

Wisdom: The Way, Truth, and Life

Bible Background • Proverbs 3:17; 8:32-36; John 14:1-14

Printed Text • John 14:1-14 | Devotional Reading • Proverbs 3:13-18

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLORE the encounter between Jesus the disciples in the upper room, APPRECIATE the difficulty the disciples had in understanding Jesus, and CELEBRATE the promise of Jesus to prepare a place for His followers and hear and respond to their prayers.

In Focus

Lester stood before his crew at the loading dock, preparing to give them their final instructions before the trucks were loaded and they all set out for their long-haul run across the country. Foremost, of course, was the safety check of the vehicles. They also had to check the bill of lading and ensure that each tractor-trailer was loaded with the correct goods.

Lester had succeeded the legendary Big Dave as team leader because he was more experienced than the other drivers. Because of that, the company owner asked Lester to go on another run to make a pickup that required a fast turnaround. Lester told his crew they would have to go ahead without him and he would join the caravan in a day or so.

“How are we supposed to manage without you?” Herb asked. “We haven’t been that way before. At least if we had Big Dave, we would feel better.”

“You get there the same way you navigated every other trip. You haven’t forgotten how to read a map, have you?” Lester said.

“Guys,” Lester said, “have you not been paying attention? I taught you everything I know, and I learned from the best, Big Dave. I didn’t hold anything back. So, really, you learned from Big Dave, too. I believe you can do this,” Lester said. “You should have the confidence you can do this, too.”

How do we cultivate the faith that God will see us through the things outside of our experience?

Keep in Mind

“Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me” (John 14:6, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Way (v. 6) *hodos* (Gk.) — A traveler’s way or to a way of thinking, feeling, and deciding

B. Truth (v. 6) *aletheia* (Gk.) — Not falsehood, whether pertaining to God or earthly matters; personal excellence

C. Life (v. 6) *zoe* (Gk.) — State of living, every living soul, and the absolute fullness of life.

Say It Correctly

Gnostics. NOSS-tix.

Chalcedon. KAL-ceh-don.

Bethsaida. beth-SAY-duh.

Didymus. DIH-dih-mus.

KJV

John 14:1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

4 And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

5 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

7 If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

8 Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?

10 Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.

11 Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.

12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

NLT

John 14:1 "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me.

2 There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?

3 When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.

4 And you know the way to where I am going."

5 "No, we don't know, Lord," Thomas said. "We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

6 Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

7 If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!"

8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

9 Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you?

10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me.

11 Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do.

12 I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.

13 You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. 14 Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!"

The People, Places, and Times

Philip. He was one of the Twelve Disciples whom Jesus called directly. Philip, along with Peter and Andrew, was from Bethsaida of Galilee (John 1:44).

Thomas. Also called Didymus, or “the twin,” Thomas was one of Jesus’ twelve disciples. He is the one who said that he would not believe that Jesus was resurrected from the dead unless he could touch the nail prints in Jesus’ hands and the wound from the spear in His side.

Background

During His ministry, Jesus repeatedly prepared the disciples for His approaching suffering and death. Jesus tells the disciples that one of them would betray Him (John 13:21). At the same time, He also informs the disciples that He will soon be leaving them and that they could not follow Him (v. 33). Undoubtedly, these things disturbed the disciples. When Peter asks Jesus where He was going, Jesus responds that Peter cannot follow Him now but will follow Him afterward. It is not difficult to see why the disciples would have been troubled. They were coming to grips with the fact that the One they had given up everything to follow was now telling them that He was about to leave them to go to a place where they could not follow. It must have seemed as if they were losing the very reason for which they had existed for the past three years

At-A-Glance

1. Jesus, the Way to Comfort (John 14:1–4)
2. Jesus, the Way to the Father (vv. 5–11)
3. Jesus, the Way to Powerful Living (vv. 12–14)

In Depth

1. Jesus, the Way to Comfort (John 14:1–4)

Jesus had told His disciples of His approaching suffering and departure (John 13). Now, He aims to calm the turmoil raging in their hearts. Jesus encourages them by telling them not to let their hearts be troubled. Jesus’ news apparently threw the disciples’ minds into disarray and sends them into a spiritual tailspin, but Jesus provides the key that will lead them out of their mental anguish. He points to Himself as the basis for sustaining peace in the midst of the storm of difficult circumstances by telling them if they believe in God to believe in Him as well. Even though He will no longer be present with the disciples physically, He assures them that where He is going, He is preparing a place for them. This is a wisdom that would leave us deeply conflicted if it were not for the one speaking it. It is wisdom that requires faith to apply. Jesus challenges us continually to see that the best wisdom is not a matter of analysis or principle, but flows directly from God. This provides great comfort, not only for the disciples but also for us. Jesus was reinforcing that His words were trustworthy; we can place our faith in His words because He is faithful to keep them.

How do you find comfort in difficult situations?

2. Jesus, the Way to the Father (vv. 5–11)

Thomas is looking for Jesus to give a location where they can meet Him. As Jewish men, they were taught the presence of God was at the Temple in Jerusalem. Philip is looking for a private meeting with God, so He can know God. They had heard the prophets had such marvelous encounters. Jesus rejects both requests. He instead makes a radical statement about how to know God. Jesus does not point His followers to a path but to a person,

namely, Himself: “I am the way.” Jesus is not claiming to have uncovered some hidden truth the disciples can understand to know God. He is not telling His disciples to practice profound principles to reach God. He is not even telling them they can encounter God at a certain physical location. He is claiming something much stronger than that. We cannot work our way to God at all. Instead, God has come to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus declares anyone who has seen Him has seen the Father (v. 9). If they could not believe it from His words, they could certainly know it by looking at what Jesus had done. Jesus reveals the character and personality of God to us (cf. John 1:18). We are to place faith in Christ as the way to the Father because it is only through Him that we can know the Father as He truly is.

How have you tried to make following Jesus harder than the simple way He showed us?

3. Jesus, the Way to Powerful Living (vv. 12–14)

Christ then notifies His disciples that placing their faith in Him will cause them to lead lives that exhibit the power of God (vv. 12–14). We will do greater works than those Christ did in His earthly ministry because He is with the Father. It is important to note that Jesus says that the works testified of His relationship with the Father. These were not gratuitous or pointless displays of power, but a demonstration of His authenticity as the Son of God. Furthermore, Jesus lets us know that it is the Father who is at work through Him. This reveals the unity of Jesus and the Father.

Placing all our trust in Jesus produces two results. First, faith in Christ yields fruitful lives that both demonstrate our relationship with Him and glorify the Father (John 15:8). Christ comes to give us “abundant life,” promising to do anything we ask in His name, to the glory of the Father. Of course, this is not a blank check given to us with which we can expect to receive all of our wildest desires. When we ask for things in Jesus’ name, we are to ask for things that are consistent with His character and purpose. Putting all our trust in Christ guarantees that we will experience powerfilled lives because He aims to glorify His Father’s name. Second, placing faith in Christ gives us the power we need to live out the Christian life. Before ascending into heaven, Jesus delivers a parting promise to His disciples: the Holy Spirit will come to them. The only way we can live powerful lives that reflect Christ’s presence is by the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. The Holy Spirit gives us power, desire, and knowledge to live the Christian life, and the Spirit is only accessible through faith in Christ.

What is the biggest request you’ve ever asked for in Jesus’ name? How has He responded?

Search the Scriptures

1. How does Jesus challenge the way we typically think about religions as ways to get to God?
2. How is the wisdom that Jesus shares in John 14 different from other types of wisdom?

Discuss the Meaning

1. “Familiarity breeds contempt.” Mark 6:1–6 is a perfect illustration of this quotation. In a Gospel written for Gentile Christians, who did not have the perfect Jewish lineage or prior knowledge of Judaism, why might this account be included? What would be an advantage of their lack of familiarity about who the Messiah is (or should be)?
2. How does this passage serve as a warning to those who are followers of Christ, especially those who have followed Him for a number of years?

Liberating Lesson

We live in a society where many consider it arrogant to claim that there is only one way to the truth. Accordingly, a popular view is that all religions are the same. This is not the view expressed in Christian Scripture. Anyone who studies religion beyond the surface knows that the truth claims or theologies are different across religious traditions. It is a great irony that it is in Western secular societies that used to be most Christian that claims of sameness are most often made. These claims can disregard the ways diverse peoples around the world articulate their own faith traditions. It is a different sort of arrogance to dismiss the distinct faiths of millions of people in order to impose on them convenient uniformity and false tolerance. To water all religions down to being “all the same” is to not take them seriously for what they profess. That does not mean

different faiths do not have similarities; they do. Many faiths agree on some aspects of ethics or prescribed actions. Many of them have similar values and behaviors: for instance, the desire to pursue peace, the condemnation of violence, the importance of care for others, and the value of all life. Yet the truth claims remain distinct. Jesus declares there is only one way to God, through Him, Jesus. As Christians we must embrace the claim of Jesus, recognizing that we are claiming something different than other religions.

In a world where people try to suppress religious differences, we would be wise to advocate for freedom to choose our faith. Christians should be advocates for true tolerance and religious freedom.

Application for Activation

We cannot get to God, but God has come to us. Our God loved us enough to come to us in the flesh. As Christians, we can boldly claim that our way, our truth, our life is not a principle, place, or pursuit but a person, Jesus Christ. Jesus invites us to seek Him for wisdom and guidance. For us, His way is always the best way. Take time this week to pray, read Scripture, and seek God for His wisdom concerning your day or more important decisions. He is faithful to give wisdom if we posture our hearts to obey His directions.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

John 14:1–14

1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

Here, Jesus tells the disciples not to be troubled in their hearts. Jesus emphasizes this truth by pointing to faith in Him as the relief or antidote for worry or anxiety. In Greek, the word “troubled” is *tarasso* (tah-RAH-so), which means “agitated, disquieted, or stirred up.” In the context of this passage, Jesus ushers in faith as a comfort to relieve the anxious disciples, much like a welcome medicine for a nagging illness or parental reassurance about a child’s nightmare. In this scenario, the disciples’ concern was well-founded, since they had just learned that one would betray Jesus, that one would deny Him, and that they couldn’t go with Him wherever it was He was going (John 13). Jesus’ own spirit was “troubled” when He announced that one would betray Him (13:21). It is remarkable that Jesus ministered to them with compassion in spite of the fact that His much more serious anguish was now only hours away. Peter must have been the most visibly shocked to learn he would deny Jesus, since Jesus immediately responded to his concern with His declaration that Peter would be disloyal (John 13:38). Jesus immediately follows this with His words of comfort. When our hearts are troubled, when things look their worst, our best response is faith or belief in our Lord; nothing less will open the door to His peace and comfort (Psalm 42:5). Nothing is more important than guarding our hearts (Proverbs 4:23; 1 Corinthians 16:13–14; 2 Peter 3:17), but at the same time, we as believers have good reason to take courage, unlike those without hope in God.

2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

The hope of eternity with Him was given as a source of comfort, not only for the disciples but also for countless believers through the ages, confronting all the multiple anxieties they as individuals and the church as a whole would face. Jesus' intent was to minister comfort in the face of potentially overwhelming distress; His response (begun in v. 1) was thorough and multifaceted. Added to faith in God and Himself was the reminder of the disciples' (and our) final reward. Our reward will not be to live in luxury, either here or in the afterlife. The word translated "mansion" is simply "dwelling place" in Greek (mone, moe-NAY). Jesus reassures them that He would not deceive them by promising them something that was so grand but wasn't the truth. Along with having our name written in the book of life (Isaiah 62:2; Revelation 2:17; 3:12; 21:27), everything becomes new in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), including our coming new home in God's kingdom.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

This isn't an impersonal second coming to which Jesus refers; He won't be sending a butler, an angel, or anyone else to escort us to our heavenly home. He will come Himself and receive us personally (1 Thessalonians 4:17). In John 14:3, the phrase "I will come" is a common, single word in Greek (erchomai, ER-khoe-my) and refers to individuals arriving or returning, appearing or making an appearance. The emphasis is on "again," just as being born is common but being born "again" is noteworthy (John 3:3). Heaven would be sufficient joy if we just got to be with Him. Wherever He is should be where we want to be; wherever He is not should be the place to avoid at all costs. Nonetheless, it is to His Father's house that we will be going, the home of the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Creator of the universe— being ushered by Christ at His Second Coming to God's eternal home will be glorious beyond words (Luke 22:30; Revelation 21).

4 And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

Jesus is trying to tell or remind His disciples that they already know in their hearts where He is going and how to get there. This would be one of the things of which the coming Comforter would continue to remind them after Jesus' departure, and about which He would continue to teach them (cf. John 14:26).

5 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

With childlike innocence, Thomas asks about what Jesus just told them that they already knew. Perhaps Thomas' response is an illustration of our own level of spiritual awareness, in reality knowing more than we think we do and being less in the dark than we believe we are at times. The disciples had received a full load of bad news, and perhaps, had they had more time to digest Jesus' discourse, they might have been less reactive. In any case, Jesus doesn't entrust the matter to their faulty memories and previous knowledge but continues to explain in order to be certain they do in fact know what they need to know.

6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

It is easy to put the emphasis on this verses' key words "way" (Gk. hodos, hoe-DOS), "truth" (Gk. aletheia, ah-LAY-thay-ah), and "life" (Gk. zoe, dzo-AY). Yet this statement was in response to Thomas' question—what is the way to where He is going? The emphasis is on the words "I am" at the beginning of the sentence. Either one of these words could have been understood and left out by Greek grammar rules, but Jesus emphatically uses both the personal pronoun (ego, eh-GO, "I") and a simple present form of the verb "to be" (eimi, ay-ME, "am"). These words are further emphasized by their placement at the beginning of the sentence. Jesus would not have failed to get His disciples' attention with this allusion to the divine name, with so much grammatical emphasis.

In Greek, the word "way" is hodos and refers to a traveler's way or to a way of thinking, feeling, and deciding. John clearly establishes that the Word is God (1:1), the Word became flesh (1:14), and the Word is truth

(17:17). “Thy word is true from the beginning” (Psalm 119:160). Jesus completes the circle by stating that He is the truth and is one with God (John 10:30); Paul echoes the same sentiment in his letters. It is the truth that sets us free (John 8:32) and that leads us to salvation (Ephesians 1:13). Even His critics know that, as truth, Jesus would never deceive anyone (Luke 20:21). As the embodiment of truth, Jesus stands in perfect contrast to the devil, in whom there is no truth (John 8:44).

In Greek, the word “truth” is *aletheia* and is used in a variety of contexts, including references to personal excellence and to truth pertaining to God. Again, it is a common word that is used in these ways over 100 times in the New Testament—until Jesus says He is the truth. No one can ever accuse Jesus of having made mediocre claims. Just in John’s Gospel alone, preceding His ultimate statement in 14:6, Jesus similarly stated that He was the Bread of Life (6:35); that He came to give life, and life more abundantly (10:10); that He gives eternal life to His sheep (10:28); and that He is the Resurrection and the Life (11:25).

In the Greek, the word “life” in this context is *zoe*, the meaning of which includes the state of living, every living soul, and the absolute fullness of life. Like the words “way” and “truth,” “life” is a common word used well over 100 times in the New Testament—until Jesus says He is the life. The latter part of 14:6 is what is known as an “exceptive statement,” meaning “all and only.” All may come to the Father through Jesus, and only those coming through Jesus may come to the Father. No matter how politically incorrect His statements may seem, Jesus was, is, and always will be the true and only way to God the Father.

7 If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

Jesus’ words are a not-so-subtle rebuke of the disciples for their lack of awareness of just who had been with them for so long. Regardless of the disciples’ shortsightedness, Jesus patiently continues to explain that in seeing and knowing Him, they have already seen and known the Father. Almost before they can realize they have been rebuked for their lack of awareness, Jesus immediately extends comfort in His reassurance that, at least from this point forward, they no longer need to be unaware of the Father. As Jesus stated (John 10:30), He and the Father are one. Jesus is God and reveals God to us. The disciples had a common awakening experience, which came soon enough and was similar in essence for all of them. God does this by sending the Holy Spirit after Jesus ascended to heaven.

8 Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. 9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? 10 Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.

Philip wanted a sign. One cannot help but empathize with Philip, since he sounds like so many today who, no matter how much they know or are told, insist on saying, “If I could just see God once, that would settle it for me. If just once I could witness a real miracle, then I’d become a believer. Why can’t God just show His face for one split second?” Just like Philip, modern skeptics ignore what is right in front of them. In Philip’s case, it was the living Jesus, God in the flesh, worker of miracles, forgiver of sins, standing before him and talking to him. Yet he didn’t understand what he was hearing. In this light, Jesus’ response (v. 9) is both understandable and appropriate. Jesus’ exasperation is showing as He peppers Philip with a series of questions, quoting his own question back to him. Jesus stresses His unity with the Father once again. When we read these passages consecutively, we see the patient Teacher gently guiding His future apostles, who soon will faithfully carry out His Great Commission to the four corners of the world— that is, once they get it straight who He is.

11 Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake.

Although Jesus’ conversation is in response to questions from Thomas and Philip, all the disciples are present and Jesus is addressing all of them in His typical teaching fashion. What was stated as a question in verse 10 is

now affirmed indicatively. There should be no more disbelief: Jesus is in fact in the Father and the Father in Him. The full implications of this, however, are hard to grasp. It is no wonder that the early church continued to struggle with the essence of Jesus' words. One can hardly imagine how He could have communicated His deity any more clearly than He did. At first, it was hard for even the disciples to grasp that Jesus was a deity; then, after He ascended, whether or not He had really been human became the prime issue of the Gnostics (thus the emphasis on Jesus' human birth and physical crucifixion in the Apostles' Creed). There were many struggles about Jesus' divinity and humanity through the fifth century when the Council of Chalcedon finally set the boundaries for orthodox doctrine about the union of divine and human natures in Christ. Today, there are still people who have no problem with Jesus' humanity but struggle greatly with His divinity. Likewise, some accept His divinity but diminish His humanity (cf. 1 John 4:2).

12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

At this point, Jesus moves on to a different subject, one of many He would address on that auspicious night. The "greater works" to which Jesus refers (v. 12) would not be possible if He stayed with them, but were only possible because He was leaving them. Jesus' words are not only about the fantastic advances in ministry that they were going to accomplish when the Holy Spirit came. He also offered them another facet of His multi-layered message of comfort and courage regarding His impending death and subsequent departure. His message was entirely about comfort, assurances, and taking heart for the great things that awaited them. These eleven men—the original pillars of the faith and the architects of the New Testament church—needed at that moment to hear some words of encouragement, reassurance, and hope from their departing Master.

13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Jesus would deny these particular men nothing. He left in their charge the greatest task ever given to any human, and He knew what they would need in order to accomplish the work He had given them. Many people have heard some preacher at some time try to interpret this as some kind of mysterious combination or formula by implying or claiming that all you have to do is say all the right words and include all the potential caveats and specific disclaimers, and God is almost obliged to accommodate you. Unfortunately, many in the church have a gross misconception of what it means to abide in Christ, which impairs their understanding of how things work in God's kingdom. When we abide in Christ, His power flows through us to accomplish His purposes in the world. The Holy Spirit is the agent, sent by the resurrected Christ, and we are the vehicles through which He flows. It is not our confession or religious invocation that garners the forces of heaven to do our bidding. It is only when our hearts are surrendered, when we are living in and for God, when our will is attuned to His, and when our prayers are for His purposes, in His name, and for His glory that He will answer, even beyond all we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

It is here that we find some of the most poignant parting words known to humankind. Jesus, the Savior, is preparing for His death, burial, and resurrection. He is equipping His disciples with the most important things they will need to know as they carry out His work without His physical presence. The reiteration of John 14:13 must be heard in the context of the whole passage. This kind of repetitive reassurance is the type one gives a loved one who needs comfort. We tend to say things more than once when we want someone to believe us, especially if there is an impending separation. Yes, when our hearts become one heart like that of the disciples (v. 1), when our faith is sure and steady, when our will is surrendered to Christ, and when our purpose is completely for God's glory, most certainly we, too, can believe like the disciples that our prayers will be answered.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Wisdom, Source of Abundant Life
(Proverbs 3:13–18)

TUESDAY

Jesus Does What the Father Does
(John 5:19–24)

WEDNESDAY

Love as I Loved You
(John 13:31–35)

THURSDAY

Spirit of Truth Dwells in You
(John 14:15–17)

FRIDAY

Love Binds Believers to God
(John 14:18–24)

SATURDAY

Spirit of Wisdom Promised to All
(John 14:25–31)

SUNDAY

Jesus, the Way to the Father
(John 14:1–14)