



Abide In Me

31 Days with Jesus and the Upper
Room Discourse

DEVOTIONAL

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Although many publishers do not capitalize terms, and particularly pronouns, which refer to the Trinity, in this study CDM publications has capitalized those elements for clarity of reference.

Introduction

Dear Weary Ministry Leader,

The work of ministry is often hard, isn't it? It stretches and pulls us to our limits. Rarely do things go smoothly. There is always some obstacle or barrier in our way. Unexpected challenges pop up on the regular. Just when we think we've got it all figured out, a crisis emerges, and we're left with no idea what to do.

This is just in a normal season of ministry! Laboring for the church has been especially hard during a pandemic. We are all weary and worn from all the ups and downs, all the disunity and disruption and uncertainty. Our hearts ache from the losses we've endured. For some of us, we've reached our limit and feel like the proverbial candle burnt at both ends. We've exhausted our resources and have nothing left to give.

Dear friends, you are not alone in your weariness. We've all felt the same, especially after the last two years of ministry during a pandemic. Many of us wonder how we will endure. We all feel that need for refreshment. For strength. For hope.

We need the soul-filling nourishment only Christ provides.

When our Savior approached the end of His ministry here on earth—when the hour fast approached for His crucifixion—He gave His disciples some final instructions. This teaching takes place in John 13–17 and is referred to as the Upper Room Discourse. In these chapters, we see Jesus prepare His disciples for what was to come after He left them. In the moment, they likely did not realize the significance of all He was teaching, for they had yet to grasp the fact that He would die. They still clung to the hope that He was the Messiah-Conqueror who would defeat the Romans, rather than the Messiah-Lamb who came to conquer sin and death on their behalf. It wasn't until after Jesus rose from the dead that things began to sink into place and all that that Jesus had taught them made sense.

If you were going to leave a final message to those you loved most, what would you say? You'd likely voice your love for them. You might talk about your hopes for them and their future. You might remind them of things you taught them. You might even encourage them to not remain in their grief but to continue forward in their lives after you've gone. In Jesus's final message, He both taught and showed the disciples what it looks like to serve in love. He instructed them in what would happen to Him and why He needed to leave them. He told them about the importance and necessity of the Holy Spirit. He prepared them for persecution and suffering. He told them about their vital union with Him. And He prayed to Father on their behalf.

Jesus knew all that these dear men would face in the coming days, weeks, and years. He knew the coming persecution and martyrdom. He knew that false teachers would come. He also knew that the evil one would create division and disunity. As a result, Jesus knew the disciples would be tempted to despair. They would face doubts. They would also feel ill-equipped, uncertain, and weary in their ministry. So, He taught His final lesson to give them what they would need to endure.

The Upper Room Discourse served to encourage and equip the disciples for all they encountered after Jesus ascended into heaven. In the coming months and years, they likely turned back to those final instructions, drawing strength and encouragement from the truth of their unity with Christ through His Spirit. When they grew frustrated with leading their wayward flocks, they would remember Jesus washing their feet—the God-Man who left the glorious halls of heaven to live a life of humility and sacrifice and called them to do the same (John 13:14-15). When they felt depleted and spent, they would remember the truth that “apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). They would then abide in Christ and be refreshed by their union with Him. When they faced uncertainty, when they didn’t know what to say or what to do, they would remember the Spirit at work in them who would, “teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). And when they felt lost and alone, they would remember the glorious truth that they are united to Christ and God loves them as much as He loves the Son (John 17:23).

For weary ministry leaders, these chapters in John encourage and equip us as well. They teach us more of who Christ is and what He has done. They show us His great love for us and how our own ministry is done in light of His work for us. These passages remind us of our own union with Christ and how we can’t do anything apart from Him. They remind us, too, of the Holy Spirit at work in us and how we need to depend upon that work. And they give us promises to cling to: “I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Our National Women’s Ministry Team wrote this devotional offering as a gift to place in your hands upon re-entry to life and ministry. We encourage you to spend the month of March seeking to abide with Jesus as you marinate in the Upper Room Discourse. Soak in the truths of who Jesus is for you. Remember that you are not alone in your labors for the Kingdom. Abide in Him and receive the spiritual nourishment your soul needs.

We are praying you will see rich spiritual fruitfulness as you study this individually and, even better, with the women on your women’s ministry team.

Your fellow laborer,

Christina Fox

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end (John 13:1).

When our children were young, my husband and I went on an anniversary trip to Paris. Because we would be gone so long, and because it was the first time we were away from the kids for an extended time, I left behind something for them to open each day we were gone. Inside each envelope was a special gift and a note for the babysitter to read to them. We wanted them to know that even though we were apart, we dearly loved and missed them.

The Upper Room Discourse begins in John 13 where Jesus gives His final words to the disciples. This chapter begins a significant shift in this gospel; it pushes the momentum forward to its apex—to the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Every moment of His earthly life up to this point was about the hours to come. Each miracle, teaching, and encounter with the Pharisees culminated in His sacrifice on the cross to redeem His people from their sins.

But His arrest was still a few hours away. First, Jesus needed to prepare the disciples for what was to come. He was going to leave them and return to heaven whence He came. He must give them final instructions. They needed His reassurance and encouragement. They needed to know of His great love for them. When the worst happened, they would need His final words ringing in their ears, so they would not be left without hope—so they would be equipped to pick up where He left off and preach the news of the Kingdom of God to the ends of the earth.

This final meal Jesus shared with the disciples took place during the Feast of Passover, the feast which celebrates the Angel of Death passing over the Israelites' homes with lamb's blood painted on their door frames. The original feast in Exodus 12 points forward to the moment in John 19, when the Lamb of God would shed His blood so that the curse of eternal death would pass over God's people once and for all.

John 13:1 tells us Jesus "knew His hour had come." Before the creation of the world, the Triune God had determined together the time and place when the Son incarnate would lay down His life for His people. That hour had now come. God the Son would soon return to His glory in the royal throne room of heaven.

John then tells us something powerful. He tells us of Jesus's love for His disciples. And more, that He loved them "to the end." The Greek word, τέλος or "telos," means "the end, aim, or purpose."¹ Jesus loved the disciples to completion of His work on their behalf. He loved them to the fullest extent: *to the point of death*. As He said later, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Indeed, He loved them, and He loves us to the uttermost.

Father, I thank You for Your great love for us, a love which began in eternity past. I thank You for the final words of Jesus, words which encouraged His disciples, and which now encourage our weary hearts. Help us to feast on Your words so that they equip, strengthen, and sustain us for Your glory. In Jesus's name, amen.

Devotional by: Christina Fox

¹ Strong's Greek: 5056. Accessed August 1, 2021. <https://biblehub.com/greek/5056.htm>.

“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” (John 13:14-15).

For many years, I made my own Christmas cards. While this was early in my spiritual walk, I knew there was something more to Christmas than what the greeting card industry offered. Each year I enjoyed the process of (providentially) selecting just the right text and media. I delighted in the wee morning hours spent gluing, rubber stamping, and bedazzling the cards while Christmas music played in the background. But mostly, I relished what I now know to be the Holy Spirit’s presence in unveiling for me the upside-down kingdom of Jesus.

John chapter 1 begins to sketch this picture: “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The King of all worlds condescended into our broken world. Can you feel the magnitude of that drop? Descending further, He didn’t arrive in an adult form, but instead as an utterly helpless infant. An unwed teenager quietly delivered the Great Deliverer. The Incarnation required a radical paradigm shift.

Fast forward to the end of Christ’s time on earth when the greatest gift of love involved a voluntary descension into death on our behalf. Again, engrained in God’s story is a willful yielding and an upturning of human expectations. Christ’s entry into and departure from this world are bookends in God’s story that we lean into every year. The Advent and Lenten seasons showcase God’s magnificence through His humility and His sacrificial love for His people.

Today’s verses zoom us into the middle of these two phenomena. Jesus, soon to endure the cross, intentionally embodied the upside-down kingdom in a teaching moment. He rose from His position at the table and bent low to wash the disciples’ feet. He then resumed His place and asked them to consider what He had done. There it is again! We simply cannot miss the fact that God’s grand design includes servant leadership.

Jesus affirmed the titles that the disciples rightly gave Him: Lord (to be obeyed) and Teacher (to be observed). He not only is their Savior *from* this world but their example *in* it. As believers, we too bend down low in service to show Christ lifted up as Sovereign. And just as the word of the Lord does not return empty (Isa. 55:11), your servant leadership is a tremendous blessing to the church. God will use your labors to build and further His kingdom.

I remember one Christmas when I found the perfect rubber stamp for my homemade cards. The sentiment was simple yet profound. It alluded to the upside-down kingdom of which I have pondered for years. It read: *Little baby, sweet and small . . . born to be the King of all.*

Lord, thank You for revealing Your kingdom economy to me. Help me to have the eyes to see needs, the heart to serve them, and the wisdom to give only You the glory in doing so. Mortify my pride with fresh gratitude for what You alone have done for me. In Christ’s name, amen.

“Truly, Truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is the messenger greater than the one who sent him” (John 13:16).

When I taught kindergarten, I had several little jingles or catchphrases I used to get my students’ attention—things like “S-T-O-P. Stop, look, and listen,” said in a sing-song voice. You have probably heard or used similar tactics yourself, such as a hand-clapping rhythm or turning off the lights. The point of these exercises is to draw the attention back to the leader or teacher in order to give directions or reminders. The activity signals the group to pay attention because what is coming next is something that is important for them to hear or receive.

Jesus used a similar tactic in the middle of His teaching about servant leadership. When He said, “Truly, truly,” He was signaling that what was coming next was worthy of the disciples’ attention. Right after washing their feet and in the middle of teaching them what this act of service meant, Jesus let His disciples know there is part of the discourse that is extra important.

When Jesus told them, “. . . a servant is not greater than his master, nor a messenger greater than the one who sent him,” He pointed back to the symbolism of what He had just done for them. Verse 13 establishes the disciples were to look to Jesus as their Leader and Teacher, and Jesus acknowledged this as good and right. So why remind them of this truth again? Why did Jesus need to point out the fact that He is the One in charge (the master) and the disciples are the ones who are in a place of submission to Him (the servants)? We know Jesus did not do this from a place of pride or dominance, for He is perfect and without sin. Instead, Jesus reminded them He is the Master, and they [we] are the servants with the same heart of love and humility with which He had washed their feet. “Truly, truly” is like a sign calling the disciples to pause and think: *Are there ways in which I am acting as though I am greater than He who sent me?* Jesus essentially was asking His disciples to evaluate how they are living in comparison to the One who has sent them. Jesus was not above washing their feet, so why did they think they were above washing each other’s feet? Jesus showed great love and care in meeting their need, even though it was costly, so why did they not show such love and care to those around them?

This truth is for our edification and growth as well. We can use this verse to help us reflect on the fact that we, Christ’s servants, are not greater than our Master and ask ourselves questions such as: *Am I living as though I am too good (or high-ranking or studied or qualified) to do certain tasks? Do I see myself as someone people should love and care for without my pouring out love and care TO others?* These questions are not meant to get us down but to send us running to Jesus. Philippians 2 tells us to look to Christ’s sacrificial love for us as encouragement for us to follow in His steps. This leads to an outpouring of love to others which brings honor and glory to God. While we cannot muster up this love for others apart from the Spirit’s work in us, we can look to the One who will complete the good work He began in us (Phil. 1:6). Ministry leaders, let us serve others as our Savior has served us.

Dear Lord, thank You for the way You remind me of Your love and Your mercy, even in the middle of teaching us how to share that love with others. Thank You for being my humble Teacher, Master, Sender, and thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to help me to live out the love and humility You call us to. In Jesus’s name, amen.

“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).

As a military spouse, I tend to straddle two very different worlds. One world is the civilian world, and about 99% of the nation’s population is part of this world. The remaining 1% make up my second world, the military world. In my military context, it is not unusual to meet someone for the first time, have a fantastic conversation, and within five minutes I am the designated emergency contact for their children. My civilian friends cannot imagine giving this responsibility to someone who is basically a “stranger,” while my military friends would say something like, “You’re not a stranger; you’re a mil-spouse, and therefore, you are family.” Similarly, in this passage about love, Christ shared with His disciples how their love would distinguish them from those of the world.

Jesus’s speech on love is sandwiched between His revealing two acts of treachery among His disciples: Judas’s betrayal and Peter’s denial. Jesus previously had spoken about love, but this time it was different. This time when Jesus spoke of love, He called it a “new commandment.” “New” because the love He described is founded in His love and because it is focused on all who are His disciples.

Consider the words “as I have loved you.” The disciples did not realize Jesus was speaking of Calvary love—a love that would leave eternal wounds on the body of Jesus, a love that would unite all believers to His life, death, and resurrection, a love that would join every tribe, race, and gender into an eternal family. This sacrificial love is the kind of love we are to have for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

For me, loving fellow Christians is not too difficult—when everyone agrees with me and things go my way. But loving a “Peter” is hard. As a leader, you probably have a “Peter” in your life whose hurtful behavior can cause you to grow weary and frustrated. The commandment remains: you are called to love “Peter.” But dear sister, you are not called to love “Peter” in your earthly strength; you are called to love “Peter” because Christ loves you. Christ gave you a new heart, a heart that loves “Peters”—not because they are lovable, but because your new heart is tethered to Christ. Your new heart recognizes them as family. In John 21, Jesus restored Peter, calling him to care for His people. Our love for Christ is demonstrated in our love for His people—even the “Peters.”

Today’s prayer comes from the hymn “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” by John Fawcett. As you read through these words, pray the love of Christ will abound in you and His people, causing the world to know you are His disciples because you love with a Calvary love.

*Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.
Before our Father’s throne, we pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, our comforts and our cares.
We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows the sympathizing tears.²*

Devotional by: Chandra Oliver

² John Fawcett, “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” in *Trinity Hymnal* (Suwanee GA: Great Commission Publications, Inc., 2002), 359.

“Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am going, you may be also” (John 14:1-3).

Due to Covid restrictions, my husband had to abruptly reschedule his flight. We were supposed to travel together from Charlotte, NC, to London with a seven-hour layover and then a one-hour flight to Belfast, Ireland. With the difference in time zones, this trip turned into a twenty-one-hour journey. Alone, with four pieces of heavy luggage for The Irish Women’s Convention in Belfast, where I was scheduled to speak, I was not expecting to do this “solo.” Psalm 23 became my go-to scripture as I practiced God’s presence all along the way, making my trip a joy and delight. When I landed in Belfast, I continued in a posture of worship and prayer, thanking God for His protection and faithfulness. The plane was packed, and I inched my way to the exit. I sensed God prompting me, *“Go back and check your seat.”*

“But Lord,” I mumbled through my masked face, “I checked my bag, and I have everything I need.”

“Go back and check your seat.”

I shuffled and squeezed my way back to row sixteen, and to my utter surprise, there was my passport holder complete with credit cards, Covid test results, and Global Entry Card. The promise of God’s forever presence is indescribable.

The band of disciples in John 14 needed a reminder of Jesus’s presence with them. Their focus needed to be not on their present reality but on their ever-present Redeemer—not on their circumstances, but their Savior. Jesus knew the disciples were in a state of shock and despair. He told them over and over He was going away. You can almost feel the heaviness of despair in the room.

With the perfect tenderness of the Good Shepherd, Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled.” Why? Because Jesus was leaving for a purpose. “In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” Their Carpenter-Master promised His disciples that He was leaving to build and prepare a permanent home where they will all be together, to dwell with Him forever. He is coming back, not only to get us and take us with Him but to welcome us to the home He has prepared for us. I wonder, how many times did those disciples reflect on these life-giving words? Paul reminds us to remember God’s promises when he wrote to the Corinthian church, “What no eye has seen nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Cor. 2:9).

This is what Jesus also says to us today. Beloved, no matter what our circumstances, He promises His Presence. This is the gospel. Let’s remember, dear ones, in times of discouragement, weariness, or when the unexpected happens, Jesus is with us. And just as He tenderly spoke to the disciples in their time of despair, He says to us as well, *“Let not your heart be troubled.”*

Help us, dear Jesus, always to remember Your great love for us and Your amazing promise that You will always be with us. Help us to practice Your presence moment by moment. Amen.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him" (John 14:6-7).

Two of my daughter's closest friends are twins. Because they look so similar, you might think you can know one twin by knowing the other. Despite their similarity in looks, however, their personalities, interests, and likes and dislikes are very different. You can't know one of them by knowing the other. Yet, unlike the twins, these verses reveal that the disciples could know God the Father by knowing Jesus, God the Son.

In John 14:5, Thomas wanted directions to the place where Jesus said He was going (13:33). Instead, Jesus pointed him to a person—Himself. In another of His "I AM" statements, Jesus reiterated what He had disclosed earlier in John's gospel: He is both the way to God the Father (v.6), and He and the Father are one. *Jesus is both the direction and the destination.*

Jesus sought to comfort and encourage the disciples by telling them, ". . .from this point forward, you have seen the Father, and you know Him." God revealed who He is through the Incarnate Word, His Son. Jesus is God's self-disclosure.³ The disciples walked day in and day out with God the Son, listening to His teaching and watching the miracles He performed. They knew Him as friend. They had both access to God the Father and intimacy with God the Son. Jesus was saying that if you want to know what God the Father is like: Behold the Son!

What encouragement this must have been for the disciples in the difficult days of the crucifixion and the uncertainty which followed as they began to understand what Jesus had taught them. This intimate knowing was the foundation of their faith. Knowing God the Father through Jesus the Son motivated the disciples to service and evangelism—and for most of them, an ultimate laying down of their lives.

This is not because of who they were by any means. Time and time again, they didn't understand what Jesus had said or done. The disciples had been in relationship with Jesus because He revealed Himself to them. As J.I. Packer points out, "What matters supremely . . . is not the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it, the fact that He knows me . . . All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me."⁴

Dear Sister, what encouragement to faithfulness for both now and the future! We can *know* God. When we want to know what the invisible God is like, we look to the Son. When ministry feels hard and pointless, we remember that we know and are known by the God of the universe; He sees us and loves us because we belong to Him. This means we can do the next thing. And more, we have hope when difficulties arise: family brokenness, suffering, anxiety, hard relationships, and whatever else may come. We know the Father and are known by Him through the revelation of the Son. What fodder for worship and praise!

Father God, help us to make time to behold the Son. As we grow in the surety of being known and loved by You, help it to fuel our faithfulness to live for You all of our days. Amen.

Devotional by: Shea Patrick

³ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 491.

⁴ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973, Americanized version 1993), 41.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:12-13).

Two weeks after the start of the pandemic, when rest morphed into concern for the future, my husband and I began to pray about life in the “new normal.” We were only just beginning to understand what was taking place, and the path forward felt scary and unclear.

It was into this type of situation that Jesus spoke to His dear disciples. These men were “troubled” because their lives were unraveling. Things were unfinished. The long-awaited Messiah was in front of them, and yet there was so much more they hoped to see accomplished. How could He leave?

Jesus spoke into their bewilderment with a heartfelt promise. Jesus reassured them that He knows the path forward. What He shared will make a difference. During this conversation, Jesus reminded them of who He is and what He came to do. He bookended this reminder with an invitation to believe in Him (John 14:1, 12).

The One who had healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, fed the hungry, and preached the good news said He did not act on His own authority. The Father, who dwelled in Jesus, worked through Him (John 14:10). And now Jesus promised His Spirit will dwell in them and empower their ministry (John 14:26). The work that felt undone would be carried on by *them*.

During His lifetime, the ministry of Jesus was limited to a relatively small area, but after His ascension and Pentecost, these men spread the message of the gospel throughout the world. Their inward belief was lived out in ministry. While they knew themselves to be incapable of such an achievement on their own, Jesus now had promised that although He wouldn’t work among them, His Spirit would work in them.

Jesus knew He needed to return to the Father in order for them to do what they were called to do. For weary ministry leaders, when things feel out of control, it is good to hear the voice of the One who “holds all things together” (Col 1:17). We can trust Him. Instead of expecting us to carry on in our own strength, Jesus tethers us to Him in prayerful fellowship. Praying in Jesus’s name isn’t a formula. Through prayer, we acknowledge what is important to Jesus and ask Him to develop His purposes and character in our own lives so that we may continue His work.

As we live out God’s purposes, enabled by His Spirit, His greater work of restoration is made visible among us. Because we believe in Him, we become more like Him. We fellowship with Him as we lean into His promise and courageously carry on the ministry that He started. Knowing we serve in the strength supplied by the Spirit, who was sent by Jesus, results in praise to the Father.

Father, thank You for inviting us to participate in Your work of redemption and for supplying what we need. You have not left us in our distress but shared Your purposes and friendship with us. Help us to believe in You, to pray to You in our weakness, and to live by the strength of Your Spirit, for Your glory and praise. We ask in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Do either of these sentences sound familiar to you? “If you eat a snack, you’ll spoil your appetite for dinner.” “If you go outside without a hat, you’ll catch your death of cold.” We’ve all heard and most likely used similar statements, yet they aren’t always negative. “If you get a high ACT score, you’ll get a college scholarship.” “If you go to bed early, you’ll wake up feeling rested and refreshed.” These “if-then” statements all reveal a cause-and-effect relationship: if you do one, the other happens as a result.

In His Upper Room Discourse, Jesus gave a similar cause-and-effect statement to His disciples. He knew He was about to leave them to sacrifice His life on their behalf. He knew they were confused and fearful and needed encouragement in how to live when He would be no longer with them. His words were simple. “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” What does that mean?

Webster defines love as “to hold dear; to cherish.”⁵ To love Jesus is to cherish Him, to delight in Him, to treasure Him. We love Jesus out of response to His love for us. Consider Jesus’s patience with His disciples. They questioned and repeatedly doubted Him, yet He continued to teach and show them how to share His love with others. We have also experienced His patience and tenderness toward us, seen ultimately in His sacrifice at the cross for our sins.

But loving Jesus is not the same as obeying Jesus. He makes it clear that our obedience to Him flows out of our delight in Him. And what commands are we to obey out of this love for Christ? Elsewhere in John, we read: “Receive Me” (John 1:12), “Believe Me” (John 14:11), “Abide in Me” (John 15:4), “Ask in My name” (John 15:7). He tells both the disciples and us if we cherish, delight in, and hold Him dear, we will believe, receive, and abide in Him. He gave another command in John 13: “just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (v. 34). The love we receive from Him causes us to believe His promises and abide in them so that we can then give of ourselves as He has done for us.⁶

Jesus’s love for us causes us to love Him. Our love for Him causes us to obey Him through the power of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised in John 14. Ministry leaders, this encourages us when we lead others to follow Christ in hard things. As we learn more of His love for us, we are then prompted by the Holy Spirit to believe Him and follow Him. When we see what He endured out of love for us, we can remain faithful through life’s trials and encourage those around us just as the Spirit has encouraged us.

Father, I thank You for Your love. Thank You for sending Your Son as a sacrifice on our behalf and for sending the Holy Spirit to help us love You and to love others. Help us believe and abide in You as we seek to share Your love with a hurting world around us. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Devotional by: Robin Stevens

⁵ “Love,” *Merriam-Webster*, accessed October 26, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/love>.

⁶ John Piper, “If Anyone Loves Me, He Will Keep My Word,” *Desiring God*, June 2, 2012, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/if-anyone-loves-me-he-will-keep-my-word>.

“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him or knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17).

Recently, my grandson learned to walk. He was only able to take his first steps after receiving help. Sometimes he used a walking toy to gain confidence, but many times someone who loved him provided guidance, balance, support, and encouragement. Having someone walk alongside him enabled him to accomplish what he was unable to do on his own.

In the same way, these verses tell us about the Helper who is given to us. Jesus will ask the Father to give this One to us, and He will be with us forever. This Helper is the Spirit of Truth and is known only by those who belong to the Father through the work of Christ. He dwells with us and in us. He provides all that we need to grow and do what we were created to do—to glorify God. He enables us to accomplish what we cannot do on our own.

This verse begins with Jesus saying that He will ask the Father to send another Helper. As our High Priest, Jesus always lives to intercede for us. He said earlier in this chapter that He is in the Father, and the Father is in Him. Knowing Jesus asks the Father to send us the Spirit gives us confidence that this request will surely be granted. Notice it says *another* Helper. He is the same kind of Helper as Jesus is. He takes the place of the divine Person who was leaving. Jesus said later that it is better that He left so that Spirit could come. Rick Phillips says in his commentary, “The Spirit is the divine person who is called to our side to continue the ministry that Jesus began.”¹

This Helper, called Comforter and Counselor in other translations, will be with us forever. He is the One who will carry us to eternity future. He is the deposit that guarantees our inheritance. He is the manifestation of God’s covenantal promise to be the God of His people. It is key for us to remember that the Spirit is a Person. It’s about a relationship. He is not just a power or impersonal force but is the third Person of the Trinity. We know Him. James Montgomery Boice wrote, “If we think of the Holy Spirit as a person, our thought will be, ‘How can the Holy Spirit have more of me?’”² This stands in contrast to always wondering how we can get more of the Holy Spirit if He is only a mysterious power. We have Him. He lives in us and is always with us.

The One who dwells with us and in us is the Spirit of Truth. Later in the chapter, Jesus said that the Spirit would teach the disciples all things and remind them of what He had taught them (John 14:26), would testify about Him (John 15:27), and guide them in truth. The Spirit also does those things for each of us. In John 14:12-15, Jesus told the disciples they would do “greater works” than He had done (referring to the spread of the gospel), would pray effectual prayers, and would obey Him. The Spirit empowers us to live this kind of life.

Father, thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thank You that He dwells with us and in us, keeping Your promise to be our God forever. Thank You that He enables and empowers us to live lives that bring honor and glory to You. Keep us ever mindful of Your enduring presence with us. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Devotional by: Paula Miles

¹Richard D. Phillips, *John, Reformed Expository Commentary*, 2 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 2014), 2:254.

²James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 4:1112.

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:18-19).

As a child, I once got lost in the supermarket. My attention was captured by the toys on one of the shelves that stores always place at a child’s eye level, and I did not notice when my mom kept going. I remember running through the store, trying to find her, and weeping when I could not. I felt completely alone. With tears streaming down my face, I went to the front, and the manager called my mom over the intercom. Though I felt like she had left me, my mom had been only a couple of aisles over from where I was the entire time. Even though I had *felt* alone and left behind, that simply was not the truth.

Abandoned. Unprotected. Alone. The disciples may have felt this way as they listened to Jesus talk to them about going away. Their hearts were likely flooded with feelings of doubt, confusion, and pain. How could the Master who walked with them for three years now plan to leave them behind? Jesus, ever-loving and sympathetic to His friends addressed their feelings to give them hope, encouragement, and reasons not for sadness but great joy!

“I will come to you.” Remarkably, Jesus promised the disciples His presence in verse 18. Despite this, all of them would leave Him after He was crucified the very next day, and after His resurrection Jesus came to the disciples and found them hiding in a locked room, devastated and afraid. His appearance to them in bodily form proved that all He had said was true; He was present with them, and His resurrection life would bring them eternal life. They could trust His Word as truth. Jesus came to them and would send the Holy Spirit to be with them. They would never be alone. “Instead of losing [Jesus], they would gain Him in a new and more intimate way!”⁷

We often find ourselves living as if we are orphans, left alone and unloved by the Father. We think we must take care of ourselves or that God’s love for us depends upon our performance. We try to earn the Father’s love and feel distance and despair when we fail. The same message from Jesus applies to us as it did to His disciples: Jesus has come to us! In fact, He keeps coming to us again and again. He lovingly walks with us through all of life, tenderly wooing us to Himself when we falter in our steps. What He said is still true: He is with us always, even unto the end (Matt. 28:20).

We offer this same hope to those we minister to in our churches. For every woman who faces discontentment in her circumstances, strife in her marriage, or wayward children who have turned from the Lord, there is genuine encouragement. Jesus sees her struggles and comes to her. He encountered the same temptations and turns to her in kindness and compassion. There is true resurrection power available for change and growth. The ongoing, transforming power of the gospel and the presence of our Savior means the story is not over. And no matter what we face, we will never be alone.

Precious Savior, You have not left us alone! This very moment You are walking with us through whatever situations in life we face. Help us to turn to You and trust that You are there to care and provide for us. Amen.

Devotional by: Shea Patrick

⁷ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Lessons from the Upper Room* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ligonier Ministries), 88.

Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23).

When I was a child, my mother would often remind me to listen to her words and to do as she said. Her commands and gentle rebukes would be for various reasons: sometimes to keep me safe, while other times to teach me wisdom. When I was young, there were times I didn't understand or even like the commands and correction from my mother. Sometimes, I would be downright defiant of her. But as time marched on and I became a mother, I understood her heart more intimately and deeply. I know the love she has for me because of her leading and loving me well. I am grateful today when I see glimpses of her in myself.

In John 14, Jesus informed the disciples that He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (v. 6) and that even though He was going away, they could still intimately know Him, and He would be with them. Judas (not Iscariot) later asked Jesus, "How is it that You will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" (v. 22). Jesus exhorted them to love Him and keep His Word. For the last three years, Jesus had taught and instructed His disciples. He had told them the greatest two commandments; He had revealed to them all that the prophets had spoken was about Him; Jesus even had shown them how to serve one another, and He continued to remind them to remember all that He had taught them. The disciples were given very clear commandments and instruction. Jesus told them to do what He said.

The psalmist reminds us that a man who delights in God's law is "like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season" (Ps. 1:3). I can't help but think that the disciples must have recalled this truth as they began to understand all that Jesus had taught them. He reminded both them and us that keeping His Word and pursuing holiness conforms us to His image. When we delight in and obey His Word, Jesus is revealed to and through us. He is the source of our hope! And more, those who keep His Word and guard it as a treasure are loved by His Father! Jesus and the Father are inseparable. The elective and redemptive love from the Father causes us to love Jesus, and this brings us into the delighting love of the Father wherein we experience His pleasure in us. Faithful obedience reveals that we are His sheep; thus, the Holy Spirit will produce holiness in us and make a home for the Father and Son in the life of the believer.

Weary leader, remember your first love. When life and ministry seem impossible, His Word is your delight. When it seems impossible to love and serve or stand up for truth with gentleness and humility, it is the Word and the Holy Spirit which conform you more to the image of Christ. And as you grow in Christ, may you see more and more glimpses of Him who is in you! To God be the glory!

Father, I am grateful for Your faithfulness and Your Word. I pray that Your law will be my delight, so I might see Jesus more clearly. May I be like a tree, rooted in Christ and nourished through the Word and the Spirit. May I keep your commandments and pursue holiness as an outpouring of my love for You so that You will be magnified. And finally, I pray that the Father's delight will always be greater to me than the competing desires for the world. In Jesus's name, amen.

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all the things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26).

When I was fresh out of college, I was hired for my first teaching job in an inner-city fifth-grade classroom. I was a new believer and zealous for the gospel. Each day I desired to use my classroom to teach students and share with them the unshakeable love of Jesus. I worked long hours—arriving at school before the sun made its appearance in the eastern sky and driving back to my one-bedroom apartment most evenings as the sun was setting in the West. When I was not in the school building, I either attended student athletic events to build relationships with families or drove back to my college campus to lead a small group Bible study for students.

One Sunday, as I sat in worship, I began to weep. I was zealous for the Lord. It brought me joy to serve Him, but I was also weary. An older woman in my life saw my tears and said, “Rachel, don’t ever forget the Holy Spirit lives in you.”

Don’t ever forget the Holy Spirit lives in me. These are words of life I have tucked away and still preach to myself in the present day. Unfortunately, my finiteness leads to my forgetfulness.

Recently our family left a church we had loved and served for twelve years. As I write this devotion, I am living in the in-between as we wait for our next call. I am weary in the waiting and thirsty for the refreshment of my friend’s life-giving words, “Rachel, don’t you ever forget the Holy Spirit lives in you.”

As Jesus prepared to leave His disciples, He needed them to know this same truth. Another Helper would be sent to dwell in them forever. Jesus didn’t want the disciples to ever forget the Holy Spirit lived in them. The Helper, or *paraclete* in the Greek, would remain in them to defend, protect, and guide the disciples to live a life of obedience and love on earth. Jesus had been the disciples’ Defender, Protector, and Guide as He dwelt among them. In His absence, the Father would send another Helper.

Just as Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God, had tabernacled among weary, wandering Israel in the Old Testament, a Helper would come to take up residence in the hearts of the disciples. The Holy Spirit would give the disciples eyes to see the “accurate and full understanding of the truth of Jesus . . . to complete, to fill out the revelation brought by Jesus himself.”⁸ Jesus began the work of His ministry in the lives of the disciples, and the Holy Spirit would bring it to completion.

Dear sister, if you are weary from serving, weary from waiting, weary from grief, weary from heartbreak, the hope of Christ’s words to His disciples in John 14:26 is true for you today: Jesus is near to you. Through the Spirit, He defends, protects, and guides you to live faithfully. Weary ministry leader, don’t ever forget the Holy Spirit lives in you, too.

Father, I thank You that You don’t leave us alone. I confess that I forget about the promise of Your presence. Encourage my weary heart to never forget the Holy Spirit lives in me. Enable me to lean into the power of the Holy Spirit and reflect your glory today on earth. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Devotional by: Rachel Ann Craddock

⁸ D.A. Carson. *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 505.

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

Meditating on this verse, I wondered, “When have I been afraid, not at peace?” Instantly popping into my head was the memory of my teen-aged son walking out of the Las Vegas DMV waving his driver’s permit. Teaching him to drive in a city with the second-highest accident rate in the nation was nothing like my learning to drive in a small, rural town without traffic lights or freeways. But is the peace described here really about being afraid for a new driver or being stressed over a challenging relationship? Is it about being troubled over civil unrest and politics or any other broken reality of life? Or instead, does this peace reference the supernatural fruit of the Spirit? Yes, yes, and yes!

The disciples in the upper room had lived with and learned from Jesus for about three years at this point, but in John 14, Jesus revealed that change was coming; He would be leaving them. The disciples reacted to Jesus’s announcement by focusing on their soon-to-be unknown future. Although He promised to send them a Helper who would continue to teach them (14:26), it is clear the disciples were afraid instead of joyful (14:28). Here, Jesus repeated the John 14:1 admonition to “let not your hearts be troubled.”

Peace means tranquility or rest. This peace is multidimensional. We are first blessed with the gift of “my peace” when God redeems us. Romans 5:1 declares, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Galatians 5:22 lists peace as a fruit given by the Spirit. Jesus includes both the indicative and the imperative in this passage, promising His peace while also instructing us to live as though we have His peace by not being afraid. Colossians 3:15 commands, “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” The Spirit equips us to deal with life’s troubles and stressors, encouraging us to keep our eyes on Jesus and not on our circumstances. And when we falter in the command to not be troubled, the Helper gifts us with a repentant heart.

Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace. *Shalom* may be described as the pre-fall harmony that existed in the garden between God and His creation, as well as between Adam and Eve. *Shalom* is used throughout the Bible as a common greeting (1 Sam. 25:6) for both hello and goodbye. Jesus may have been using it here in the traditional way as part of His upper room farewell. He is also promising a greater peace to dwell in His people forever when He sends the Helper, the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, complete *shalom* will be restored when Jesus returns. Revelation 20:3 describes this fully restored peace: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.’”

Even as redeemed people, we can act like the disciples here when we look at our circumstances rather than at Jesus. We can focus on an illness, a prodigal child, infertility, or a plethora of other life challenges rather than trusting Jesus in all things. We may know a truth but not apply the Word to daily living. I can know God is the Author of life but act as if my worrying over traffic is what preserves life. What has you troubled or afraid? Jesus promises, “My peace, I leave with you.” Gaze upon Him.

Lord, may we grow in the knowledge of who You are and how much You love us. Help us to be anxious for nothing, looking to You for peace rather than to the world. As life around us changes, remind us that You are unchangeable and are with us forever. Shalom.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit"
(John 15:1-2).

At the beginning of every season, I make my way to the local hardware store to purchase some annual flowers. My husband always jokes that I have a gangrene thumb and laments they will be dead just in time for the next season's flowers to arrive. I have a terrible habit of forgetting to water and prune my annuals. At the end of the season, they typically wind up with the rest of the dead branches and weeds from the yard and are picked up by the county waste control.

Jesus had just told His disciples they are to keep His Word and that the Father will send the gift of a Helper, the Holy Spirit. Jesus left them instruction and an awesome promise. Now, Jesus was teaching His disciples that they and all His redeemed people are united to Him. And because they are united to Christ, the Father will tenderly love and care for His precious people.

In the Old Testament, Israel was known as the vineyard of God's vine. This imagery was a foreshadowing of Christ to come as the genuine Vine who would fulfill the law and be the true Covenant-Keeper. The branches on a grapevine are united to the main vine and must be pruned daily to yield fruit. If a branch does not bear fruit, it is because it has not been robustly pruned. The people of God are the branches. We are united to Christ, and all believers are grafted into the true vine. A vinedresser has a daunting job. He meticulously prunes the branches daily, all throughout the year. This pruning begins almost as soon as the plant is planted. The more robust the pruning, the more fruit the branch will yield. Spiritually speaking, the Father is the Vinedresser. He lovingly and tenderly attends to His people. He sanctifies His church through wisdom which is often mysterious to us but is effectual for our bearing fruit (1Thess. 5:23-24).

John 15:1-2 is a glorious picture of Christ, the Church, and her sanctification. The Church is no longer identified by ethnic Israel but is now united to Christ in faith. She will bring Him glory through the fruit she bears. The Father shows His love for the Church as He renews His people through the Word and the Holy Spirit.

Pruning can be painful, and at times life can be hard. But we can trust that God's purposes are good, and His ways will conform us more to the image of Christ. The good and great Vinedresser has not forgotten you! In the seasons of life when it seems like everything is spiraling down around you, remember you have been engrafted into the true Israel. Count it all joy that He remembers you!

Father, thank You for the love and tenderness You show Your children. Thank You for the ways in which You prune us and cultivate the fruit of faith in the lives of Your people. Thank You for the church and the many ways in which we can serve You by serving her. Thank You for the difficult seasons in life and ministry as they remind us to remain in You and strip us of self. Thank You for the ministry of the Word and the Holy Spirit to Your people. In Jesus's name, amen.

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

Several years ago, my husband’s job moved us across the country from Florida to Texas. We exchanged our Florida home and dear church community for an unfamiliar place where we knew no one. This left us longing for a place to belong, to be known, and to know others. We yearned for home. At times, I’ve sought this “home” in relationships, ministry roles, and hobbies. Despite their promises, I have found having anything less than Jesus as my home is sorely deficient to quench my deepest longings. Homesickness points us to the only One in whom we have true belonging; in Him alone we find the security for which our soul longs and the nourishment that we need.

John 15:4 comes sandwiched between two chapters in which Jesus told the disciples He is going away (John 14:3, 16:5-7). Yet, Jesus introduced the invitation to abide in Him. In Greek, “abide” means “to continue, to dwell, or to remain.” It could be stated, “do not leave” or “do not depart.”⁹ I imagine the disciples were confused, insecure, and bewildered. How does one remain with Someone who keeps announcing His departure? Jesus ushered them to come with all their uncertainties and make a home in Him.

The posture of abiding brings a foundational relationship change between Jesus and His disciples. He promised that as they remain in Him, He also will stay in them. Though absent in the flesh, He will remain in a profoundly intimate way. Up until this point, they had been *with* Jesus walking *alongside* Him in ministry. They would soon experience Jesus not by being *alongside* Him but by His indwelling presence *within* them and His Spirit at work through them. The distinction between “alongside” and “within,” dear sister, makes all the difference in the world. Jesus dwells within us, never to leave again. He knows us completely and will never leave us.

Abiding in Christ vitally connects our weary souls to their true home. Tethered to Him, we receive life nutrients for each day, grow in fruitfulness, and become a conduit of God’s life to others. Apart from this union with Christ, we have nothing to offer, but within it, we offer riches beyond comprehension. Jesus lives in and through His people, carrying out His works through them to bring new life—the hope of a place in Him. This work does not happen merely alongside Jesus, but as we abide in Him and He in us.

What overwhelming situations do you face today? Are you tempted to look for life in anything less than Jesus Himself or to walk merely “with” Him rather than “in” Him? He invites you to lean into Him, to make your home with Him, and to receive the nurture and life-giving nutrients you need today.

Jesus, I thank You that You have made Your home in me. Help me to abide in You today, depending on You to provide for my every need. Through my connection to You, bring life and nourishment and pour out love and grace through me to those around me. In Your precious and life-giving name, amen.

Devotional by: Lisa Tarplee

⁹ Strong’s Greek: 3306. Accessed October 26, 2021. <https://biblehub.com/greek/3306.htm>.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

In the back corner of our yard grows a large mulberry tree. Tangled within its branches was a mass of grapevines and apple tree branches. Imagine, if you will, large branches jutting out from the gaps and fruit hanging here and there. It was a hot mess. Nothing had enough room to grow. All three trees vied for the sun’s rays. Consequently, none of the trees reached their potential; all remained stagnant. What they needed was a good pruning. So, in my inexperience, I began hacking away, trying to clear out the space. I came back later in the week to check on my progress, only to see that one of the main branches was dead. Its leaves were shriveled up, and most of the fruit had fallen to the ground. Upon further investigation, I realized I had cut a main branch. In our passage, Jesus was teaching the disciples they would bear fruit only when they abide in Him. Just as a branch cannot do anything apart from the vine, neither can we.

Jesus emphasized here their abiding union with Himself. He had already stated in the previous verse that He was the “true vine” and that the Father is the vinedresser. And in verse five, He reminded the disciples that not only is He the vine, but that we are the branches. A branch is wholly dependent on the vine for its source of life. When Jesus said, “apart from me you can do nothing,” He was saying no matter how strong or resourceful you think you may be, apart from Him, you can do nothing. In John 4:13-15, Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well and asked her for a drink. As the conversation progressed, He told her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.” In this verse, Jesus tells us that He will satisfy our deepest thirst. Abiding in Christ gives us everything that our spiritual and physical body needs.

Why would Jesus, on the night before His arrest, emphasize this metaphor of His being the vine and their being the branches? Just as He foreknew the disciples would all fall away, some even denying Him, He also foreknew they would need to remember that their comfort and contentment is found in abiding close to Him. When we drift from Jesus, looking for contentment in either the world or in our own striving, we create a gap that separates us from the Father. But when we abide and draw close to Christ—as we are spiritually fed—we become more like Him. We find our thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and desires change. As believers, we must sync ourselves to Christ, trusting that He who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it. Ministry leader, ask yourself: are you abiding in Christ? Are you trusting that He is working in you so you can bear fruit? Ask Him today to do this.

Lord Jesus, we ask that You remind us of Your sustaining power. You have drawn us to Yourself and are able to not only supply all our needs and desires, but You delight in doing so. Lord, change our desires and wants to be more aligned with Yours. Help us to be in sync with You. We are grateful You continually work in us and through us, taking this lump of clay and making something beautiful for Your glory. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

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

My husband and I once had the opportunity to visit wine country in California. We walked among the vineyards, remarking at the beautiful foliage—the twisted vines and branches full of large, dark green leaves. But what really draws most people to this part of California is not the plants themselves, but the grapes which grow on them and the wine the fruit produces. A vineyard that is beautiful but not fruitful would not bring the owner much recognition. People would likely not visit just to see green leaves because many other plants and bushes also have pretty leaves. It is the grapes which prove the vineyard is worth a visit because they distinguish it from other vineyards.

John 15:8 shows us this is also true for Christ’s followers. Just as the purpose of the vine is to produce fruit so the owner can make wine, the purpose of our fruitful life is to bring glory to God. It’s worth recalling from earlier verses in this chapter how little we ourselves are involved in the growth process. First Corinthians 3:7 tells us it is God who gives the growth. And John 15 shows us that God, through His Spirit, makes this happen. We bear fruit through the work of Christ on our behalf, by the transforming power of His Word, and with the help of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is only right for God to get the glory for our fruitfulness. While other verses in the New Testament encourage us to glorify God by doing things such as accepting others as Christ has accepted us (Rom. 15:6), fleeing from sexual impurity (1 Cor. 6:18-20), or doing good deeds (1 Peter 2:12), this passage reminds us that God is the One who carefully cultivates in us a life which brings about those actions. Since it is God at work through us, He receives all the glory.

However, it is not just our fruitfulness that glorifies God but the *result* of that fruitfulness. The vine doesn’t bear fruit for itself but is used by the owner of the vineyard to make wine. In our case, God uses our fruitfulness to show the world what a disciple looks like. He uses our changed lives as evidence that being a follower of Jesus is transformative. When we show love to our neighbors, we reveal we are growing in Christ’s love. Our joy in the midst of suffering tells the world that we are abiding in the hope only Jesus can give. The peace we show in the face of turmoil demonstrates we are resting in God as our true King. When we are patient and kind in the midst of difficult relationships, we show that the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives. Such fruit is evidence of a God who is working in us to shape us into the likeness of Christ. The world will see and notice this change in us and will be drawn to Him.

Ministry leaders, the fruit you bear, is not for you alone; rather, it serves a greater purpose. May others see the Spirit’s work in your life and give God the glory He is due.

Dear Lord, thank You for the privilege of being Your disciple. Thank You for working in and through us so that through Your care, we are able to glorify You and show the world the beautiful fruit You produce in the lives of those who are learning from You. In Jesus’s name, amen.

“As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you. Abide in My love.” (John 15:9).

During sixth grade, I joined a competitive dance team. Dancing was awkward to me at first. Little by little I became more involved; my movements became more refined. By the time I entered high school, I was dancing on both the junior team as an officer, and my coach allowed me to dance on the senior team as well—for a freshman, this was rare. And although my mom was very sick with breast cancer, remaining in my dance team community was vital for my social-emotional wholeness during a very difficult season of my life.

I participated in ten routines that year. I would go to school, then directly to the studio. From 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., I remained in community. I had meals at the studio and would complete homework between classes. The girls I danced with came from different schools, different backgrounds, were different ages—we all even danced differently! As I remained in community at my dance studio, the dance team became like my family. It was a mutual love for dance which brought us together, but over time that mutual love for dance wove our hearts together as a people. The more we showed up and practiced together, the more intimately we learned to move as one.

I became a Christian in my early twenties. I remember feeling like an awkward sixth-grade dance team member when it came to Christian community. A friend of mine said to me, “Rachel when it comes to Christian community, the only thing that matters is having Christ in common.” As a new believer, I needed to be disciplined to remain in Christian community, to learn to move as one with His people. This hasn’t been easy in every season—sometimes I have needed to repent and start again—but abiding in community, despite how I sometimes feel about it, has been a tangible way I have experienced the Father’s love here on earth.

Jesus told His disciples to abide in the love they had seen Him model during His time on earth. To abide in something simply means to remain in it—it’s a moment-by-moment choice to stay connected to the life-giving source of love, Christ’s love. Jesus told the disciples to abide in His love in John 13:34; now He is saying it again. “Remain in My love.” This seems so simple, but because of the Fall can feel warped, awkward, and broken. However, remaining in Christ’s love is vital for the wholeness of every Christian in every season.

While we receive His love by grace, we remain in His love through obedience—living an intentional life of practicing the discipline of radical love. As D.A. Carson wrote, “We remain in Jesus’ love by exactly the same means by which He has always remained in His Father’s love: obedience.”¹⁰

Weary Leader, I fail to abide in His love well, but the beauty of the gospel is this: when we stray from abiding in Christ’s love, we are given mercy and grace to repent and begin the routine all over again. We get to practice together! Although we are weary, as we are disciplined to show up and practice abiding in His love, we will learn to move together as one.

Father, You are gracious and merciful. I confess that sometimes I forget to abide in Christ’s love. Thank You that through Christ, we have the gift of repentance so we can begin to remain in Your love again. Supply us with the courage to love deeply and boldly. In Jesus’s name, we pray. Amen.

Devotional by: Rachel Ann Craddock

¹⁰ D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 505.

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full”
(John 15:11).

A few weeks ago, my father sent me a handful of pictures from the birth of my third child that he had found while clearing out his phone. Sadly, all my original photos recounting that day had been lost when our computer crashed. So, when I received these lost treasures, it brought an unexplainable joy. My mind immediately went back thirteen years ago to my daughter’s birth. She was a beautiful newborn. It was an easy birth, even if my face looked exhausted! Reliving that joy through photos can be equated to re-experiencing the joy felt from hearing what Jesus said to His believers. There is that initial joy of hearing the promises of God laid out to us in the gospel; then, there is the reoccurring fullness of joy in being reminded of His promises.

For some of us, recalling the words of Jesus and His promises comes easily, but for others, the strain of remembering takes effort. So, how can we encourage not only ourselves but our sisters in Christ? With the very promises of Christ. In the beginning chapters of John, Jesus told the people that “whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (3:36). This is His promise to us: if we believe in Him, we will have eternal life. To be assured of our eternity brings an inexplainable joy. But there’s more! Jesus promises, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (8:12). So, not only are we given eternal life, but we are also given the promise of having the light of Christ in this life! Jesus promises to give us His truth (8:31) and to come again and take us home with Him. But in the meantime, He has sent us a Helper, the Holy Spirit (14:3; 15:23).

In His words, we not only receive eternal life but the hope and assurance needed to persevere during our trials and temptations. Just as Peter had needed to keep his eyes on Jesus while in the storm, we, too, need to keep our eyes on Him in order to remain steadfast. *The Westminster Catechism* reminds us, “yet are they never left without such a presence and support of the Spirit of God as keeps them from sinking into utter despair.”¹¹ What a gracious and merciful God we have who gives us a Helper to support us in our Christian walk. In hearing His words and receiving the good news of the gospel, we are reminded of who we are in Christ. These glorious truths give us great and abiding joy.

During those times when we feel joyless, the Holy Spirit faithfully works in us, keeping us from entering into despair. Weary ministry leader, if you feel like this today, I encourage you to remember who you are because of Christ. Just as I was reminded of the joy of my daughter’s birth, when we focus our thoughts on Christ, remembering who He is and what He has done, we enter into a joy unspeakable. Rest in the knowledge that He calls you His daughter and takes delight in you. You are uniquely and wonderfully made. And in His joy, you will be full. Walk this day in confidence.

Lord, we do ask that You give us confidence and assurance of who we are in Christ. We pray You would fill us with the joy of our salvation. We pray that we would be completely satisfied in Christ and see the beauty of what He has done on our behalf. May we never grow tired of knowing Him more intimately. Lord, spur in us the desire to do good works, to share the gospel boldly with those who are lost, and to rest in the promises laid out to us in John. In Your holy name, amen.

Devotional by: Carrie Mills

¹¹ *Westminster Larger Catechism*. Question 81. <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/westminster-larger-catechism/>.

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give it to you” (John 15:16).

I remember the feeling of standing in the front of my elementary classroom as the captains for our recess kickball teams began to call out the names of those they wanted to be their teammates. I remember feeling elated when I was the first girl chosen but also anguished when I was passed over for someone else. No one wanted to be the last one standing. There was something special about being picked out by one of my peers. Everyone likes to be chosen, to be deemed special.

In the Scriptures, God’s people are described as being chosen, holy, and dearly loved (1 Peter 2:9). Ephesians 1:3 tells us that we were chosen in Christ, before the world was created, to be holy and blameless. In eternity past, God the Father placed His affection upon you and determined He would make you His own. The Father covenanted with His Son to redeem you with His blood and with the Spirit to seal you for all eternity to be set apart for His purposes. Jesus lovingly confirmed to His disciples in John 15, “I chose you.” He underscored it with “You did not choose Me.” Apart from God’s electing love, we would never choose Him. We would never desire to be a part of His team. We would still be His enemies, never His friends. And so, we are delighted and overwhelmed with gratefulness to be called His own.

“The LORD, your God, has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the peoples on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set His love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that He swore to your fathers” (Deut. 7:6-7). We are His for no other reason than the fact that He set His electing love upon us. If we did nothing to deserve it or initiate it, we can do nothing to lose it. The Spirit is a deposit which guarantees our inheritance. We are secure, and there is no fear we will ever be passed over, overlooked, or forgotten.

Being chosen by Him also gives us purpose as those who were created for His glory. The passage in John says we were appointed, or set apart, to bear fruit, fruit that will last. In Ephesians 2, we read, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (vv. 8-10). What are these fruits or good works? Scripture teaches that fruit in a believer’s life includes the Christlike character wrought in our lives as the Spirit transforms us and we respond in obedience. Perhaps the word “go” in John 15:16 indicates the fruit of the gospel mission. We go and make disciples when we bear witness to the truth of the gospel to a dying world and in service to the church. In these verses, prayer is also connected to eternal fruit born in our lives. We become more effective in our praying. Our prayers are not merely a means to an end but are the fruit we are appointed to bear. And so, whatever we ask accords with His will, and He grants our requests.

Father, thank You that we have been chosen in Christ before the creation of the world. We are undeserving of Your affection and grateful to be called Your own. Thank You for the security that is ours in Christ and for setting us apart to bear fruit. Make us women who bear abiding fruit. In Jesus’s name, amen.

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

A couple of years ago, in a non-religious online group with thousands of members, I responded to a question about welcoming others by saying that no matter who we were, there was room to welcome all kinds of people to participate in a shared activity. In response to my reply, a woman shared in a lengthy string of vicious and profane comments that she would never welcome Christians. I was literally left shaken. I can only describe her vitriol as the darkest tsunami-sized wave of pure hate for Christians. It was unnerving and demoralizing.

As John chapter 15 begins, Judas Iscariot, the unbeliever, had left the upper room, and Jesus was now addressing His true disciples. As He spoke to them and prayed for them, Jesus knew He was about to be betrayed by a so-called follower of His inner circle, be arrested, and face fierce public opposition and humiliation. He was hated and would be mocked, not only by leaders in the secular government but also from the respected religious leaders of His day who were threatened by and opposed to His ministry and His teaching.

Jesus also knew what would soon come for His disciples as they faced similar opposition for following Him. And it is with that backdrop He tells them He loves them and is calling them to love one another. Not only that, but He says they are not merely His servants but His friends—friends whom He has specifically chosen, called, and appointed to bear lasting fruit.

These truths come with Jesus’s sobering reminder that they will be persecuted and hated. It is to be expected. The gospel is fragrant and life-giving to us who are called by Jesus not only as friends but as daughters. Yet the gospel is odious and offensive to those who reject God as well as to false teachers who preach another gospel. In fact, biblical truth and true goodness will be called hateful and evil by the wicked (Isa. 5:20).

Who is the world? The world is all who oppose God and His Word. The world is secular systems and rulers like Pontius Pilate before whom Jesus appeared. But the world is also anyone who appears to follow God like the religious rulers of Jesus’s day who have the outward appearance of godliness but who actually have hard hearts which oppose Christ (Luke 18:9-14).

In the midst of the reality of the world’s persecution and opposition to God’s people, Jesus, in His Upper Room Discourse, prayed for the disciples to have Christ-centered joy (John 16:22-24). It is a fact that God’s people will face tribulation, but we are to have His peace as we endure it (John 14:27). Jesus reminds us to take heart—to be encouraged. The world and its systems and anyone who opposes God’s Word will finally be defeated as Jesus Himself has overcome the world through His death and resurrection; therefore, the gates of Hell will not prevail against Christ and His Church.

Father, there are times we are discouraged, weary, and sometimes even fearful of opposition to biblical truth by enemies of the gospel or even among those who claim to believe in You but reject truth in Your Word. As we serve You, strengthen us through Your Spirit for the persecution Jesus tells us we will face. Thank You for the gospel-centered peace we can know through the encouragement of Your promise that Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33). And give us refreshment through the fullness of Your joy (John 15:11). In Jesus’s name, amen.

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27).

As a child, I once snuck into a movie being shown to the high schoolers at church. The movie was about the rapture and all of the horrible events that would happen to anyone who was not raptured. Fear of being left behind sent my thought-life into overdrive. I wrestled, doubted, and evaluated my every thought and action, trying to confirm whether or not I was a true Christian. While I wrestled, my fear grew—because I did not want to be left behind without my family, or my neighbors, or my church. In fact, I was so afraid of being left behind I would sneak out of bed in the middle of the night to listen at my parent’s bedroom door. My father snored loudly, so I reasoned if I could hear him snoring, then I had not been left behind; I had not been left alone.

As we come to the end of John 15, let’s pause for a moment and reflect on what Jesus has been teaching His disciples and us in this chapter. Jesus used the illustration of the vine and the vinedresser, showing us how our lives are vitally connected to Him, the true vine. He also warned us that those who do not abide in Him will be cut off and thrown into the fire of judgment. Jesus then cautioned us that because the world hates Jesus, it hates us as well because we abide in Him. These are hard truths.

With love and compassion for His disciples, Jesus then gave the promise of the Holy Spirit. He knew the disciples would face many doubts and lies in the coming hours and days. Jesus knew His dear friends would be tempted and taunted by their own thoughts, questioning whether or not Jesus really was who He said He was. They would wonder if they had been deceived and abandoned.

As Jesus prepared to leave His disciples, He shared that God will still be with them; they will not be left alone. The Holy Spirit will come and stay with His disciples forever. The Holy Spirit will never leave or abandon the believer. The Spirit will also fight the lies of isolation and unbelief with the truth of the gospel.

I still wrestle with assurance; I still find myself drifting to questions about my thoughts, my behavior, and my sin. I question whether I am really united to Christ. However, my wrestling is short-lived because the Holy Spirit reminds me of truth. He fights these old lies with living truth; with gentle strength, He pushes into my fear of being alone, and His presence affirms that I am not alone and will never be alone. The Holy Spirit encourages me with promises of Scripture (the very words of God) given to all those who abide in the vine—to those who are loved by God. Ministry Leaders, may these truths encourage your hearts as well.

Today’s prayer is from a familiar hymn by Samuel Francis, reminding us of gospel truth.

*O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me!
Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love
Leading onward, leading homeward to Thy glorious rest above!¹²*

Devotional by: Chandra Oliver

¹² Samuel Trevor Francis, “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus!” in *The Trinity Hymnal* (Suwanee, GA: Great Commission Publications, 2002), 535.

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you” (John 16:7).

My husband Mike and I celebrate 42 years of marriage this year. We met in college, became best-buds, and our relationship blossomed into a beautiful love for one another. Being far apart several weeks at a time during summer breaks was quite painful and heart-wrenching. Even though I had his picture, wore his football jersey, and we talked on the phone for hours, I longed for his presence. Receiving his letters during our days apart was nice, but none of those things compared to having him right there with me. Mike’s presence made all the difference.

The twelve disciples had been with Jesus for approximately three years. This little band of saintly ruffians had spent quality time at beaches and hillsides listening to Him teach and preach, heal the sick, and cast out demons. They had witnessed Jesus win theological debates, perform miracles, and go against the tide of culture by welcoming women within His circle. But as much time as they had spent with their Savior, it was limited. Little did they realize it was imperative for Jesus to leave them and in doing so, the purpose of His coming would be accomplished. Their hopes and dreams of an earthly kingdom were dashed as Jesus explained to them He must go away. Leaving was an act of divine grace, but His absence was not for long. Only three days and Jesus would triumphantly conquer death.

We have the blessing of seeing the rest of the story—the reality of Pentecost. Jesus promised the disciples the Helper would come and they and all who follow Him would do greater works because of the power of His presence (John 14:12). We see this clearly in the book of Acts where Peter so boldly and audaciously preached to the very ones to whom he earlier had cowered. At Pentecost, Peter and the disciples experienced the presence of Christ in such a different way than when they had walked with Him physically just a few weeks prior. When Peter wrote his second letter, he said: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature . . .” (2 Peter 1:3-4). Each of the disciples was martyred for his faith, but God was with them to the end as Jesus had promised. They knew their Savior not only physically, but more importantly, they knew Him spiritually as they were filled with the promised Holy Spirit to carry on the mission to make God known.

Beloved, when you experience times of discouragement or weariness, remember that God’s presence dwells within you. Practice His presence. Remember His covenant promise: “I will be your God, you will be My people, I will dwell among you forever” (2 Cor. 6:16). His presence makes all the difference!

Heavenly Father, thank You for the glorious gift of Your presence in our lives. Help us to embrace this deep truth that we are Your temple and You dwell within us. Grant us power to live lives which reflect Your presence and power. Thank You that it is in You we live and move and have our being. In Jesus’s name, amen.

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

I am a strong introvert, and my husband is my opposite, which was a challenge for us while we were dating. I need time to process, just to be still and think, and he is energized through verbal processing. I would take some of my “me time” during our drives while he was talking, and that caused some real issues in our relationship. He thought he was communicating with me, and even though I was present, I was not listening. My actions showed I didn’t value what he had to say. I missed things he thought I needed to know, and I missed out on getting to know him better.

I’ve since learned much about listening to others. People feel valued when you take time to listen, when you are fully present and engaged. Listening well also blesses you as you get to know more about other people. I’ve learned the importance of quieting my heart and setting aside thinking about what I need to do or how I am going to respond and to instead be still and listen. I appreciate that Jesus and His Spirit model for us how to follow the Father and how to love others by taking time to listen.

This Spirit of truth continues the mission of Jesus, who always did what He heard from the Father (John 5:19; 12:49; 14:10). We see that the Spirit of truth indwells us as believers; He bears witness about Jesus; and in reminding us of Jesus’s words (He is the truth), He glorifies God (John 14:6, 17; 15:26; 16:13-14). This was a gift to the disciples. Even though Jesus was departing and going to the Father, they would have another member of the Trinity by their side who will tell them of the things to come. This Spirit, like Jesus, will not speak on His own but what He has heard. We see that God’s Spirit, like Jesus, is a great listener and communicator; He listens to the Father and will tell the disciples what He hears.

The Spirit of truth will guide them into all truth. I love this word *guide* which means, “a person who advises or shows the way to others.”¹³ I think of guides I have had in the past: tour guides, hiking guides, retreat spiritual guides. I had to choose to follow them, though sometimes I decided my own way was better than the guide’s (and that never went well for me). We have the ultimate Guide, God Himself, who will guide us into all the truth. He lovingly leads us in the truth—if we will but listen. The Spirit of truth speaks into our hearts what He hears from the Father and the Son and makes the Word of God alive to us; He helps it to make sense. He opens our eyes to see our sin and to understand the story of a God who would dare humble Himself to become a man and die in our place. And He helps us see how we fit into the story of redemption.

In this passage Jesus taught that the Spirit would tell the disciples of what was to come—after Jesus’s life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. They would soon understand and know more about Jesus after His death than they had while He was on earth with them! We have this same Spirit in our lives and hearts today, and He speaks to us through the Word of God. His words bring life as we listen. The question is: *Are you listening?*

Father in heaven, thank You for Your continual presence and for always pointing me to Jesus. Please quiet the voices and demands of today, so I may hear Your voice. You are the source of what is true, and thank You that nothing will happen today that surprises You. Grant me the strength to listen and follow as You lead and guide. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Devotional by: Jamie Voss

¹³ <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/guide?locale=en>.

"I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

As my kids rush to the school bus each morning, I call out, "I love you, and I am so proud of you! You are never alone; God is with you. Find someone who needs a friend." I say these things because I know that between the bus and the playground, the classroom and the lunchroom, my kids will face some sort of trouble before I see them again.

In these last words before His high priestly prayer, Jesus also reiterated what would be most important for the disciples to remember as they face what lay ahead.

Ministry friends, take heart: Jesus knows what you are facing. Jesus had just told the disciples that they would leave Him alone (John 16:32), but instead of ending there, He pointed them to peace found in Him.

Jesus identified two spheres of existence: in Him and in the world. In the world, faith will be tested. "Tribulation" derives from the Latin word used to describe the rigorous process in which wheat and chaff were separated. But also, in tribulation, faith is refined.

The word for "peace" here is *shalom*, the kind of wholeness and flourishing which can only be found in the grace of Christ. Jesus spoke these words in the shadow of the cross. Although shalom was disrupted during the Fall (Gen. 3), Jesus's life, death, and resurrection secured peace once again. Jesus has brought us near (Eph. 2) and blessed us beyond what we presently see (Eph. 1:3-14).

In the raw moments of trouble, words of peace can feel out of reach or even trite, and yet even if peace seems elusive, "take heart," Jesus says. The decisive battle has been waged and won. "For 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 John 5:4-5).

When God looks at us, He does not see us as those who "scattered" but as those who share victory with Christ. Because Christ is our representative head, sin has no hold on us, and even death cannot claim us forever; nothing can separate us from "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39). Jesus, the Overcomer, is greater.

As you face the next difficult circumstance, I pray that Jesus's words of peace will encourage your heart and that you keep His victory in view. "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 Cor. 4:17-18).

Father, thank You for Your great love for us, which welcomes us to You through Jesus, Your Son! We praise You and thank You that You knew the only way to restore peace with You was through the cross, and yet You secured a place for us in the face of our own sin and shortcomings. We pray the victory and peace that You offer in Christ would be the source of our joy. Strengthen our inner being so Your peace would prevail in our confusion. In our current sorrow, may we discover Your eternal joy. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

“I have manifested Your name to the people whom You gave Me out of the world. Yours they were, and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they know that everything that You have given Me is from You” (John 17:6-7).

Jackie, a freshman in college, struggles with loneliness and longs for friendship and a place of belonging. Tosha, a new mom juggling sleepless nights, bottles, and diapers, struggles to know her value as she adjusts to the demands of mothering. Kimberly, a single woman, has just attended another friend’s wedding and wonders if it will ever be her turn. Carrie, married for two decades, feels unseen after a disagreement with her spouse. Jessica was recently disappointed to learn that another candidate was offered the position she had hoped for.

“Who am I?” “What is my value?” “Where do I belong?” “Am I lovable?” These are questions we ask in one form or another throughout life, especially when times seem uncertain and out of our control.

Knowing the disciples faced turbulent times ahead, Jesus prayed for them. Love for the disciples saturates His prayer. He thanked God for giving them to Him as a love gift and offers them back to Him. By saying this prayer in their presence, Jesus expressed His deep love for them, reinforcing their value in belonging to the Father. We can only imagine how hearing Jesus pray intimately to the Father about them must have fortified their faith and reminded them that they were loved and cherished.

Belonging in God gave them lasting value, love, and purpose. Jesus manifested, or made evident, the truth of God to them. Their hearts illuminated to see and know God through Him. Having been given to Jesus out of the world, they now found true life and belonging in Him. Soon Jesus would give Himself entirely for them through His death on the cross. This prayer assured the disciples that God was their sure foundation through uncertain times; the One to whom they belonged would continue to lead and guide them. In this prayer, Jesus gave them a foothold on which to stand in the coming days.

In this prayer, Jesus also “reminds” God by calling on God to live out the truths of who He is. “Father, these men are Yours! Dear God, take care of them. They have heard Your word and obey. Be their faithful God!” As an advocate, Jesus recounted who God is and relied on God to prove Himself true to His people. The disciples were utterly dependent on God, and Jesus entrusted His beloved disciples to His care.

Dear Sister, Jesus also cherishes you as a love gift from the Father and stands as an advocate in this same way for you (Heb. 7:27). Your belonging, value, and purpose are of infinite worth in Him. What places of your life need this assurance today?

Beloved Jesus, thank You for showing the Father to me. Light up my heart to see afresh that I belong to You, am deeply cherished by You, and find life in You. Because I am secure in my belonging to You, help me to serve others wholeheartedly today.

“I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one” (John 17:14-15).

During the Protestant Reformation, theologian Martin Luther was considered a dangerous heretic by church leaders of the day when he discovered the truth in God’s Word that faith alone in Christ justifies a person. A verse in the hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” which is attributed to Luther, says, “And though this world with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.”¹⁴ As a spiritual battle raged around him, Luther’s faith in Christ and knowledge of the truth in God’s Word helped him at his trial in 1521 to boldly proclaim, “Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise” as he refused to recant his beliefs.

As Jesus prayed for His disciples, He knew what they were going to face as He left them and journeyed to the cross. Peter would be questioned—wasn’t he one of “them”? Didn’t he follow Jesus? As they heard Jesus pray for them, they knew they would face tribulation and persecution as He did. Jesus prayed the Father would protect them from being overcome by the spiritual battles they would soon face and the battles in the years ahead in their ministry in the early Church. And the Father answered Jesus’s prayer. Peter went from denying Christ to boldly proclaiming the gospel (Acts 2:14-41).

These verses in the middle of Jesus’s high priestly prayer remind us of whose we are. Believers are not citizens of this world or any earthly kingdom or country. We are only passing through this earthly existence on our journey to our real home country—living in the presence of God with the people of God for all eternity (Rev. 21).

Most of us will not be like Martin Luther and be put on trial to recant our faith in Christ or face death. However, forces in the world may pressure us to recant our biblical convictions so we can get a good grade on a paper or to compromise our faith at work in order to get a promotion, or even to face hostility from immediate family members who are not believers. As we stand firm for Christ and faithfully share the gospel with others, it will be evident to the world that we are not part of it. It is only a matter of time in our post-Christian culture when we will be asked, “Are you one of those narrow-minded Christians? Don’t you follow Jesus? Your views are bigoted and hateful.”

Jesus reminds us in the Upper Room Discourse that we can expect persecution. And as we face trials through persecution, we have the comfort of the Word of God. Jesus reminded the disciples in His prayer that He gave them His Word. We also have the same fountain of life in Scripture (Ps. 19: 7-11). We can answer with firmness as Martin Luther did. Yes, we follow Christ. We can have peace rather than fear since we take heart knowing He has overcome the world (John 16:33).

Father, Thank You for the gift of Scripture and for its life-giving words. We know Satan seeks to devour us (1 Peter 5:8-9) and that the spiritual battle we face is very real. Thank You for equipping us to resist Satan and stand firm in our faith by giving us Your armor (Eph. 6:10-18). Thank You that we have nothing to fear and that Jesus has already won this battle and conquered death and Satan. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Devotional by: Melanie Cogdill

¹⁴ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Lessons from the Upper Room: The Heart of the Savior* (Ligonier Ministries, 2021) 107.

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

Our family is captivated by *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien. Not only are these stories filled with adventure, loyalty, sacrifice, and courage, but they also beautifully illustrate timeless truths. In the first book, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, nine people are called from their homes to embark on a perilous journey to destroy the evil ring of power which threatens their entire land. The members of this fellowship are set apart and sent to protect their world from destruction. In some ways, we share a similar journey with fellow believers. We are set apart by God and commissioned to reflect His love to a broken world, knowing that gospel truth is the only path to salvation and restoration.

In John 17, Jesus prepared to finish His earthly ministry and poured out His heart in prayer for His disciples. While not of this world, they were being sent on mission into this world to continue the work that Jesus Himself began. Jesus knew that the darkness of the world can only be driven out by the light of His truth, reflected by His true disciples. He prayed the Father would sanctify, or “set apart,” His disciples through the ages in the truth. Jesus longed for us to grow in holiness and to have our hearts aligned with His heart. This sanctification can only happen by knowing the truth and differentiating it from the lies which bombard us. Ray Stedman says, “We must know the world and life in the way God sees it, the way it really is. We must know it so clearly and strongly that even while we’re listening to these alluring lies, we can brand them as lies and know they are wrong.”¹⁵ The Word of God is the source of truth that illuminates what is good, exposes what is evil, and shapes us into who we are meant to be.

The use of “Word” (*logos*) in verse 17 recalls John 1, reminding us that through this Word (Jesus), all things were made. It is not simply words on a paper, but the outpouring of the Father on a world He was moved to redeem. This Word, made incarnate, is ultimately what sanctifies us. The Word is now available to us through the Scriptures and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. The sanctifying truth which comes from this Word prepares us to transform a world living in darkness. For believers, His true Word is our reference point and the means by which the Father conforms us to the likeness of His dear Son Jesus.

How can we then be sanctified in the Word? We can start by following the example of Jesus and pray to the Father for His help. We can anchor ourselves to His truth and become so familiar with God’s Word that we immediately recognize truth from a lie. We can hide it in our hearts, teach it to our families, live it out within our neighborhoods, and joyfully proclaim it within our churches. Remember, Jesus advocates on our behalf to our Heavenly Father, asking for us to be set apart and equipped to participate in His mission.

Dear Jesus, thank You that You chose to pray for us and our holiness right before Your agonizing death on the cross. May Your Spirit work in our hearts through the power of Your Word to make us more like Christ. Open our hearts and minds to know, love, and live out Your truth in the body of Christ and in a world who does not yet know You. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Devotional by: Tatiana Anderson

¹⁵ Ray C. Stedman, *Secrets of the Spirit* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1975), 147-48.

“. . . that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me” (John 17:21).

A quick scroll through social media, and I’m immediately discouraged. The anger nearly radiates out from the screen. Disagreements abound. Readers are invited to join in and take sides; the more, the merrier. What makes it worse is that the insults hurled from one side against the other come not from unbelievers but from brothers and sisters in Christ.

Toward the end of Jesus’s prayer in John 17, He turned His attention from praying for the disciples to praying for believers who would come after them—that includes us today. Jesus desired the Church would be united as one. He first mentioned His own unity with the Father. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have existed for all eternity in complete and perfect union. Their relationship is one in which they honor, treasure, glorify, and love the other. God didn’t need to, but chose to, create mankind so we too could participate in this glorious union of love that our Triune God has always enjoyed.

As we well know, the Fall broke the union we shared with God. Jesus came to restore that union, to bring us back into right relationship with God. Through faith in His perfect life, sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection, we once again have access to God. Jesus has brought us near to God. Yet, even more than access, the Bible tells us we are united to Christ. Everything He has is ours. Everything He has done is ours. Yet, there’s more! We are also united to Christ vitally through the Spirit who now lives within us. We have access to the very Spirit of God. And we are bound up in that same fellowship our three-in-one God has. What a marvel!

Not only are we united to God, but we are also united to one another. All those who come to Christ by faith are united to one another as brothers and sisters in the family of God. Our union with one another is stronger than blood ties; we are woven together with strands even tighter than that of a common DNA; we are united by the blood of Christ and will be together for all eternity.

Jesus tells us in this verse that our union has an important purpose, a gospel purpose: so the world might believe in Christ. When we live out the truths of our union with one another, the world sees who Christ is and what He has done. Our unity shines a light, pointing the way to Jesus. Francis Schaeffer called this the final apologetic: “We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus’ claims are true, and that Christianity is true unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians.”¹⁶

This has important implications for not only our interactions on social media but in how we interact with one another in the church. What are we doing to fight against disunity? How are we living out our union? And, *what are we showing the world when they look at us?*

Father in heaven, I praise You for the marvelous wonder that we are united to the Trinity through Christ. I thank You for my union with my brothers and sisters in Christ. Help me to live out this union in how I interact with those in the church. May my words and actions point the world to who Christ is. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Devotional by: Christina Fox

¹⁶ Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 27.

“I in them and You in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You loved Me” (John 17:23).

In 2000-01, our church family saw the deaths of five people in their 30s and 40s. Most were sudden and unexpected. The one closest to our family was the father of two of our children’s closest friends. His wife was and is a good friend and co-laborer in women’s ministry. Our church family came alongside them immediately and continued to help them in many tangible ways over the next several years, sometimes imperfectly, but consistently. People from the law firm where the dad had worked commented on how amazed they were by how well the family was loved and cared for by the church.

Oneness is not a natural characteristic of human relationships. Oh sure, when there is a tragedy, many rally to lend support. But rather than making a longer-term relational commitment, we may often opt to give money to some third party who will distribute it to those in need. Oneness implies involvement and relational investment. It means seeing myself in you and valuing your needs as I would my own.

As was pointed out yesterday, in this section of John 17, verses 20-26, Jesus was praying for all believers who will believe because of the disciples’ ministry, and that includes each of us. These six short verses include Jesus’s final prayer for His people, even those yet to be born, as He was facing His passion at the cross. When the words “they” or “them” are used, it refers to all these believers. In this prayer, Jesus acknowledged that He sees Himself in the Father and the Father in Himself. This describes an intimacy they have always shared. Then He asked the Father to produce that same kind of intimacy within the community of believers which would develop from the disciples’ ministry.

He knew this oneness is unnatural. We do not naturally trust other sinners, especially when we are aware of the deceit in our own heart (Jer. 17:9). But it is more than just difficult; it is impossible for us to produce oneness on our own. This oneness cannot possibly be manufactured through human effort no matter how hard we try. It is only produced by the Father as we abide in the vine, and we only become aware of His working as our spiritual eyes are opened to see God’s hand at work.

In that sense, oneness can be a barometer of whether we are abiding in the vine. When it is lacking, it does not mean we need to add “focus on oneness” activity. It means we need to abide in the vine. We need to see Jesus more clearly and recognize Him in each believer. We need to pray to see the hand of God at work in their lives as well as in our own. We need to give them the grace that we give ourselves when we fail. Jesus asked the Father for our oneness so we can be confident the Father will answer His prayer because no one’s prayer is more in tune with the Father’s will.

By design, the oneness which God gives to the Church is so foreign to the rest of the world that it intrigues them. There is no explanation for it except that the one true God sent Jesus into the world, and those who truly believe in Him are radically changed.

Father, I praise You for the wonder of the unity You share with Christ and the Holy Spirit. You are not surprised when my weary heart is discouraged by the division I see in the world and even more so by the division I see in the Church today. Jesus foresaw it and prayed for us. Glorify Yourself as You answer His prayer. Do not let sin blind me from seeing Jesus in my brothers and sisters in the church. Give me eyes to see Your hand at work, producing oneness which only You can produce in the Body of Christ.

“Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, may be with Me where I am, to see My glory that You have given Me because You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).

When my kids were away at college, they had moments of homesickness. Immediately after a phone call, I would quickly fill a box with some of the tastes and comforts of home and ship it to them. Chocolate chip cookies and Trader Joe’s peanut butter cups are yummy but will not appease the ache and longing for home. We were created to be at home with the Lord. So, homesickness springs from a painful longing in our hearts brought on by the Fall. We know this world is not as it was created to be.

The Fall is the tragic intrusion of sin and death into everything and everyone. Living and leading in this radical in-betweenness is challenging. Promises might be broken. Relational conflict brings division. Unmet expectations cause disappointment. Weariness results from an exhausting self-reliance. All these leadership challenges can leave us overwhelmed and in desperate need of Fatherly prayer. Jesus gathered His beloved disciples as He prepared to go home and promised them He will love them to the end (John 13:1). Over the past 30 days, we have marinated in Christ’s last words to live by as we walk each other home. Jesus addressed both the disciples’ and our troubled hearts, encouraging us to believe in Him (John 14:1). His words remind us, when we are lost and aimless as we journey towards Heaven, that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). When we are tempted to become self-sufficient and serve in our own strength apart from abiding in Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). He admonishes us when we are tempted to quit not to lose heart or be surprised that the world hates us (John 15:18). There is hope because we are not alone on this eternal trek. He has given us the Helper (John 16:7). But before they left the upper room, Jesus left the disciples with what we need most. He prayed that He would be gloried and that His chosen and beloved children would receive eternal life (John 17:3). What is eternal life? Believing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom God sent (John 17:3). Ultimately, He longs for us to reflect the oneness of the Godhead in our relationships with Him and others so the world will see the Gospel is true (John 17:21). No matter what trials may come until we get home, Jesus’s prayer will be answered. He is the Master Intercessor. His prayer is rooted in His Word and His sovereign desires.

You may have heard it said, “Seeing is believing.” The Upper Room Discourse reminds us that believing these last words to live by each day leads to seeing. And it is no mere passing sight. Jesus still prays we will see His glory! Right now, we lean into the struggle of leadership and look up. We groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23). Right now, in the trenches of life and leadership, our vision is dim. His prayer will be answered because it was formed in the Godhead before the foundation of the world. And while you may grow discouraged that you have far to go in your spiritual maturity, remember He will complete His work in you until you look like Him and radiate His glory. A day is coming—and it is coming soon—when we will finally be home. His prayer will be answered. Clarity is coming. He will love us to the very end. We will see Him as He is, and we will be like Him (1 John 3:2).

Dear Father, when we grow weary and worn, remind us to look up and see that You are grand and glorious. Heal our homesick hearts and give us grace and faith to walk faithfully until we see You face to face.