



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

Gospel of John
Part 7

Deacon Jerome Yorkshire, Sr., Sunday School Superintendent
Deacon Eric Dolce, Director of Discipleship
Reverend Patrick J. Walker, Senior Pastor

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Lesson 25: Discipleship Training Part 1—The Glory of Service

Primary Verses: “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.” (John 13:3-5 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 13:1-20

Supporting Texts: Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Philippians 2:1-11

It seems that virtually everyone agrees on the value and virtue of service until the task of serving falls upon them. Indeed, being served has a most welcomed ring to it while serving others often carries connotations of inferiority, demeaning work, or worse. Many of the pleasures and pains associated with servanthood are historically linked with societal rank, the public pecking order, and one's “station in life”. These aspects of life in the world east of Eden sours the spiritual sweetness divinely intended in service to others.

The impact of negative associations with service can harm both the server and the ones served. For example, soup kitchens and food drives, though they are popular expressions of care and concern, are targeted to help those described as being “the less fortunate” or “those who can't do for self”. In some cases, the poor are herded and humbled in spaces and before faces that treat them according to their circumstance and not according to their value as image-bearers of God. Though they are being served, at times they are made to feel anything but served. Then, of course, there are some who feel that to be in a position of serving others is beneath them. They despise the appearance of weakness and are overly eager to maintain the apparent glory of having others serve them.

But the Christian way is not based on earthly aberrations and misunderstandings of humility scarred by sin. Instead, the way of the Christian is the way of Christ, Who once said, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45)”. This week's lesson gives us an inkling of Jesus' source of freedom to serve and the benefit He was happy to grant others in making Himself a servant. By wrapping a towel around His own waist, Jesus eliminates any hint of shame in service.

Questions to Consider: Is the act of serving, in and of itself, pleasing to God? Why or why not? What difference does it make if a person serves 10 hours in a Christian ministry to the poor as opposed to 10 hours volunteering for through a reputable service organization? Is there any difference? If so, what is that distinction? If there is no difference, why is one Christian and the other isn't? Do you find worldly images of serving/service hindering your desire to imitate Christ's example of service? If so, how do you overcome the temptation to avoid service? According to this passage, why did Jesus wash His disciples feet (there may be more than one reason)? Is there a connection between Christ's freedom to serve and yours? If so, what is it and how does it apply?

Challenging the Class: There are some traditions that celebrate Jesus' service to others, but only to a point. By quoting the passage from Mark partially, some stop short of Christ's ultimate act of service: giving His life for the lost via the cross! As we enter the holiday season, be prayerful about ways that your service can be cross-shaped and point to the unique way in which Christ served with perfect humility and love.

Lesson 26: Discipleship Training Part 2—The Glory of Love

Primary Verses: “Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:33-35 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 13:21-38

Supporting Texts: 2nd Samuel 15-17, Matt. 5:43-48, Acts 20:17-38

Our vision is so limited we can hardly imagine a love that does not show itself in protection from suffering. The love of God is of a different nature altogether. It does not hate tragedy. It never denies reality. It stands in the very teeth of suffering.” — **Elisabeth Elliot**

As the story goes, John Montagu, the Fourth Earl of a particular town on the southwest coast of England, was enjoying a gambling game so much that he decided he could not halt for dinner. Instead, he made a request for a practical, hand-held meal of beef between two slices of bread. That town he was from, somehow became associated with the food Mr. Montagu ate. The name of the town was Sandwich. Despite the debate around the history of sandwiches, there is one truth about them that is almost universally accepted: it's the meat in the middle that defines the sandwich, not the bread itself. John's gospel serves us a sandwich in today's teaching text. Can you see it?

The two slices of bread are not identical, but similar: verses 21-30 is the first slice and verses 36-38 contain the second slice. The falsehood of Judas, a man whose heart had long since abandoned the Savior's mission, is identified in the first slice. Perfectly conscious of his greed and hypocrisy, Jesus offered him an easy way out to do the dirty deed, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” Despite the miracles and ministry tasks he completed, Judas' betrayal was no secret to Christ who knew it long ago (John 6:70-71). The second slice of bread falsehood that is hiding under the surface of foolish, flesh-based confidence. Peter's intentions may be true, but his words betray a form of self-assured strength that will fail when tested by Satan. But Jesus does not offer a new commandment that He does not demonstrate with integrity.

The meat in the middle is love. The love of Jesus is stronger than intentional betrayal. It is better than the betrayal that comes from sinful human weakness. It is a love that outweighs all wrongs and endures all attacks. It is patient in the face of frustration, big-hearted despite small-mindedness, and embraces the cold-hearted. The love of Christ is braver than the fury of sin and that is the love Jesus calls and equips His own to demonstrate in a world starving for compassion.

Questions to Consider: How normal is betrayal in the life of the believer? None of the Twelve suspected Judas—what does that teach us about betrayal? How does Peter's confidence inform your expressions of boldness for Christ? How is God glorified in the love of Christ expressed in this passage?

Challenging the Class: If you have not yet humbled yourself to serve and wash the feet of one who has intentionally betrayed you without speaking ill of them, have you loved as Christ loved? If you have not forgiven a close friend who abandoned you at your weakest moment, have you loved as Christ loved? But the new commandment is not merely love, it's love **as Jesus loved** (John 13:34).

Lesson 27: Discipleship Training Part 3—The Glory of Trusting Jesus

Primary Verses: “Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does His works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me or else believe on account of the works themselves.’” (John 14:8-11 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 14:1-14

Supporting Texts: Isaiah 35, John 1:4-17, 10:9, 11:25, Acts 4:1-12

Ever since Eden, God has been graciously seeking to gather His people again, like a hen gathers her chicks. It is we, however, who have proven unwilling. Expulsion and exile is what we have earned collectively, but it has been the heart of God to receive all who are repentant, back into His arms, His presence, and yes, His place. It was His place because it was He Who planted it (Genesis 2:8).

Recall that in Eden, God Himself walked among His people, at that time, Adam and Eve, in the Garden. Though we have no idea how long they dwelled in Eden together with God, it was long enough for Adam and Eve to recognize “the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8). Some time later, God called Abraham out of Ur to a land that He would give to Abraham’s descendants. After some time in Egypt, the Lord delivered His people into that land, His land, and when the defilement of sin and plague of idolatry which had infected the Canaanites, had gone viral amongst His own, He caused the land to vomit His people out (Leviticus 18:25-28).

Even when Ezra and Nehemiah led Judah back to the land and re-established worship, nothing was quite the same. The temple was not up to the standard of the one built in Solomon’s time (Ezra 3:12-13, Haggai 2:3) and Israel was soon to be overrun by the Greek Empire. No sooner was the land liberated from the successors of Alexander the Great, it was next being ransacked by Rome. The nation never had another truly Davidic king and there were still probably more descendants of Abraham outside of the promised land than there were in it. It is in this context, that we find Jesus making a most stunning claim: I am going away from you, to prepare a place for you, in My Father’s house.

Questions to Consider: Christians often express a desire to have been alive and present during Jesus’ earthly ministry. How do the interactions between Jesus and Thomas and then Jesus and Philip challenge the notion that greater faith or understanding could be had if we were eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life and work while on earth? How does Jesus handle the questions and requests posed by both disciples? In the teaching passage alone, how many different times has Jesus made a claim affirming His deity? List and explain each one. Why does the phrase, “in my name” appear twice? Is a prayer request authentically “in Jesus’ name” merely because we said, “in Jesus’ name” at the end of it? Based strictly on what Jesus says in these fourteen verses, how can we know if a prayer request has been made “in Jesus’ name?”

Challenging the Class: It is true that “no one comes to the Father” except through Jesus (the Way). However, we should never forget that John 14:6 was not originally promoting the exclusivity of Christ as much as it was the totality and sufficiency of faith in Jesus as THE way to God. In Him, we have it all!

Lesson 28: Discipleship Training Part 4—The Glory of The Holy Spirit's Ministry

Primary Verses: “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 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 14:16-19 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 14:15-31

Supporting Texts: Psalm 25 (esp. 25:8-17), John 8:48-59, Romans 8:1-11

So far, in our examination of John 13 and 14, we have not yet spelled out the most obvious and ominous fact: Jesus is speaking to His disciples on the eve of His death. Commonly known as “the Upper Room Discourse,” the Teacher is keen to the heaviness and in the hearts of His students. He has already announced his departure on numerous occasions (13:33, 13:36, 14:3) and knows that the initial manner and means of His leaving will not be easy for the Apostles to handle. Including the teaching text, he has already repeated Himself with the phrase, “Let not your hearts be troubled” (14:1, 14:27).

He corrects His disciples to help them see that sadness is the wrong response to His departure (14:28). And yet, Jesus is a master teacher. He is very aware of how heightened emotion can enhance a learning experience. The discourse will continue for another three chapters, but at this point we must pay attention to how many reassurances Jesus has already given. John Chrysostom, a prolific preacher/pastor from Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) who served the early church in the late 300's offers the following statement as a great bridge between chapters 14, 15, and beyond:

“Do you perceive in how many ways He showed His love? By disclosing secrets; by taking the initiative in seeking eagerly for their friendship; by bestowing great benefits upon them; by enduring the sufferings which he then experienced for their sake. And after this He indicated that he would remain always with those who were going to produce fruit. For they would need to enjoy His assistance and, thus fortified, would bear fruit.”

And what better benefit could Christ have provided for His disciples than another like Himself?

Questions to Consider: How many ways does Jesus describe the Holy Spirit? How is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus' followers differ from the Holy Spirit's relationship with the world? Why is it different? What are the benefits of the Holy Spirit's ministry to the Christian according to this passage? If Jesus is going away, in what sense is He also saying that He will be “in” His followers (14:20)? What is the connection between John 14:12 and John 14:28?

Challenging the Class: The desire to see Jesus is a good one, but only in focusing on His second coming. To wish for or to romanticize Jesus' earthly ministry is a sign of immaturity or worse (John 14:28). Living now, in the age of the Holy Spirit, unites us with all the benefits of being in Christ while enabling us for ministry in ways that were beyond the scope of the Apostles before the Holy Spirit came (John 2:22, 7:39, 12:16).

Our Teacher the Holy Spirit

John 14:25–26

JOHN 14:25–26

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

Knowing that hearing of His betrayal and His imminent return to the Father would trouble the disciples, Jesus spent the night of the Last Supper reassuring them that He was not leaving them alone. He would be sending “another Helper” to strengthen them and empower them to do works greater than His. Moreover, by this same Helper, the “Spirit of truth” or Holy Spirit, Father and Son would also come to dwell within them ([John 14:1–24](#)).

Despite the comfort that these words undoubtedly offered the disciples at the time, we may certainly infer that they would have difficulty remembering and understanding them as the ordeal of the crucifixion began. Even Peter would deny Christ (18:15–27). It would take a supernatural work for the disciples to recall and comprehend Jesus’ teaching.

Jesus promised such a supernatural work, as we read in today’s passage. The Father would send the Spirit in the Son’s name to teach the disciples all things and bring to their remembrance all He had said to them ([John 14:25–26](#)). This is a vital text for our doctrines of the reliability and inspiration of Scripture. We trust the Apostles’ records of the life and teaching of our Savior because God worked supernaturally by the Spirit to have them recall what Jesus said and did. Moreover, we can trust the Apostolic reflection and application of these teachings in Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation because the Spirit was at work unfolding the teachings of Christ (see also [2 Tim. 3:16–17](#)). It is the work of the Spirit to teach the disciples and, through them, the church. It is not to introduce any new, post-Apostolic revelation. It is to enable the church to understand what Jesus has already taught, which is recorded for us in the New Testament. John Calvin comments that “the spirit that introduces any doctrine or invention apart from the Gospel is a deceiving spirit, and not the Spirit of Christ.”

Note also that the work of the Spirit in bringing to remembrance all that Jesus taught—and helping the disciples understand it—is a Trinitarian work. Jesus, the Son of God, taught His disciples. But He did not give them any other words than the words of the Father ([John 14:24](#)). What the Spirit inspires is taught by the entire Godhead. Divine revelation comes from the Father, who speaks through the Son, whose words are brought to mind in the Apostles by the Holy Spirit. Every word of the Scriptures is a word from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and so can be fully trusted.

Coram Deo

Sacred Scripture does not consist of merely human writings. Instead, the Scripture is inspired by our triune God and deserves our full attention and submission. When we are reading Scripture, we are reading not merely a humanly written book but also a divinely written book. Let us treat Scripture as such and seek, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to conform to its teaching.

For Further Study

1 SAMUEL 23:2
HEBREWS 10:15–17

The Glorification of the Son of Man

[John 13:31–33](#)

[JOHN 13:31–33](#)

“When he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, “Where I am going you cannot come.” ’ ”

One who was present at the Last Supper might think that the impending betrayal and death of the Savior would be only a time of great loss. After all, Jesus was “troubled in his spirit” as He predicted Judas’ betrayal ([John 13:21](#)). Furthermore, few things are more awful to witness than one man betraying his friend, as Judas did when he went out from the feast to sell our Lord into the hands of the religious authorities (vv. 27–30).

Certainly, we do not want to minimize the sheer awfulness and horrific nature of Jesus’ betrayal and crucifixion. Yet, given what we read in today’s passage, we must also note that the death of our Lord was both the greatest travesty in human history and one of the greatest moments of glory ever seen. After Judas’ departure from the Upper Room, Jesus said to His disciples, “Now is the Son of Man glorified” (v. 31). This is a reference to the atoning death of Christ, which was imminent. John’s gospel tells us in several ways that the death of Jesus was a moment of supreme glory for our Savior. When Jesus asks for the Father to glorify Him at the right hour, that right hour is the hour of His death (17:1). When Jesus spoke of His being lifted up to draw worshipers to Himself, He was speaking of being lifted up on the cross of Calvary (3:14; 12:27).

But why was the crucifixion a moment of glory for the Son of God? Because Christ’s death reveals the glorious character of our Creator. We see at Calvary the manifestation of God’s justice as Christ bears the curse that sinners deserve for their transgressions ([Gal. 3:10–14](#)). On the cross, we witness the almighty power of God. Our greatest enemy, death, could not finally hold Christ captive. He rose again, conquering death ([Acts 2:24](#); [Rom. 6:3–5](#)). Calvary shows us the supreme wisdom of God in using what the world sees as despised and foolish as the means of its defeat ([1 Cor. 1:18–31](#)). The

crucifixion reveals the great love of God, for it is God Himself, in the person of Jesus, who bears the curse we deserve so that we can be reconciled to Him ([Acts 20:28](#)).

Yet, the crucifixion was a moment of glory not only for the Son but also for the Father. Because the Father and Son were fully united in providing atonement for our sins, the glory that accrues to the Son also accrues to the Father, and the glory that accrues to the Father also accrues to the Son. In the death of Jesus, our triune God is glorified.

Coram Deo

Without the cross, there is no Christianity. In the atoning death of Jesus is revealed the glory of our triune God, and if we do not preach the cross, then we are failing to glorify our Creator. When we share the gospel with others, we must emphasize the atonement, for in the atonement we see the character of God in His mercy and justice fully revealed.

For Further Study

[ISAIAH 4:2](#)

[JOHN 14:13](#)

[ACTS 3:11–26](#)

[ROMANS 8:12–17](#)