn 20:20–21). This is why Paul prayed that we would have the **mind of Christ** (Phil 2:5ff.). Death works in us so that life can work in others (2 Cor 4:12). There are **two crosses** in the gospel: Jesus' and ours.

C. Henri Nouwen provides deep insights into what apostolic ministry looks like in his book *The Wounded Healer*. Here are a few quotes:

- “No one can help anyone without becoming involved, without entering with his whole person into the painful situation, without taking the risk of becoming hurt, wounded or even destroyed in the process.” (72)
- “The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there.” (72)
- “The paradox of Christian leadership is that the way out is the way in, that only by entering into communion with human suffering can relief be found.” (77)
- “Like Jesus, he who proclaims liberation is called not only to care for his own wounds and the wounds of others, but also to make his wounds into a major source of his healing power.” (82f)
- “A Christian community is therefore a healing community not because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision.” (94)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think American evangelical theology has such little understanding of pain and suffering?
2. Do you see any “super-apostles” in the church today? How do you distinguish true ministers from false ministers?
3. Think of a time when you were hurting. Who ministered to you? What was it like to be on the receiving end of ministry?
4. Is there someone you know who is currently in pain? What have you learned from this lesson that can make you a more effective minister to that person?

No Scar

By Amy Carmichael

*Hast thou no scar?
No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land,
I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star,
Hast thou no scar?*

*Hast thou no wound?
Yet I was wounded by the archers, spent,
Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent
By ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned:
Hast thou no wound?*

*No wound, no scar?
Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,
And, pierced are the feet that follow Me;
But thine are whole: can he have followed far
Who has no wound nor scar?*

Arise, My Soul, Arise!

Charles Wesley (1742)

*Arise, my soul, arise; shake off thy guilty fears;
The bleeding sacrifice in my behalf appears:
Before the throne my surety stands,
Before the throne my surety stands,
My name is written on His hands.*

*He ever lives above, for me to intercede;
His all redeeming love, His precious blood, to plead:
His blood atoned for all our race,
His blood atoned for all our race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.*

*Five bleeding wounds He bears; received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers; they strongly plead for me:
“Forgive him, O forgive,” they cry,
“Forgive him, O forgive,” they cry,
“Nor let that ransomed sinner die!”*

*The Father hears Him pray, His dear anointed One;
He cannot turn away, the presence of His Son;
His Spirit answers to the blood,
His Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.*

*My God is reconciled; His pardoning voice I hear;
He owns me for His child; I can no longer fear:
With confidence I now draw nigh,
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And “Father, Abba, Father,” cry.*



got life?

The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

THE NERVE TO SERVE

John 13:1–17

I. Table Talk

- A. Most of John 13–17 takes place in the context of **a meal**. Jesus and the disciples are at table sharing dinner. There is something about food that makes conversation significant.¹ The best **education** often takes place not in a formal, lecture setting but around a table with your friends.
- B. Don't think of this dinner in terms of our own Western culture. With all due respect, Leonardo da Vinci in his famous painting (*The Last Supper*) got it all wrong: high table and chairs with thirteen men sitting on the same side of the table. Think rather of a low table, perhaps shaped like a "U," surrounded by cushions and mats, with men leaning on their left elbows eating with their fingers. In biblical times, one **reclined** at table (cf. Jn 13:23, etc.). This meant that **feet** were often near the food and in proximity to their neighbor's nose and dinner!
- C. Traditionally called "The Upper Room Discourse," John 13–17 contains the **last words** of Jesus to his disciples. As he faces the cross, Jesus emphasizes to his followers the things he most wants them to understand: love, betrayal, the Holy Spirit, abiding, heaven, persecution, peace, bearing fruit, etc.
- D. He begins this final conversation by emphasizing the fundamental importance of **servanthood** (Jn 13:1–17). His words here are few as he drives home his message with an acted parable. In washing the disciples' feet, he "preaches" one of his greatest sermons. In fact, this action should probably be regarded as one of the **signs** that Jesus did to enable people to see his glory and believe on him (see Jn 20:30–31). A sign (turning water to wine, feeding the 5,000, healing the blind man, raising Lazarus, etc.) points to something beyond itself. Don't confuse the sign with the reality to which it points. Don't just look *at* the sign, look **through** it!

II. Examine the text. Read John 13:1–17.

- A. There are two things going on in this passage:
 1. Jesus (Messiah, Son of God, King of Israel, etc.) is taking the role of a **servant**. He is performing a (disgusting) task reserved for slaves.² It was both **shocking** and impossible for the disciples to understand that their "Teacher and Lord" (Jn 13:13) would behave this way. Messiahs don't do feet! This explains why Peter said, "No, Lord, you will never wash my feet!"³ (Jn 13:8).
 2. Jesus is calling his disciples to **imitate** his example. "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you"

¹ This provides the biblical justification for potluck dinners. ☺

² Remember, in the first century, people wore sandals and no socks. Streets were unpaved and frequented not only by people but also camels, sheep, goats, etc. Beyond the dust and dirt that would stick to sweaty skin, feet would also be dirtied by mud, garbage, sewage, excrement, etc. Arriving in a home, feet would be caked with mud, grime, and filth. When a mother told little Levi to wash his feet before dinner, she was not only thinking of proper social etiquette but of biological hygiene. Low tables and unwashed feet made for a toxic situation!

³ The statement "No, Lord" is an oxymoron (combining two words that are mutually contradictory—jumbo shrimp, pretty ugly, postal service, United Methodists, etc.). But Peter repeats this irrationality at least four times: Mt 16:22; Mk 14:29–31; Jn 13:8; and Acts 10:14–16).

(Jn 13:14–15). It was not just difficult for the disciples to envision their teacher and Lord washing feet. They found it **impossible** to see themselves performing a similar task!

Think of some roles today that many of us might consider “beneath our dignity”:

- _____ .
- _____ .
- _____ .
- _____ .

NOTE: Some traditions believe that Jesus was giving a command to be taken **literally**. These churches practice foot-washing as a “third sacrament” (along with Baptism and Holy Communion). Interestingly, there is no evidence in the New Testament that churches practiced such a rite, though there is plenty of evidence that they practiced the other two ordinances. Most traditions have seen Jesus’ command as a **spiritual** command to humbly serve one another.

- B. Normally, when guests arrived for dinner, a servant would wash their feet **before** the evening meal. However, on this occasion no one had anticipated how this would be handled. The text indicates that it was “during supper” (Jn 13:2, 12) that Jesus quietly got up and began to wash their feet. Perhaps it was between the entrée and the dessert. Or more poignantly, perhaps it was during that point in the conversation when “a dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest” (Lk 22:24).
- C. Judas plays an important role in the narrative (Jn 13:2, 10–11, 18–30). Jesus’ humble act was his **final appeal** for Judas *not* to do what he was about to do. It almost appears that having his feet washed was the final straw for Judas and was the very thing that pushed him over the edge. True service to others brings out the best—and also **the worst!**

III. Pre-requisites for effective ministry (service) to others.

A. The model for ministry

“Do you **understand** what I have done to you?” (Jn 13:12). This is a good question! In this non-verbal act of service, Jesus is giving a graphic picture of what true ministry looks like. Because he himself highlights the importance of following his example, we can be sure that he intends for us to use this model as the **plumb line** for measuring all Christian service. Obedience should not be measured by observing a literal rite but rather by incarnating in our own lives the humility and love that enables us to connect meaningfully with others by serving them at their point of need. Just as Jesus came “not to be served but to serve” (Mk 10:45), so he expects us to live our lives with the same **mentality/attitude**.

B. This is harder than you think!

Serving others as Jesus did is not easy. Some will be too arrogant to even try. But most who do try will soon discover that their service to others is tainted with a mixture of carnal **self-interest** and/or unholy feelings of **self-abasement**. So, how can I serve like Jesus? I’m so glad you asked!

1. The motive is **love**.

The text begins by underscoring the fact that Jesus “loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1). The Greek term (*telos*) indicates

that his love had reached its fullest completion. He “showed them the full extent of his love” (Jn 13:1 NLT). He “now showed how perfect his love was” (Jerusalem Bible). His ministry was not motivated by self-interest of any kind—only love.

Think of possible ministry options (help in the nursery at church, cut a neighbor’s grass, prepare a meal for someone, make a donation, preach a sermon, go on a missions trip, etc.) and then name possible motives for such activity:

- _____ .
- _____ .
- _____ .
- _____ .

When those receiving ministry detect that the motive for service is something other than love, how do they feel?

- _____ .
- _____ .
- _____ .
- _____ .

2. The **timing** is divinely orchestrated.

Jesus washed feet only when he “knew that his hour had come” (Jn 13:1). Throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus has been very sensitive to issue of timing (see Jn 2:4; 7:6–8, 30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). Though this concept has many theological implications, it reminds us of the importance of reading the moment when it comes to ministry.

Can you name a ministry experience in your life when the action was right but the timing was wrong?

3. The servant is secure in his own **self-identity**.

To be an effective servant takes more than love and a divine sense of timing. The servant must know how to answer the question—**Who am I?** To take the role of a servant and to perform menial tasks is more challenging than it first appears. When the servant does not have proper **self-awareness** and a clear understanding of his identity in Christ, he may do more **harm** than good!⁴ Perhaps the most important verse in our Scripture is one that is typically completely overlooked:

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper.... and taking a towel... he began to wash the disciples’ feet.... (Jn 13:3–5)

The Scripture emphasizes that Jesus was self-aware; he knew who he was. Specifically, he knew three things about himself:

- He knew his **resources**—The Father had given all things into his hands.
- He knew his **origin**—He had come from God.

⁴ See for example the book by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert entitled *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor* (Moody, 2009).

- He knew his **destiny**—He was going back to God.

The only way to ensure that servanthood never becomes **demeaning**, debasing, and undignified; the only protection against **hurting** others in our attempts to help them; the only safeguard that serving others will be valued as a character trait one **aspires to have** is to serve as Jesus served. Jesus served well not because he had no sense of self-worth but precisely because he did!

- a. *Knowing our resources.* Paul told the Corinthians (who had lost the ability to humbly serve one another), “All things are yours... and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (1 Cor 3:21–23).
- b. *Knowing our origin.* When we’ve been taught that we come from a random collision of molecules in a prebiotic soup that was made possible by time plus chance so that we evolved like all the other plants and animals, is it any wonder that the glory of serving others has fallen on hard times?
- c. *Knowing our destiny.* Our truest identity is formed not in our past but in our future. When we have a future and a hope, then service to others becomes a high privilege. If you are bound for heaven then nothing is beneath your dignity!

Question: Which of these three (resources, origin, destiny) is most challenging for you personally? Why? When you seek to minister to others, how does this struggle for self-understanding manifest itself? (Form groups and talk about this).

IV. Two examples

- A. Mother Teresa—“The point in life is not to do great things, but to do little things in a great way.”
- B. Brother Lawrence (a cook in a seventeenth century monastery)—“I possess God as peacefully in the bustle of my kitchen, where sometimes several people are asking me for different things at the same time, as I do upon my knees before the Holy Sacrament.... I turn my little omelet in the pan for the love of God....”⁵

⁵ *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 84.

Make Me a Captive, Lord

George Matheson, 1842–1906

*Make me a captive, Lord,
and then I shall be free.
Force me to render up my sword,
and I shall conqueror be.
I sink in life's alarms
when by myself I stand;
imprison me within thine arms,
and strong shall be my hand.*

*My heart is weak and poor
until it master find;
it has no spring of action sure,
it varies with the wind.
It cannot freely move till
thou hast wrought its chain;
enslave it with thy matchless love,
and deathless it shall reign.*

*My power is faint and low till
I have learned to serve;
it lacks the needed fire to glow,
it lacks the breeze to nerve.
It cannot drive the world
until itself be driven;
its flag can only be unfurled when
thou shalt breathe from heaven.*

*My will is not my own till
thou hast made it thine;
if it would reach a monarch's throne,
it must its crown resign.
It only stands unbent
amid the clashing strife,
when on thy bosom it has leant,
and found in thee its life.*



got life?

The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

THE ENEMY WITHIN

John 13:18–30 and selected Scriptures

I. How bad can bad be?

A. Dante's *Inferno*.

Written almost 700 years ago, *The Inferno* is an imaginary story about Dante's visit to **hell**; a deep pit composed of nine levels. Each descending level describes a more serious degree of sin and consequently a more frightening form of punishment.

- Level 1—Devout pagans and those who haven't heard the gospel (Socrates, Plato, etc.).
- Level 2—Those guilty of sexual immorality (Cleopatra, etc.).
- Level 3—Gluttons and those controlled by their desires.
- Level 4—Those who sin with money (misers, prodigal spenders, etc.).
- Level 5—The lazy and the wrathful.
- Level 6—Heretics (Pope Anastasias, etc.).
- Level 7—The violent, murderers, suicides, homosexuals (Alexander the Great, Attila the Hun, etc.).
- Level 8—Witches, deceivers, pimps, seducers, liars, hypocrites, those guilty of simony, and those who split churches (Potiphar's wife, Caiaphas, Pope Nicolas III, Mohammed, etc.).
- Level 9—The lowest level is for the worst of the worst. A three-faced Lucifer (like an unholy trinity) stands frozen in a lake of ice from his chest downward, eternally gnawing on sinners. Among those found here are Cain, Brutus, and **Judas**, "with head inside [Lucifer's mouth] and legs out kicking" (381). In the eyes of Dante, no sin is more damnable than **treason**.

Readers of *The Inferno* are certainly free to question the way Dante described hell. However, on one point, Dante merits serious consideration: those **closest to God** (Lucifer, Judas) are the ones capable of committing the **greatest sin**.

B. The mystery of iniquity

Where does evil (sin, hurtful behaviors, poisonous attitudes) come from? **Why** do we succumb? Whether talking about evil in the spiritual realm, in the world around us, in the church, or in our own hearts, we all find ourselves at some point scratching our heads in incomprehension over "the **mystery** of iniquity" (2 Thes 2:7 KJV). Consider:

- How did the **serpent** get in the Garden of Eden (Gn 3)?
- If **David** had a heart like God, how to explain his moral fall (2 Sm 11)?
- Why do I do things I **hate**? Why do I not do things I should? (Rom 7:15, 19).
- If "the heart is deceitful above all things" (Jer 17:9), how will I recognize my sin? By definition, sinners typically don't know they are sinners! They will automatically assume that this Bible study is for **someone else**.
- How in the world did Judas find his place among the 12 apostles?

Perhaps this explains why **bitter herbs** were included in the Passover menu (Ex 12:8). God wants us to never forget the capacity for evil that lurks within. He wants us to be ever vigilant for the possibility of a traitor at the table!

C. Motives: Why did Judas betray Jesus?

Many efforts have been made to try to explain the motivation that provoked Judas to turn over the Messiah to the hands of his enemies:

- **Greed**—Judas was a greedy thief (see Jn 12:6; 1 Tm 6:10).
- **Disappointment**—When Jesus did not raise an army, throw out the Romans, and establish a new Israel, Judas turned his back on him in bitterness and anger.
- **Forcing his hand**—Far from giving up on Jesus, Judas was trying to “help” by creating a scenario where Jesus would be forced to use his powers against his enemies and set up his kingdom.

We don’t know for sure why Judas did what he did. His motives were probably mixed. And because sin is a mystery and often irrational, it is likely that Judas himself did not know his own motives. It is doubtful that he saw himself as a **traitor**.

*The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” Judas, who would betray him, answered, “**Is it I, Rabbi?**” He said to him, “You have said so.” (Matthew 26:24–25)*

II. Examine the Scriptures

A. John 13:18–30, 36–38.

1. The word “betray”—*paradidomi*—is important (Jn 13:2, 11, 21). It literally means “to give over,” “to deliver up.” Though our text underscores Judas’ role in “delivering up” Jesus to be killed, others are also involved in his death:
 - The **Jewish leaders** “handed him over” (*paradidomi*) to Pilate (Mt 27:1–2).
 - **Pilate**, the Roman governor, “handed him over” (*paradidomi*) to be crucified (Mt 27:26).
 - The **citizens of Jerusalem** “handed him over” (*paradidomi*) to be killed (Acts 3:13). NOTE: Peter is accusing **us** of Jesus’ death!

The theology gets deep when we consider further that:

- **Jesus** “gave himself” (*paradidomi*) for us all (Gal 2:20). He was no victim. No one took his life; he freely gave it (Jn 10:17–18; Mt 26:53–54).
- God **the Father** did not spare his own Son, but “gave him up” (*paradidomi*) for us all (Rom 8:31–32).

It is essential to keep together these two complementary ways of looking at the cross. On the human level, Judas gave him up to the priests, who gave him up to Pilate, who gave him up to the soldiers, who crucified him. But on the divine level, the Father gave him up, and he gave himself up, to die for us. As we face the cross, then, we can say to ourselves both, “I did it, my sins sent him there,” and “He did it, his love took him there.”¹

2. In verse 18, reference is made to an Old Testament **prophecy** (Ps 41:9) that predicted Judas’ treachery. This is not the only reference:
 - “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me” (Ps 41:9, quoted in Jn 13:18).

¹ Stott, 64.

- “For it is not an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it.... But it is you... my companion, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together; within God’s house we walked in the throng” (Ps 55:12–14).
 - “And if one asks him, ‘What are these wounds on your back?’ he will say, ‘The wounds I received in the house of my friends’” (Zech 13:6).
3. Note the seating arrangement at the table. It appears that John, the beloved disciple, is on Jesus’ right side and Judas is on his left. Jesus, John, and Judas, may well have been at the “head table” in the **places of honor**.
 4. A traitor at the table caused Jesus to be deeply “troubled” in his spirit (Jn 13:21; see Jn 11:33; 12:27). This is remarkable because Jesus will soon say to his disciples, “Let not your hearts be troubled” (Jn 14:1, 27). Somehow Jesus’ emotional distress provides the **remedy** for ours!
- B. Matthew 26:69–27:5.
1. While Judas betrayed Jesus, Peter **denied** him (Jn 26:70, 72, 75). This is the same word used in Matthew 16:24, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny **himself** and take up his cross and follow me.” The lesson is clear: either we deny self or the day will come when we will deny our Lord.
 2. Note especially how the writers of Scripture have connected the stories of Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s denial. Both John and Matthew want us to think about these two moral failures **together**.

III. Judas and Peter: A Study in Comparison and Contrast

A. How Judas and Peter are alike (comparison).

1. Both men were **chosen** by Jesus. The Scriptures underscore the fact that Judas, like the other apostles, was **called** to his position by Christ himself (Jn 13:18; 15:16; Luke 6:12–16; etc.). Judas did not volunteer; he was chosen (“elected” in Greek). Though Jesus knew in advance what Judas would finally do (Jn 6:64; 13:11), nothing indicates that he had no choice in his evil deed. **Foreknowledge** is not foreordination.
2. Both men were **devoted followers** of Christ. For three years, Judas experienced the greatest theological education program in the history of the world. He was active in **ministry**. Nothing indicates that he was faking it. His name was “written in heaven” (Lk 10:17–20). He was so well trusted that he was named the treasurer. No one suspected he was a traitor, not even when Jesus gave him the bread (Jn 13:25–29). The Scriptures say that he “**became** a traitor” (Lk 6:16).
3. Both men were **warned** by Jesus. During the Last Supper, Jesus spoke clearly about the fact that someone at the table would deny him—and someone else would betray him. He urged his disciples to **watch and pray** that they not fall into sin. Both Peter and Judas apparently felt Jesus was talking about **someone else**.
4. Both men committed **deadly sins**—very serious offenses. We tend to think that denying Jesus is not nearly as serious as betraying him. Consider this:
 - “Whoever denies me before men, I will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 10:33).
 - “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the **antichrist**...” (1 Jn 2:22).

5. Both men were **truly sorry** for what they had done. Almost immediately, both men come under conviction and have guilty consciences. Peter went out “and cried and cried and cried” (Mt 26:75 *The Message*). Judas was “seized with remorse” (NIV) and confessed “I have sinned” (Mt 27:3–4; see Lk 15:21). From the outside, Peter’s tears and Judas’ remorse look similar.
6. Both men were potential candidates for **forgiveness** and **restoration**. No sin is so deep that God’s grace cannot reach it. No sinner is so lost that redeeming love can’t work a miracle of restoration. “Where sin abounded, grace abounded even more” (Rom 5:20).²

B. How Judas and Peter are different (contrast).

While there are many ways that the moral failures of Judas and Peter are similar, there is one way in which they are profoundly different.

- Peter came to a place of genuine **brokenness** and godly **repentance**. This resulted in his complete forgiveness and restoration.
- Judas, though full of **regret**, self-reproach, and remorse³, never came to a place of genuine repentance. The normal word for “repent” is *metanoeo* (turn around, change, convert). But for Judas’ act of remorse, another word is used (*metamelomai*; Mt 27:3): to feel regret, to be sorry, to have remorse. Judas was lost not because his sin was worse than Peter’s but because he did not truly repent!

Paul speaks of these two different types of repentance:

*For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For **godly grief** produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas **worldly grief** produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:8–10)*

Worldly Grief	Godly Grief
Sorry for the consequences	Sorry for the twisted nature of my heart
Focuses on what I’ve done	Focuses on who I am
Please God, stop the pain	Please God, change my heart
Self-pity	Genuine brokenness
Remorse	Repentance
Leads to many regrets	Leads to no regrets
Produces death	Produces life
Judas	Peter

² Did Judas commit the unpardonable sin (Mt 12:31–32)? Perhaps. But the impossibility of forgiveness was on Judas’ side, not God’s. Judas may have passed the point of no return, but God hadn’t!

³ Interestingly, the English word “remorse” is a compound word composed of *mordre* (French, “to bite”) and the prefix “re” (again). To feel remorse is literally to gnaw on yourself over and over again.

IV. Conclusion: How to prevent moral failure.

When a question of sin and moral failure is raised at the Lord's Table, disciples of Jesus have always been very good at finding tactics to dismiss the question:

- **Denial**—"No, Lord. You can count on me. I'd never do such a thing."
- Assuming the question is aimed at **someone else**—"Others might fall, but not me."
- **Self-confidence**—"I am strong and spiritually mature. I won't succumb to temptation."

These kinds of responses only **increase** the potential for moral failure. Assuming one is immune from failure may be the best recipe for allowing it to happen! A better response is this:

- The humble question: "Lord, **is it I?**"
- The fervent prayer: "**Search me**, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Ps 139:23–24).

How Sad Our State by Nature Is⁴

Isaac Watts (c. 1709)

Sung to the tune "O, for a Thousand Tongues"

*How sad our state by nature is!
Our sin, how deep it stains;
And Satan binds our captive souls
Fast in his slavish chains.*

*But hark! A voice of sovereign grace
Sounds from the sacred Word;
Ho, ye despairing sinners, come,
And trust upon the Lord.*

*My soul obeys th'Almighty's call,
And runs to this relief;
I would believe thy promise, Lord;
O help my unbelief!*

*To the blest fountain of thy blood,
Incarnate God, I fly;
Here let me wash my spotted soul
From sins of deepest dye.*

*Stretch out thine arm, victorious king,
My reigning sins subdue,
Drive the old dragon from his seat,
With all his hellish crew.*

*A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On thy kind arms I fall;¹
Be thou my strength and righteousness,
My Savior, and my all.*

⁴ On July 19, 1738, Charles Wesley and his friends sang this hymn with some criminals just before they were hung. Wesley felt this hour under the gallows was one of the most blessed hours of his life.

¹ This couplet is inscribed on the grave of William Carey (1761–1834), Serampore, India.



got life?

The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

GROUND ZERO¹

John 13:34–35

I. The Main Thing.

An old tradition tells the story of how the apostle John, in old age, always preached and taught on the same thing: **love**. When one of his disciples complained about this and asked why, John answered, “Because there isn’t anything else.”

A. The Scriptures underscore the reality that love is the main thing:

1. The Great Commandment (Dt 6:4–5; Mt 22:36–40).
2. The greatest of all virtues (1 Cor 13).
3. The summation and fulfillment of the Torah (Rom 13:10).
4. The explanation for why God sent his Son into the world (Jn 3:16).
5. The motive for everything the Christian does (1 Cor 16:14; 2 Cor 5:14).
6. The covering for a multitude of sins (1 Pt 4:8).
7. With God, love is more than a verb, describing what he *does*. It explains who he is (God is love—1 Jn 4:8, 16).

B. Throughout the ages, saints have spoken of love as the essence of our faith:

1. Augustine—“Love, and do what you will.”
2. John of the Cross—“In the twilight of our lives, we will be judged on how we have loved.”
3. Francis Schaeffer—Love is “the mark of the Christian.”
4. Henry Drummond—Love is “the greatest thing in the world.”
5. When Karl Barth was asked, “What is the most profound thought you have ever had?” without hesitation, the great theologian replied, “Jesus loves me.”

C. Even pagans and unbelievers recognize the importance of love.²

1. “All you need is love” (The Beatles).
2. “What the world needs now, is love, sweet, love” (Jackie DeShannon).
3. “Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds... Oh, no! It is the ever-fixed mark...” (William Shakespeare).
4. “My love is like a red, red rose that’s newly sprung in June...” (Robert Burns).

D. In our Scripture (Jn 13:34–35), Jesus and the disciples are still at the table, their feet are washed, and Judas is gone. Now Jesus speaks of what is most pressing on his

¹ Definition: 1) the point directly above, below, or at which a nuclear explosion occurs; 2) the center or origin of rapid, intense, or violent activity or change; 3) the very beginning.

² One is tempted to say: Nothing is talked about more and understood less.

heart: the indispensable importance of love. If the disciples miss this, they miss everything. The **main thing** is to keep the main thing the main thing.

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 ESV)

II. Notes on the text.

A. Defining terms.

The writers of the New Testament had a problem. What **vocabulary** should be used to describe what God had shown the world in Jesus Christ? What word best describes his motivation? What caused the Father to send the Son? There were basically four options:

1. The word *storge* describes **affection**, something or someone you **like**. What someone might feel toward a leader, a pet, or a particular food or smell.
2. The word *philia* speaks of **friendship** and connotes **fondness** and general attraction for a person or a thing (philosophy, philanthropy, Philadelphia, philoxenos, Theophilus, etc.). This word and cognates are used often in the New Testament.
3. The word *eros*. In the world of Jesus' day, this was the primary word used for love (e.g., *The Symposium* by Plato). It refers to **desire**, often of sexual love and romantic attraction. Remarkably, this word occurs **zero** times in the New Testament.
4. The word *agape*, though rare in classical Greek, was seized upon by the authors of the New Testament as the primary term to describe who God is, why he does what he does, and what he expects of his children. In Old English, the word was often translated as "charity." The chart³ below helps to emphasize the uniquely Christian aspects of what Jesus is talking to his disciples about in the Upper Room.

EROS—HUMAN LOVE	AGAPE—DIVINE LOVE
Self-seeking, self-protecting	Self-giving
Based on emotions, feeling	Based on the will
Avoids pain	Embraces pain
Clutches and controls	Releases and lets go
Must be earned	Is freely given
Is determined by the worth of the one loved	Is determined by the character of the lover
What's in it for me?	What's in it for you ?

B. What's "new" about an old commandment?

But in what sense can Jesus claim that this is a *new* commandment when Moses had given the same commandment 1400 years earlier (see Lv 19:18)?

³ This chart is a modification of a chart found in the important book *Agape and Eros* (1932) by Anders Nygren (MacMillan, 1932: see pages 164–82).

1. In Greek there were two words to describe something as being “new.” One word (*neos*) spoke of newness in terms of time. It described something as being recent. This is *not* the word used here. The commandment Jesus is giving is “new” (*kainos*) in terms of **quality**, new in nature. He was introducing something with which the disciples were totally unfamiliar!
 2. The radically new element in Jesus’ commandment was **the standard** that he was using to measure love.
 - Moses said: “You shall love your neighbor **as yourself**” (Lv 19:18). In Moses’ day, the highest standard of love was self-love (principle of the Golden Rule). I should treat you in a manner similar to how I treat myself.
 - Jesus said, “Love one another just **as I have loved you**” (Jn 13:34). This is something radically new. Indeed, it is revolutionary! Jesus is commanding his disciples to treat others not as they would treat themselves but rather as he (Jesus) has treated them!
- C. Jesus insists that love must be **the proof** of Christian discipleship (Jn 13:35).
1. One can recognize a Jew by his skullcap; a Buddhist by the way he meditates (lotus position), a Sikh by his turban; a Muslim by his prayers (facing Mecca) or her veil; a Mormon by his white shirt and tie; an Amish by his horse and buggy, etc.
 2. But how do you recognize a Christian? By a cross necklace? A WWJD bracelet? A fish decal on his car? Political affiliation? Church attendance? Orthodox theology? Baptism? What is the validating mark of the Christian? This is what Jesus is so insistent to press home during his final hours with his disciples. “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have **love for one another**” (Jn 13:35).

III. The Look of Love (Agape).

Jesus is **commanding** his disciples to love one another with the same love that he has shown them. He also insists that this love will be the **authentic mark** to verify to a watching world that they are his followers. Therefore, if we can determine how Jesus loves us, we should be ready to obey his commandment, right? So, how did Jesus love us?

- A. Jesus **chose** to love us. “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (Jn 15:16).
1. Love is a choice. One may “fall” into *eros*, but no one falls into *agape*! To show agape-love for others is an act of **the will**. It is based not in the lovability of the object but in the holy character of the lover.
 2. At the table that night was a traitor (Judas), a betrayer (Peter), and a doubter (Thomas), not to mention the fact that all of them would soon desert him and flee. And yet he washed their feet and loved them “to the end” (Jn 13:1). *Eros* may be blind, but *agape* sees people truly—for what they **really are**—and loves them anyway.
 3. Jesus does not love me because I am loveable or because he has good taste: “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).
 4. This explains why Jesus can **command** us to love (Jn 13:34; 15:12, 17). Certainly one cannot order someone to have *eros*, *philia*, or *storge* for someone else. Remember when your parents ordered you, after a fight with your sister, to “Kiss and make up. Now say, I love you.” But Jesus dares to command us to

have agape-love for those around us, even for our enemies, because love is a choice.

- B. Jesus loved us by **laying down his life** for us. “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends...” (Jn 15:13–14).
1. Earlier, Jesus had underscored how he understood love by saying “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11, 15, 17–18). The word used for “life” here is *psyche* (soul), not the word used for biological life. Jesus is not really speaking about martyrdom here, but rather that he has come to **give up his rights** and privileges so that the needs of others can be met.
 2. Perhaps the clearest **definition** of agape-love in the New Testament is found in 1 John 3:16, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”
 3. The story of Peter’s denial illustrates what happens when agape-love is **absent**. Peter loved Jesus, right? He even said, “I will lay down my life for you” (Jn 13:37). He knew the *language* of love, but he had not yet learned to **deny himself** (see Mk 8:34), and this made him dangerous. Denying his Lord became inevitable.
 4. The first time I told Katy “I love you,” what I really meant was, “I love the way I feel when I’m with you.” This is just another way of saying, “**I love me.**” Agape love turns such egocentric *eros* upside down. The question is not *What’s in it for me?* But rather, *What’s in it for you?*
- C. Jesus loved us because the Father **loved him “first”**. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you” (Jn 15:9).

Even Jesus “needed” to be loved in order to love. Jesus loved others with a love whose source was not in himself, but in his Father. “Love is **from God**” (1 Jn 4:9). The only way to love others as Jesus commands us is when we tap in to the love that comes from God, for us—for the world. “We love because he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19).

IV. The logic of love. 1 John 4:7–21

In his first letter, John enables us to better understand what is involved in obeying the command of Jesus to love one another by writing perhaps the most amazing statement ever written about love (agape):

*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**. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God **abides in us** and his love is perfected in us.*

*By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is **love perfected with us**, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love*

casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom 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 4:7–21)

Almost as a philosopher would do, John lays out his position. His **logic** is irrefutable and can be put in the form of a syllogism (a kind of logical argument in which a conclusion is inferred from two propositions).

- **Major Premise: God is love** (1 Jn 4:8, 16). Love is not just what God *does*. It is who he *is*. His very essence is agape! God is a community of three divine Persons existing eternally in a sort of **dance** of self-giving love. Created in his image, we are intended to reflect this wondrous reality of self-giving love.
- **Minor Premise: God lives in us**. Because of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have now been "born of God" (1 Jn 4:7). He has "given us of his Spirit" (1 Jn 4:13). God "abides" in us (1 Jn 4:15–16). In other words, the very **spiritual DNA** of God is found within all of his true children.
- **Conclusion:** If we are, in fact, God's children, then our lives will, by definition, be characterized by agape-love (see 1 Jn 4:8, 20). Love will define **who we are** and **what we do**. If our lives are not characterized by love, then either the first premise or the second is false!

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

By Charles Wesley

*Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven to earth come down;
Fix in us thy humble dwelling;
All thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
Pure unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation;
Enter every trembling heart.*

*Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit,
Into every troubled breast!
Let us all in Thee inherit;
Let us find that second rest.
Take away our bent to sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its Beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.*

*Come, Almighty to deliver,
Let us all Thy life receive;
Suddenly return and never,
Never more Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray and praise Thee without ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect love.*

*Finish, then, Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.*



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The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

THE CURE FOR A TROUBLED HEART

John 14:1–31

I. What do you sing about?

A. We don't sing about **heaven** much anymore. In fact, many songbooks of contemporary worship don't even include "heaven" in the index! How different was the worship of our grandparents. They sang about heaven all the time.

- *In the Sweet By and By*
- *Beulah Land*
- *Ivory Palaces*
- *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*
- *How Beautiful Heaven Must Be*
- *I'll Fly Away*
- *When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder*
- *When We All Get to heaven*
- *We're Marching to Zion*
- *I Am Bound for the Promised Land*
- *I've Got a Mansion Just Over the Hilltop*

B. Why? Perhaps the explanation for the absence of songs of heaven in our contemporary worship is that **we like this world** better than that one! Our treasures are *here*, rather than there. We think of death as a tragic ending rather than a beautiful beginning. Our **citizenship** is on earth rather than in heaven.

C. Perhaps this fixation on things of earth helps to explain why we today suffer from so much **depression, anxiety, and fear**. Though our grandparents worked harder, owned less, and had a shorter life expectancy, they tended to be happier and more emotionally healthy. Why worry about my five-room farm house when I have a mansion just over the hilltop? Why worry about my retirement plan when my riches are invested in the Bank of Heaven?

*I'm just a poor, wayfarin' stranger
Traveling through this world of woe,
There is no sickness, no toil, nor danger,
In that bright land to which I go. (Unknown Author)*

D. Few passages are read more frequently at **funerals** than John 14. Jesus is seeking to comfort those who are depressed, anxious, and filled with fear. To calm their **troubled hearts**, he talks about heaven—and much more.

II. A troubled heart—diagnosing the problem.

A. Though Jesus himself knew the reality of inner turmoil¹, he was insistent that his followers live with a deep sense of inner **peace** (cf. Jn 14:27). Our text both opens and closes with the admonition "Let not your hearts be troubled" (Jn 14:1, 27). The word "troubled" (Greek, *tarasso*) can refer to the "stirring up" of a body of water (see

¹ "Now is my soul troubled" (Jn 12:27). "Jesus was troubled in his spirit" (Jn 13:21).

Jn 5:7). When used metaphorically of one's inner being, it refers to the state of being **agitated**, unsettled, disturbed.

B. Why were the disciples so troubled? Diagnosing their inner agitation helps us to better understand the cause of our own inner angst.

1. They had just learned that a traitor was in their midst (Jn 13:21–30). *Our hearts are troubled when **other people** fail us and disappoint us.*
2. Peter had just been told that he would deny Jesus three times (Jn 13:37–38). *Our hearts are troubled when we realize **our own capacity** for moral failure and desertion in the line of duty.*
3. Jesus has just announced that he is going away (Jn 13:36). *Our hearts are troubled when **our Lord is absent** just when it seems we need him the most.*
4. Soldiers will soon come, arrest Jesus, and take him away. He will be unjustly tried, beaten and crucified. The fledgling mission Jesus had inaugurated is about to come to a crashing end. Indeed, Satan, “the ruler of this world” (Jn 14:30) is coming! *Our hearts are troubled when **all hell breaks loose!***

How can Jesus tell these men not to be troubled when their world is coming apart at the seams and the wheels are falling off? Ah, that's the right question!

III. John 14:1–31. Notes on the text.

<u>The Father's House</u>	<u>The Father's Face</u>	<u>The Father's (and the Son's) Presence</u>
It is a prepared place for prepared people.	If you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father.	When Jesus leaves, the Holy Spirit will come.
You can trust him!	God is like Jesus!	Ask him anything!
John 14:1–6	John 14:7–11	John 14:12–31

Notes:

1. The word “**Father**” occurs 23 times in 31 verses, clearly denoting perhaps the primary theme of this chapter. Nothing helps a troubled heart more than the presence of a loving father. This passage reminds us that in a world where all hell often breaks loose, we are not **orphans** (Jn 14:18).²
2. The Greek word *moné* (Jn 14:2, 23) is built on a root word meaning “to abide,” “to dwell.” The translation “mansions” is derived from the Vulgate, but modern usage makes it misleading. The word does not typically indicate separate dwellings but rather different “rooms” in a grand house. Perhaps Jesus is thinking of the **New Jerusalem** which will be God's “dwelling place” (tabernacle) but will not be a “temple” (Rv 21:2–3, 22). Indeed, in this great cube-structured residence there will be many “rooms,” “dwelling places.”
3. Note especially how this chapter gives insight into the **triune** reality of God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
4. When Jesus promises “I will come again” (Jn 14:3), there are three possible meanings. He could be talking about:
 - His return when he is raised from the dead at his **resurrection**.

² In John 14:18, the Greek word *orphanos* can mean desolate, abandoned, bereft of a father. It is the root from which our English word “orphan” is derived.

- The coming of the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Jesus) at **Pentecost**.
- The **Second Coming** and the establishment of the City of God.

We should probably see the primary reference in this passage to the third option. Jesus is talking about the great Day of the Lord when all wrongs will be righted and believers will receive their final inheritance. However, all three meanings have a bearing on what Jesus is telling his disciples.

IV. The cure for a troubled heart.

Though Jesus' obvious concern in this chapter is with his disciples as they faced the trauma of his death, his words are applicable for any Christian who finds himself/herself in a situation where life just isn't making sense and it feels like all hell is breaking loose. This passage gives very practical counsel to such people built primarily around the three virtues of **faith**, **hope** and **love** (see 1 Cor 13:13).

What to do for your troubled heart:

- A. Put your **trust** in God/Jesus (Jn 14:1; also Jn 14:10–12, 29).

To believe in God means far more than a mental acceptance of his existence or a creedal affirmation of his sovereign power. To believe means to trust; to put one's confidence in. To say one believes in aviation but never to fly because of fear is nonsensical. To believe means to entrust your life to the plane and fly! David said it succinctly: "When I am afraid, I will trust in you" (Ps 56:3).

- B. Put your **hope** in heaven (Jn 14:2–3).

In talking about the disciples' future dwelling place in the Father's house, Jesus is urging us to get our focus beyond the present and onto the future. Hope is a marvelous antidote for a heart troubled by life's present circumstances. Our old liturgies spoke of "the **sure and certain** hope of the resurrection of the dead" but now this has been replaced by a **vague and fuzzy** optimism that somehow things will work out in the end. Jesus wants you to know three things about heaven:

1. It is a **place** (Jn 14:2–3).

Jesus is not speaking of an **imaginary**, mythical, pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by (Shangri-La, El Dorado, Nirvana) locale. He is not talking about a state of mind or cosmic consciousness where people float around as disembodied spirits. No. He is talking about an actual, physical, tangible location—as real as Wilmore! Jesus is talking about a real place inhabited by real (embodied) people. When he speaks of "the Father's house" he is probably envisioning the New Jerusalem (see Rv 21:1–22:5). (Incidentally, Revelation does not indicate that we will **go up** to heaven but rather that heaven will **come down** to earth!³).

When Jesus speaks of the "Father's house" he is tapping in to our deepest feelings of **homesickness**. We are all refugees, displaced persons—strangers in a strange land. Our greatest danger is when we begin to feel ourselves at home in this world.

*Oh Lord, you know, I have no friend like you;
If heaven's not my home, then Lord what will I do?
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore. (Jim Reeves)*

³ For a fresh and biblical perspective on our future state, see N. T. Wright's book *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper One, 2008).

So where is heaven? Can you point to its location? Perhaps the best answer is this: Heaven is wherever God is. Jesus put it well when he said, the kingdom of heaven is **“at hand”** (Mk 1:15; etc.).

I suspect that after we die and look back at our earthly lives from the vantage point of heaven, we will feel a bit like a baby who has just been born: “I was always here, in this larger world; I just didn’t see it when I was in that little dark womb.”⁴

2. It is a **prepared** place (Jn 14:2–3).

Jesus tells his disciples that he is going ahead of them “to prepare a place” for each of them. The word “prepare” means to do the work of a host who wants to make sure that everything is ready for the ones soon to arrive (the food, the décor, the ambiance, etc.). The word can even be used of preparations for marriage. Jesus is personally guaranteeing his disciples that their accommodations will be perfect when they arrive. As a **carpenter**, Jesus knew how to make things in a way that brought pleasure to others. “If it were not so, I would have told you!” (Jn 14:2). You are going to love it! “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

3. It is a prepared place for **prepared people**. (Jn 14:4–6).

Only those who **know the way** to the Father’s house will enjoy the beauties of heaven. Jesus did not come to *show* us the way. He did not give us **a map** and urge us to figure it out. He *is* the way. To know him is to know the reality of eternal life—now, here. Those who don’t know Jesus will miss heaven.

- C. **Love** one another (Jn 13:34–35).

Last week, we looked at the importance of this commandment. Here, as Jesus is helping his disciples to deal with their troubled hearts, it is important to remember the importance of loving one another. Few things help to calm a troubled heart more than experiencing the reality of authentic **community**. “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three: but the greatest is love” (1 Cor 13:13).

- D. **Obey** the commandments (1 Jn 14:15, 21–24).

*Keep calm and carry on.*⁵ Soldiers are taught that when the confusion of combat makes everything chaotic and unclear, think back to the last command you received and do that. Troubled hearts and outward catastrophe should never be made an excuse for disobedience. When your inner world is agitated and upset, simply do what Jesus tells you to do. For example:

- “Do [to others] just as I have done to you (Jn 13:15).
- “Love one another” (Jn 13:34–35).
- “Believe in God; believe also in me” (Jn 14:1).
- “Let not your hearts be troubled” (Jn 14:1, 27).

- E. Receive the **Holy Spirit** (Jn 14:16–17, 25–26).

We will talk more about the Holy Spirit in a future lesson, but his presence is essential to finding a cure to our troubled hearts. Note especially the name by which

⁴ Kreeft, 197.

⁵ “Keep Calm and Carry On” was a motivational poster produced by the British government in 1939 in preparation for World War 2 and the massive bombardment of London in the Blitz.

Jesus calls the Spirit: the *paraclete*. The word literally means “one called alongside” and can be translated as “helper,” “counselor,” “advocate,” “comforter,” “defender.” The fact that Jesus speaks of “another Helper” (Jn 14:16), implies that they already have one, and this can only mean himself. The Holy Spirit is Jesus himself, alongside of us, **with us**. More than that, it is to have him **in us!** (Jn 14:17).

V. Conclusion

What is the cure for a troubled heart?

1. Put your trust in God/Jesus.
2. Put your hope in heaven.
3. Love one another.
4. Obey the commandments.
5. Receive the Holy Spirit.

Note well that Jesus does not promise to heal our troubled hearts by **removing** our problems and **fixing** everything that is broken. The fact that he himself was about to experience the crucifixion is proof that he has something deeper and richer in mind. His cure is not to save us *from* our trials but to save us **through** them!

- “Peace [shalom] I leave 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” (Jn 14:27).
- “In the world **you will have tribulation**. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

Come, Let Us Join Our Friends Above

By Charles Wesley

(sung to the tune of “There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood”)

*Come, let us join our friends above
That have obtained the prize,
And on the eagle-wings of love
To joys celestial rise;
Let all the saints terrestrial sing
With those to glory gone,
For all the servants of our King
In earth and heaven are one.*

*One family we dwell in him,
One church above, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death:
One army of the living God,
To his command we bow:
Part of his host hath crossed the flood,
And part is crossing now.*

*Ten thousand to their endless home
This solemn moment fly;
And we are to the margin come,
And we expect to die:
His militant, embodied host*

*With wishful looks we stand,
And long to see that happy coast,
And reach that heavenly land.*

*Our old companions in distress
We haste again to see,
And eager long for our release,
And full felicity:
Even now by faith we join our hands
With those that went before;
And greet the blood-besprinkled bands
On the eternal shore.*

*Our spirits too shall quickly join
Like theirs, with glory crowned,
And shout to see our Captain’s sign,
To hear his trumpet sound:
O that we now might grasp our guide,
O that the word were given!
Come Lord of hosts the waves divide,
And land us all in heaven!*



got life?

The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

GOOF-PROOF DISCIPLESHIP

John 15:1–17

I. How to Spot a Phony

A. How can I be sure?

Among the 12 disciples with Jesus during the Last Supper was a **phony** (Judas) and a **deserter** (Peter).¹ And yet both men were so convincing in their outward behaviors that no one suspected they might be faking it. In fact, their performance was so good that it is probable not even *they* knew the true condition of their hearts. This raises a very important question that every follower of Christ must ask: **how can I be sure** that I am a true child of God?

B. Change of topic.

1. Chapter 14 ends with Jesus' admonition: "Rise, let us go from here" (Jn 14:31). The meal is over and the disciples apparently leave the Upper Room. The remainder of the recorded conversation (chapters 15–17) occurs either as the group walked to the Garden of Gethsemane or perhaps in the garden itself. But the real significance of Jesus' words indicates that **the topic of conversation** is about to change.
2. Prior to this moment (chapters 13–14) Jesus' words and actions had been calming and reassuring. In washing their feet and speaking about peace for their troubled hearts, Jesus wanted to **comfort** his disciples in light of the traumatic events about to take place. But in chapters 15–16, the emphasis changes. Jesus now gives his disciples a **call to action**. In essence, Jesus seems to be saying, "OK. Enough attention to ourselves. Let's get on with the work the Father has given us to do!"

C. The call to abide is not an end in itself!

1. Many readers of John 15 want to make Jesus' words an invitation to a mystical type of union with God. The mutual indwelling ("Abide in me and I in you," Jn 15:4) is seen as the **ultimate purpose** of salvation and discipleship.
2. The text makes clear, however, that the call to abide in Christ must *never* be seen as an end in itself! The whole point of Jesus' teaching is to remind his followers that the purpose of their calling is to join in the work God had sent him to accomplish. The very reason they have been made branches on the vine is *not* just to enjoy the relationship, but to **bear fruit** (Jn 15:16)! When Jesus said "Rise, let us go from here," he was summoning his disciples to **mission**.

D. The fool-proof method of recognizing a true disciple of Jesus Christ is, therefore, the presence (or absence) of fruit. Being **attached** to the vine and the presence of **leaves** are not enough. Only fruit validates authentic discipleship.

- "By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so **prove to be** my disciples" (Jn 15:8).
- "You will **recognize** them by their fruits" (Mt 7:15–20).

¹ The loyalty and authenticity of the other 10 disciples was also questionable, but the emphasis in Scripture seems to highlight the treachery of Judas and the fickle faith of Peter.

II. Study the text (John 15:1–17).

- A. One of the most pervasive images of Israel in the Old Testament is **the vine** (Ps 80:8–11; Jer 2:21; Ezek. 19:10; Hos. 10:1; etc.). Isaiah 5:1–7 is particularly relevant for this study:

Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

*And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield **wild grapes**?*

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

*For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the **house of Israel**, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for **justice**, but behold, bloodshed; for **righteousness**, but behold, an outcry! (Isaiah 5:1–7)*

- B. Read John 15:1–17.

Note key words “abide” (11 times), “fruit” (8 times), and “love” (9 times).

- C. The main elements of this allegory are obvious:

- *The gardener* is **God**. He owns the vineyard. Gardening is not a hobby for God but a means to obtaining a harvest. God assumes responsibility for the fruit. The branches only need remain attached to the vine. The Gardener will do all the rest!
- *The vine* is **Jesus**. Because he calls himself the “true” vine² we learn there are other vines, other options of where to belong and to find your sustenance.
- *The branches* are the people of God (**disciples of Jesus**). On a grapevine, it is hard to tell where the vine ends and the branch begins.

- D. Jesus’ teaching on the vine and the branches certainly raises the theological question of the **security** of the believer. Can a branch, genuinely attached to the vine, be cut off and cast into the fires of hell? Can salvation be lost? The warnings of this passage are clear—and frightening! Though the possibility of falling from grace is very real,³ we should not fail to see the blessed **assurance** promised to those who simply abide in the vine.

- E. Jesus’ teaching reminds us of the final judgment and how God will ultimately evaluate our lives (2 Cor 5:10; etc.). The wood of the vine is **worthless**. A vine without grapes, therefore, is good for nothing but firewood. Earlier in the week, Jesus had dramatically **cursed** a fig tree to illustrate this point. He had approached

² Notice how Jesus is called the “true light” (Jn 1:9) and the “true bread” (Jn 6:32, 55) elsewhere in John’s Gospel. The adjective “true” reminds us that false and inauthentic options exist. So be careful!

³ See Romans 11:17–24 where Paul builds on the analogy of the vine and branches and makes equally frightening statements about the possibility of believers being cut off from the vine.

the tree, hoping to find something to eat, but all he found was leaves. “May no one ever eat fruit from you again,” he said (Mk 11:12–14, 20–21).

F. Definitions and meanings of key concepts:

1. *To abide*: to remain, to dwell, to persevere, to rest. Often in this passage, the verb is in the present tense, which means to “keep on abiding.” Jesus speaks of a double abiding, a **mutual indwelling**: “abide in me, and I in you” (Jn 15:4). As sap fills a vine and flows into the branches, so the life-giving Spirit fills believers and makes them fruitful. The passage itself indicates *how* one abides in the vine:
 - By **trusting** in Jesus and in the Father (Jn 14:1, etc.).
 - By letting Jesus’ **words** abide in us (Jn 8:31; 15:7).
 - By **loving** Jesus and loving one another (Jn 13:34–35; 15:9–10; etc.).
 - By **obeying** the commands of Jesus (Jn 15:10,14; etc.).
2. *To prune*: this seems to be a synonym for to be **cleansed** (see Jn 15:2–3) and means to trim or cut off branches so that they will grow back in a healthier and more fruitful form. Though fruitless branches are cut off to be burned, a fruitful branch may be cut off (pruned/cleansed) so “that it may bear more fruit” (Jn 15:2).
3. Perhaps the most important term to understand is “fruit.” What does Jesus mean when he speaks of fruit? The context points to two important realities:
 - The fruit of our **witness** (evangelism, ministry, service). Earlier Jesus had spoken of “gathering fruit for eternal life” when he ministered to the woman at the well (Jn 4:36). He also knew that his death would “bear much fruit” (Jn 12:24). Thus God is expecting our lives to have a **ministry impact** on the world (conversions, service, building up the body of Christ, etc.)
 - The fruit of our **character** (Christlikeness, godliness). The New Testament often speaks of godliness in terms of fruit (Eph 5:9; Heb 12:11; Jas 3:18; etc.). Perhaps the most obvious reference is Paul’s teaching on the **fruit of the Spirit** (Gal 5:22–23). Thus, God is expecting our lives to be characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

III. Four revolutionary questions for disciples of Jesus

A. Am I abiding in the vine?

The branches have one—and only one—responsibility: to remain connected to the vine. This is done through faith in God, letting Jesus’ words abide in us, loving one another, and doing what Jesus tells us. The branches **are not responsible** to bear fruit. That is the Gardener’s responsibility. The branches **are responsible** to abide in the Vine and invite Christ (and his Words) to abide in them. They are not called to **do** something but to **be** something! Working hard and striving never produces the fruit God is looking for!⁴ Abiding in Christ does. Let the sap of the vine fill you and then just see what happens.

If our lives are characterized by stressful labor that leaves us feeling tired and empty, then we have not yet learned the secret of abiding.

⁴ It’s a bit like trying to go to sleep at night. The harder you try, the more sleep escapes you! One sleeps when one stops trying and just lets sleep happen.

B. Is fruit evident in my life?

Bearing fruit, because it is the evidence of abiding in the vine, simply reveals the reality of our position in Christ. It does not earn merit or prove that we are spiritual giants. No. The fruit is simply the reality of **Christ in us** and **us in Christ**. Whether this is evidenced in ministry to others (evangelism, service, etc.) or in godly character (love, joy, peace, etc.), the marks of the indwelling Christ are **obvious** for all to see.

If our lives are characterized by barrenness or by the absence of Christlike qualities, then perhaps we're attached to the wrong vine!

C. Am I being pruned?

Before drawing an erroneous conclusion by the apparent absence of fruit in my life, ask: Am I being pruned? Perhaps the Divine Gardener has allowed loss, hardship, or persecution to render you temporarily "ineffective" in ministry. Perhaps God is working out a plan for a future season of even **greater fruitfulness**. Perhaps your present sense of "uselessness" is in reality the Father's process for producing a **sweeter** tasting wine.

If our lives are currently characterized by painful circumstances and apparent ineffectiveness in ministry to others, then the Father is calling us to trust him, to love him, and to obey him at a deeper level. Even as Jesus "learned obedience through the things that he suffered" (Heb 5:8), perhaps God has a deeper future in store for us.

D. Am I enjoying the blessings of life in the vine?

Though Jesus' words are sober, we must not miss the overwhelming blessings that are promised those who abide in the vine:

1. They will experience **joy!** Jesus explains that the very reason he is sharing this information is so that "my joy may in in you and that your joy may be full" (Jn 15:11). Letting the life of God flow in us and through us so that divine productivity is seen in our lives—what is more joyful than that? Any pain we may experience in the process of such fruit-bearing is negligible (see Jn 16:21–22; Heb 12:2).
2. They will be counted as **friends of God!** God does not consider those who abide in the vine as servants/slaves but rather as friends (see Jn 15:13–15). The sign of this friendship is that God lets us in on the "secret" of what he is doing: "all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."⁵ Friends of God are those who are close enough to him to hear him "explain" the meaning of life's events.
3. They will have their **prayers answered**. As we abide in Christ and his words abide in us, our prayers become answerable (see Jn 15:7, 16). For the first time, we begin to pray according to the will of God. It is God himself, through his indwelling Spirit, who is actually praying, so that prayer becomes God talking to himself (see Rom 8:26–27).
4. They will bring **glory to God**. God's glory is Jesus' ultimate concern during this entire conversation (see Jn 13:31; 17:1). Here Jesus states clearly that when a branch, abiding in the vine, bears fruit, the Father is glorified (Jn 15:8). When fruit is produced, those who see it give glory to God, *not* to the ministers.

⁵ See how Abraham was called a "friend of God" (Is 41:8; 2 Chr 20:7) because God had pulled him aside and explained to him what he was about to do in the world (Gn 18:17).

5. Their fruit will **remain forever!** Not only are the branches promised a fruitful life, but they are told their fruit will abide (Jn 15:16). Jesus is inviting his disciples to experience the very same realities of a life of service that he is experiencing! "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me" (Mt 10:40).

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

By Joseph Medicott Scriven (1855)

*What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!*

*Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!*

*Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge--
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
you will find a solace there.*



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OUT OF THIS WORLD

John 15:18–16:4

I. The Forgotten Sin

- A. Tony Evans tells the story about an eagle that was raised on a **turkey farm**. Moral: “A lot of us are hanging out with the turkeys when we ought to be soaring with the eagles. We have gotten so used to being with turkeys that we think we are one of them.”¹
- B. The turkey story is a funny way to introduce a truth that is not funny at all. As Christians we find ourselves living **in the world**. But we know we are not worldlings. This is troubling and difficult. Many disciples consequently either live **ineffective** lives (never soar) or **abandon** their faith all together (live as turkeys).
- C. Among the last instructions Jesus gave his disciples was a warning about **worldliness**. He knew that without a strong sense of their **identity** in Christ and a clarion call to **courage** in the face of coming conflict, his followers would fall away.
- D. Out text addresses the issue of worldliness head on:
- “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you” (Jn 15:18). The word “know” is an imperative, exhorting us to absorb the sobering reality that “the world” (*cosmos*, Greek) has disdain, antipathy, contempt, animosity, and a deep-seated **revulsion** to who he is and why he came!
 - “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” (Jn 15:19). Jesus is underscoring the reality that we are called **out of** the world. We belong to him and his kingdom, no longer to this world.
 - “They hated me without a cause” (Jn 15:25). Quoting from the Scriptures (Ps 35:19 or 69:4), Jesus explains that the hatred of the world is not grounded in **rational** opposition or **reasonable** disagreement. It comes rather from people who have closed their eyes, raised their opposition to a scream, and refused to think.
 - “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away [*skandalizo*, Greek]. 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” (Jn 16:1–2). Jesus knew how **destabilizing** it can be when persecution comes, especially when it comes from “church people.” It will be hard to believe that your life is truly rooted in God when your ministry flounders, the world hates you, and the “church” excommunicates you! Jesus is telling us in advance so that we will be prepared.

II. What the Bible has to say about the world.

- A. Carl Sagan was wrong! Astronomer, author, and popularizer of science, Sagan (1934–1996) was perhaps best known for his opening line in his television series *Cosmos*: “The Cosmos is all that **is** or **was** or ever **will be**.”
- B. The word “cosmos” in the Bible is used in several different ways:
1. The **universe**, the created order, nature (Jn 21:25; Acts 17:24; 1 Tm 6:7; etc.).

¹ 173f.

2. The **human race**; the inhabited world; people (Mk 16:15; Jn 3:16; etc.).
 3. Once, the word is used for a woman's **adornment** (*cosmetics* has the same root): "Do not let your adorning [*cosmos*] be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear" (1 Pt 3:3).
- C. Our focus is on the most important way the word is used. The New Testament (especially the writings of John) often uses *cosmos* to refer to the world system, the present condition of human affairs in **alienation** from God and **opposition** to him. Sometimes the word "age" (*aion*, Greek) is used in the same way.
- "You are of this world; I am not of this world" (Jn 8:23).
 - "The ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me" (Jn 14:30).
 - "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).
 - "My kingdom is not from the world. . ." (Jn 18:36).
 - "Do not be conformed to this world [*aion*], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . ." (Rom 12:2).
 - "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God . . ." (1 Cor 2:12).
 - "[Through the cross,] the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14).
 - "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col 2:8).
 - "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world [*aion*] . . ." (2 Tm 4:10 NKJV).
 - "Religion that is pure and undefiled . . . is this: to visit orphans and widows . . . and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (Jas 1:27).
 - "Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you" (1 Jn 3:13).
 - "We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 Jn 5:19).
- D. A brief summary of what the Bible says about the world:
1. God created the world. Originally, it was **very good**.
 2. Satan and sin have corrupted and captured the world so this world system now is anti-God and anti-Christ (Babylon). **Satan** is the prince of this world and thus it will be condemned and destroyed (Rv 18).
 3. Yet God **loves** the world and sent his son to offer eternal life to fallen citizens of this fallen humanity. He calls them out of darkness into his marvelous light. They are to remain **in** the world but not **of** it.
 4. Those who refuse to respond to God's call harden in unbelief. They reject and oppose both Christ and his followers and will be **condemned** with the world.
 5. Disciples of Christ are called out of the world and then sent back **into the world** on a mission of redeeming love. However, they must remain alert to the **dangers** of loving this world and being seduced by her charms.

III. A Few Clarifying Questions

- A. **Why** does the world hate Jesus (and his followers)?
1. For many, it seems incomprehensible that anyone could **hate Jesus**. He was a good man who loved children, told amusing stories, healed the sick, gave out

free food, and could walk on water! What's not to love? It's a bit like trying to imagine people marching in the streets, demanding the death of **Mr. Rogers!** Who in their right mind would hate Mr. Rogers and want to crucify him?

2. Jesus explains the world's hatred this way: "The world . . . hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil" (Jn 7:7). When the light of truth shines in the darkness of this world, it **exposes** the fact that many actually love darkness, because their deeds are evil (Jn 3:19). Jesus' coming removes the masks we wear and exposes the ugly truth about who we are. He did this by:
 - *His words.* His preaching called sin by its proper name and called people to repent. His **worldview** was different.
 - *His lifestyle.* He lived simply and was not seduced by the allure and entrapments of riches and worldly pleasures. He was counter-cultural. His non-conformity was subversive. His **values** were different.
 - *His actions.* He refused religious posturing. He elevated the humble, gave voice to the voiceless and visibility to those who no one else even saw. He regarded the cross as his throne! His **priorities** were different.
3. Jesus' coming turned on the light so that people had **the opportunity** to see their own hypocrisy, wickedness, superficiality, cowardice, racism, and egocentrism. Some were grateful for such a divine gift of love. Others closed their ears and shut their eyes and began to make plans to eliminate Jesus.

B. What does it mean that disciples are called "**out** of this world."

When the Bible tells us to "come out" from the world and be "**separate**" (2 Cor 6:17) and that we are to be a "peculiar people" (1 Pt 2:9 KJV), does it mean we should withdraw into monastic communities or become like **the Amish**?

1. There are many nuances in answering this question and it is likely that no two people will answer it in exactly the same way. But the definitive word comes from Jesus himself in his final prayer for his followers.

*I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not **of the world**, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them **into the world**. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. (Jn 17:15–19).*

2. Jesus is not calling us to **withdraw** from the world. *Au contraire!* This is where the "turkey story" is flawed. God sends his eagles back to the turkey farm, to live there and to love the turkeys! But be careful not to become turkey-like. This is what the call to **be witnesses** (Greek, *martus*) is all about (Jn 15:26–27).
3. When the Mall of America opened in Minneapolis in 1992, a worship service was held in the rotunda between Bloomingdale's and Sears for 6,000 people—"A Sunday Mallelujah!" Some felt this was wonderful, but others felt it was a sacrilege. Reflecting on the event, Os Guinness insightfully wrote: "The problem is not the presence of a church in a mall but the presence of **the mall in the church**."² It's a good thing when a boat is in water. It's a bad thing when water is in the boat!

² *Dining with the Devil*, 11–12.

C. **How do I know** if I have become worldly?

The warnings in Scripture against worldliness are given primarily to **believers!** Jesus was insistent that his disciples be warned about the **toxic nature** of worldliness that so easily infiltrates both the hearts of individual Christians and the church. There are two primary symptoms of worldliness:

1. If the world **loves you**.

- “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own . . .” (Jn 15:19).
 - “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you . . .” (Lk. 6:26).
 - “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an **enemy** of God” (Jas 4:4).
- a. How many enemies do you have because of your faith in Jesus? Though there are occasions when God’s people have favor with the world (e.g., Acts 2:47), the primary message of human history is one of hatred toward those who name the Name of Jesus.
- b. Turkeys love **turkeys**. But turkeys hate those who begin to take on an eagle nature and rise above the turkey yard.

2. If you **love the world**.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15–17).³

- a. Some of us grew up in an atmosphere where “worldliness” was measured by a set of **litmus tests** that involved behaviors such as drinking, dancing, smoking, playing cards, length of hair, jewelry, etc. “We don’t smoke, or drink, or chew; and we don’t go with those who do.” Such a posture produces **Pharisees** and **legalists**, not saints.
- b. John’s approach to worldliness is much deeper and more astute. The evidence of worldliness is seen not so much in our behaviors as in our **loves**. In a similar manner the Bible does not say that money is the root of all manner of evil; but that *the love* of money is (1 Tm 6:10).
- c. This approach to worldliness should produce two reactions in all of us. First, there is **relief** that God is not measuring our lives by outward behaviors (smoking, drinking, etc.). But secondly, there is **inner panic**. Is it possible that **I’m guilty** of the sin of worldliness even if I live in a trailer park and buy my clothes at Walmart? Do I love this world and the things in it?

³ At the risk of oversimplification, “the desires of the flesh” focuses on *how I feel* (sensual pleasure, happiness); “the desires of the eyes” focuses on *what I want* (greed, covetousness); and “pride of life” focuses on *how I look* (image, appearance, status).

3. Soren Kierkegaard suggests that we use “The Echo Test.”

Endless volumes have been written to show how one is to recognize what true Christianity is. This can be done in a far simpler way. Nature is acoustic. Pay attention to what the echo answers and you will know at once what is what.

When one preaches Christianity in such a way that the echo answers: “Glorious, profound, brilliant, articulate, you should be exalted with high praise,” know that this signifies that this preaching is a base lie. He who preaches and wins honor and prestige is a liar, a deceiver, who at one point or another has falsified the truth.

When one preaches Christianity in such a way that the echo answers, “He is mad,” or “What nonsense,” know then there are considerable elements of truth in his preaching. However, this is still not the Christianity of the New Testament. He may have hit the mark, but he does not press hard enough.

But when one preaches Christianity in such a way that the echo answers, “Away with that man, he does not deserve to live,” know that this is the Christianity of the New Testament. Capital punishment is the penalty for preaching Christianity as it truly is.⁴

IV. So what’s the cure for worldliness?

- A. **Remember** how the world treated Jesus. Jesus was not Mr. Rogers! The world had utter contempt for him because of his holy life and preaching of truth.
- B. Remember your **calling**. Salvation is not just from sin and death but from this world-system! Jesus came to deliver us from the world!
- C. **Repent**. Worldliness is a mortal sin. It is what caused the rich, young ruler to turn his back on Jesus and walk away—sad. Crucify yourself to the world and crucify the world to you (Gal 6:14).
- D. **Love** Christ and his kingdom more than anything. Put your treasures in eternity. Value what Jesus values.
- E. Become an **overcomer**! Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world (1 Jn 4:4). “Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 Jn 5:4–5).
- F. Memorize Matthew 5:11–12, “**Blessed** are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

*“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”
(Jim Elliott)*

⁴ 181f.

O Jesus, I Have Promised

By John E. Bode (1866)

*O Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end;
be Thou forever near me, my Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle if Thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway if Thou wilt be my guide.*

*O let me feel Thee near me, the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me, around me and within;
but, Jesus, draw Thou nearer, and shield my soul from sin.*

*O let me hear Thee speaking in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me, to hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen, Thou Guardian of my soul.*

*O Jesus, Thou hast promised to all who follow Thee,
that where Thou art in glory, there shall Thy servant be;
and, Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow, my Master and my Friend.*



got life?

The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

IT'S ALL IN THE PREPOSITIONS

John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26; 16:5–15

I. Living Out Our Theology

A. Out of the mouths of babes

1. When our youngest daughter was perhaps four years old, she said to me: “Daddy, Jesus was God, right? Well, when he prayed, who did he pray to?” This simple reflection of a child “explains” the historical process that led to the development of the doctrine of the **Trinity**.
2. As early believers studied how Scripture described the historical realities related to the **God of Abraham** dwelling in heaven, his **Spirit** at work in the world, and the coming of **Jesus**, they had to explain how it all fit together. As heretical notions arose, the church needed help in defining the reality of God; both who he is and who he isn't. The doctrine of the Trinity was not something a bunch of theologians made up! It was, rather, a humble attempt to explain **the revelation** of God as told in the Bible. *The Nicene Creed* (see below) is one such example.
3. Though Jesus spoke often about his Father, he said little about the Holy Spirit. However, on his final night with his disciples, the **Person** and **work** of the Spirit was front and center in his mind and teaching. Essentially he said this:
 - “I know you are sad because I am leaving. But it is actually **better** this way because only when I go can the Spirit can come!” (see Jn 16:5–7).¹
 - “I have only been **with** you. When the Spirit comes, he will be **in** you” (see Jn 14:16–17). It's all in the prepositions!²

B. Don't downsize the Trinity.

1. No doctrine is more definitive of the Christian faith than the Trinity: **one God** eternally existing in **three Persons**. Yet when it comes to living out our faith, many of us are Binitarians. We believe strongly in the Father and the Son—but we're not quite sure what to do with the **Holy Spirit**.
2. Numerous explanations may be offered for our neglect of this most fundamental element of our faith:
 - **Ignorance**. We simply don't know there is more!
 - **Contentment** with a cognitive faith; we are satisfied with being Christians from the neck up.
 - **Fear** of charismania. Our favorite verse is 1 Corinthians 14:40. “All things should be done decently and in order.”

¹ See how different versions translate John 16:7. “It is to your advantage...” (ESV). “It is for your own good...” (NIV). “It is best for you...” (NLT). “It is expedient...” (KJV).

² At the risk of oversimplification, one might say that the message of the Old Testament is that “God is *for* us.” The message of the Gospels is that “God is *with* us.” The message of Acts and the subsequent history of the Church is that “God is *in* us.”

3. In his final teaching to his disciples, Jesus insisted on the vital importance of a **personal experience** with the Spirit. This is not optional but a necessity for authentic Christian living.

II. What the Second Person has to say about the Third Person

A. John 14:16–17.

1. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit “**another Helper**.” He will be like Jesus—but different.
2. The Spirit will be *in* you. Cognitive faith and formation in Christian discipleship is **not enough**. The Christian faith is not just a moral code or a worldview. It is a living Presence to be felt and experienced.

B. John 14:26.

1. The Spirit will teach you all things (see 1 Cor 2:10–13; 1 Jn 2:20–27). This points not so much to teaching information (science, theology, history, future events, etc.) but rather to the ability to **discern** truth from error, right from wrong, good from evil.
2. The Spirit especially has a role in helping Christians to **remember** what Jesus has already taught them; reminding them of what they already know.
3. The special knowledge of disciples is a deep conviction of Jesus’ true **identity** (the only Son of God come in the flesh). “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.” (1 Jn 2:22).

C. John 15:26–27.

1. **Jesus** sends the Spirit but specifies that the Spirit proceeds from the **Father**.
2. The Spirit will bear witness **to Jesus**, affirming the Son’s true identity to those who receive him.
3. When the Spirit fills the hearts of **disciples**, they too become witnesses of Jesus.

D. John 16:7–11.

1. We begin to understand why it is actually advantageous both for us and for the world that Jesus leaves and the Holy Spirit comes:
 - Jesus could be in only one place at a time but the Spirit can be **everywhere**.
 - Jesus was here for only three years but the Spirit will remain **forever** (Jn 14:16).
 - Jesus was only with a few people but the Spirit will be available for **everyone** (potentially, “all flesh”, see Acts 2:17–18).
 - This helps perhaps to explain what Jesus meant when he said that his followers would do “greater works” than even he had done (Jn 14:12).
2. When the Spirit comes, he will have a ministry of **convicting (convincing)** the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. Only the Spirit can convince someone of the truth. When we try to fill the role of God’s prosecuting attorney, we hinder the advance of the gospel and succeed only in becoming **manipulative** Pharisees!

- E. John 16:12–15.
1. The Spirit of truth will guide believers into all truth. This helps us better understand the purpose of God in sanctification. Jesus' final prayer included these words: "Father, sanctify them in **the truth**; your word is truth" (Jn 17:17).
 2. The Third Person's primary ministry is to **emphasize** the Second Person!

III. What Jesus wants us to know about the Holy Spirit

A. **Who** is the Holy Spirit?

1. The Spirit is not an **impersonal** force, cosmic energy, or a generalized influence for good. Jesus speaks of the Spirit in personal terms as someone who speaks, thinks, has feelings, etc. The Spirit is a **Person**.
2. Jesus uses three different names to designate the Spirit:
 - The **Helper**. The Greek term *paracletos* literally means "called alongside" and sometimes referred to legal counsel in a courtroom (see 1 John 2:2). Because there is no exact English equivalent, translations render the term differently: Counselor, Helper, Advocate, Comforter, etc.
 - The Spirit of **truth** (Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; see 18:37). The Spirit speaks truth and will always lead to truth. Specifically, Jesus is talking about moral truth, spiritual truth, ultimate **reality**.
 - The **Holy** Spirit (Jn 14:26). Jesus could have called him the Mighty Spirit, the Loving Spirit, or the Gift-giving Spirit. He called him the *Holy* Spirit not only to describe his primary characteristic but also to highlight the work he has come in the world to do: He makes things and people holy. He is the **sanctifying** Spirit.

B. **When** does the Holy Spirit come?

The gospel narrative makes clear that the Spirit comes only **after** the Son has completed his mission (death, resurrection, ascension). In other words, Calvary comes before Pentecost. Sins must be forgiven before one can be filled with power from on high. Justification must precede **sanctification**. John's Gospel gives us the first installment of the promised Spirit when the risen Christ breathed on his followers and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20:22).³

C. **Why** do we need the Holy Spirit? What is his primary ministry?

In these passages, Jesus makes no mention of **signs and wonders**. Though the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was accompanied by phenomena and though miracles were part of the apostolic mission described in Acts (at least in the early part), such outward manifestations are not emphasized here in Jesus' conversation. Jesus' emphasis is on the following ministries of the Spirit:

1. A **convicting** work (Jn 16:8–11).

Jesus could only **preach** against sin. It takes the coming of the Spirit to bring about conviction (awareness of guilt, inward persuasion, spiritual awareness); being overwhelmed by the reality of our true condition before God. Jesus

³ Jesus' act of breathing on the disciples echoes both the original creation when God breathed into an inanimate Adam and caused him to come alive (Gen 2:7) as well as the vision of a valley full of dry bones: "O breath/wind/Spirit, breathe on these slain, that they may live" (Ez 37:9).

mentions three areas where this convicting work of the Spirit is of vital importance:

- **Sin**—“because they do not believe in me” (Jn 16:9). You know the Spirit has come when people are suddenly profoundly troubled by their sinful deeds, words, attitudes. The greatest conviction is reserved for the worst sin: **unbelief**.
- **Righteousness**—“because I go to the Father” (Jn 16:10). Humans invariably define “righteousness” as a religious endeavor (prayer, Bible study, giving money, acts of charity, etc.). But when the Spirit comes, we realize that all our righteous deeds are filthy rags (Isa 64:6). Jesus alone is righteous and until I **exchange** my sin for his righteousness, I am lost and condemned (cf. Rom 9:30–32; Phil 3:9).
- **Judgment**—“because the ruler of this world is judged” (Jn 16:11). Because Satan has already been condemned, we can be sure that we too will be found guilty on Judgment Day and sent to **hell** unless a remedy for our sins can be found.

For a good illustration of what this looks like, see Paul’s Spirit-filled ministry before the Roman governor Felix:

*And as Paul reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was **alarmed** and said, “God away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.” (Acts 24:25)*

2. A **guiding** work (Jn 16:13). The Spirit both creates in the heart of the believer a passion for truth and nudges him to pursue it. Those who hate the light (Jn 3:19–21) will never be filled with God’s Spirit. All truth-lovers are candidates for Spirit baptism. The *Paraclete*, like a good counselor, will gently lead people to truth so that the truth can set them **free** (Jn 8:32).
3. A **witnessing** work (Jn 15:26–27). Just as the Spirit bears witness (gives testimony) to Jesus, so do the people that are filled with the Spirit. The book of Acts tells how the power of Pentecost was not given so that preachers could preach (though that happens) but rather so that witnesses could witness! “You will receive power when the Holy spirit has come upon you, and you will **be my witnesses...**” (Acts 1:8).
4. A **glorifying** work (Jn 16:14). The Spirit’s greatest joy is to put the spotlight on Jesus: his life, his death, his resurrection, his current reign, and his soon-coming return. The Spirit never exalts himself!⁴
5. A **comforting** work (Jn 14:17; 16:33). The word *paracletos* is closely related to the Greek word for comfort (*paraclesis*—encouragement, consolation). When the Spirit fills our hearts, the indwelling presence of the crucified, soothes our hurts, answers our questions, and brings us peace like no other power on earth can do!

⁴ Therefore, we should resist changes in worship to replace the cross by a dove, or a flame. Though subtle, the shift in emphasis may be more dangerous than one first imagines.

IV. Questions for self-examination

A. Am I **needy**?

The reason many believers are not filled with the Spirit is that they are oblivious to reality. They don't realize their need for guidance, for knowledge, for forgiveness, for deliverance from the wrath to come.

B. Am I **thirsty**?

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink...' Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (Jn 7:37-39). R. A. Torrey said, "No man ever got this blessing who felt that he could get along without it."

C. Have I **asked**?

"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Lk 11:11-13).⁵

Nicene Creed (325 A.D.)

*I believe in one God, **the Father** Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten **Son of God**, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.*

Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

*And I believe in **the Holy Spirit**, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.*

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Nicene Creed gets its name from the city (Nicaea) in which the First Council of Nicaea was held in 325 AD. It is a statement of faith widely used by Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches. In the late 6th century, some Latin-speaking churches added the words "and from the Son" (*Filioque*) to the description of the procession of the Holy Spirit. This was formally incorporated into the text of the creed by the Western Church (Rome) in 1014. Many Eastern Churches vigorously objected and the *Filioque* controversy was one of the primary causes of the Great Schism in 1054 that split the church into East and West, Orthodox and Roman Catholic.

⁵ This verse is engraved on the tombstone of Oswald Chambers.

Come, Holy Spirit, Come

By Joseph Hart, 1712–1768

Sung to the tune of "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord"

*Come, Holy Spirit, Come!
Let Thy bright beams arise;
Dispel the sorrow from our minds,
The darkness from our eyes.*

*Cheer our desponding hearts,
Thou heav'nly Paraclete;
Give us to lie with humble hope
At our Redeemer's feet.*

*Revive our drooping faith,
Our doubts and fears remove,
And kindle in our breasts the flame
Of never-dying love.*

*Convince us of our sin,
Then lead to Jesus' blood,
And to our wondering view reveal
The mercies of our God.*

*'Tis Thine to cleanse the heart,
To sanctify the soul,
To pour fresh life into each part,
And new-create the whole.*

*Dwell, therefore, in our hearts;
Our minds from bondage free;
Then shall we know and praise and love
The Father, Son, and Thee.*



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ANSWERS

The Truth about Truth

- I. (A) strike zone; truth; post-modern; (B) political correctness; post-truth; perished; (C) consequences; brains
- II. (A) this world; God; (A1) mission; truth-lovers; (A2) power; (B) Thomas; will never; [Thomas column] evidence; [Pilate column] cynic; agnostic
- III. (A) Word; (A1) does not lie; gravity; (A2) fundamentalist; (A3) self-authenticating; Augustine; (B) narrow; exclusive; (B1) controversial; not the way; (B2) one door; narrow; easy; destruction; few; (B3) math teacher; (B4) universe; university; (C) personal; (C1) I am; (C2) know him; (C3) religion; relationship; (D) liberating; (D1) lies; (D2) freedom; (E) Holy Spirit; (E1) Spirit of truth; guide; reformation; (E2) minds; transformed; mind
- IV. personal application (A) fixed point; (B) possible; choice

The Wounded Healer

- I. (A) ugly; glorified; (B) as; in the same manner as; imitate; reassure; authenticate; validates; body of Christ; (C) lay down his life; rejected; embraced; healed; (D) cruciform; deny himself; daily; painful; (E) redemption; labor pains
- II. Paul; suffer with Christ; validated; personal; difficult experiences; prosperity theology; smells; distinct aroma; (A) Comfort; so that; encourage; Wounded healers; (B) Selflessness; ourselves; servants; not about me; ego-centrism; selfish ambition; Timothy; (C) vulnerability; jars of clay; death; messenger; be open; (D) hope; weight of glory; cynicism; despair; not home yet; (E) Agape-love; for themselves; love like Jesus; (F) credentials; commend; boast; weakness; validation; (G) weaknesses; conceited; my power; strong; remove; weaknesses
- III. (A) cruciform; give his life; emptied; (B) mind of Christ; two crosses

The Nerve to Serve

- I. (A) a meal; education; (B) reclined; feet; (C) last words; (D) servanthood; signs; through
- II. (A1) servant; shocking; (A2) imitate; impossible; literally; spiritual; (B) before; (C) final appeal; the worst
- III. (A) understand; plumb line; mentality/attitude; (B) self-interest; self-abasement; (B1) love; (B2) timing; (B3) self-identity; Who am I?; self-awareness; harm; resources; origin; destiny; demeaning; hurting; aspires to have

The Enemy Within

- I. (A) hell; Judas; treason; closest to God; greatest sin; (B) Where; Why; mystery; serpent; David; hate; someone else; bitter herbs; (C) Greed; Disappointment; Forcing his hand; traitor; Is it I
- II. (A1) Jewish leaders; Pilate; citizens of Jerusalem; us; Jesus; the Father; (A2) prophecy; (A3) places of honor; (A4) remedy; (B1) denied; himself; (B2) together

- III. (A1) chosen; called; Foreknowledge; (A2) devoted followers; ministry; became; (A3) warned; watch and pray; someone else; (A4) deadly sins; antichrist; (A5) truly sorry; (A6) forgiveness; restoration; (B) brokenness; repentance; regret; godly grief; worldly grief; [Worldly Grief column] consequences; pain; regrets; [Godly Grief column] who I am; life
- IV. Denial; someone else; Self-confidence; increase; is it I; Search me

Ground Zero

- I. love; (D) main thing
- II. (A) vocabulary; (A1) affection; like; (A2) friendship; fondness; (A3) desire; zero; (A4) [Agape column] Self-giving; the will; given; character; for you; (B1) quality; (B2) the standard; as yourself; as I have loved you; (C) the proof; (C2) love for one another
- III. commanding; authentic mark; (A) chose; (A1) the will; (A2) really are; (A4) command; (B) laying down his life; (B1) give up his rights; (B2) definition; (B3) absent; deny himself; (B4) I love me; (C) loved him “first”; from God
- IV. God is love; abides in us; love perfected with us; logic; God is love; dance; God lives in us; spiritual DNA; who we are; what we do

The Cure for a Troubled Heart

- I. (A) heaven; (B) we like this world; citizenship; (C) depression; anxiety; fear; (D) funerals; troubled hearts
- II. (A) peace; agitated; (B1) other people; (B2) our own capacity; (B3) our Lord is absent; (B4) all hell breaks loose
- III. [Column 1] House; [Column 2] Face; [Column 3] Presence; (1) “Father”; orphans; (2) New Jerusalem; (3) triune; (4) resurrection; Pentecost; Second Coming
- IV. faith; hope; love; (A) trust; (B) hope; sure and certain; vague and fuzzy; (B1) place; imaginary; go up; come down; homesickness; “at hand”; (B2) prepared; carpenter; (B3) prepared people; know the way; a map; (C) Love; community; (D) Obey; (E) Holy Spirit; with us; in us
- V. removing; fixing; through; my peace; you will have tribulation

Goof-Proof Discipleship

- I. (A) phony; deserter; how can I be sure; (B1) the topic of conversation; (B2) call to action; (C1) ultimate purpose; (C2) bear fruit; mission; (D) attached; leaves; prove to be; recognize
- II. (A) the vine; wild grapes; house of Israel; justice; righteousness; (C) God; Jesus; disciples of Jesus; (D) security; assurance; (E) worthless; cursed; (F1) mutual indwelling; trusting; words; loving; obeying; (F2) cleansed; (F3) witness; ministry impact; character; fruit of the Spirit
- III. (A) are not responsible; are responsible; do; be; (B) Christ in us; us in Christ; obvious; (C) greater fruitfulness; sweeter; (D1) joy; (D2) friends of God; (D3) prayers answered; (D4) glory to God; (D5) remain forever



Where Shall My Wondering Soul Begin

By Charles Wesley¹

*Where shall my wondering soul begin?
How shall I all to heaven aspire?
A slave redeemed from death and sin,
A brand plucked from eternal fire,
How shall I equal triumphs raise,
And sing my great deliverer's praise?*

*O how shall I the goodness tell,
Father, which thou to me hast showed?
That I, a child of wrath and hell,
I should be called a child of God!
Should know, should feel my sins forgiven,
Blest with this antepast of heaven!*

*Outcasts of men, to you I call,
Harlots and publicans and thieves;
He spreads his arms to embrace you all,
Sinners alone his grace receive.
No need of him the righteous have;
He came the lost to seek and save.*

*Come, O my guilty brethren, come,
Groaning beneath your load of sin;
His bleeding heart shall make you room,
His open side shall take you in.
He calls you now, invites you home:
Come, O my guilty brethren, come.*

*For you the purple current flowed
In pardon from his wounded side,
Languished for you the eternal God,
For you the Prince of Glory died.
Believe, and all your guilt's forgiven,
Only believe—and yours is heaven.*



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