

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

I AM the Way, and the Truth, and the Life—John 14:1-14

If you've been a Christian for any length, you're probably familiar with this verse, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me.*" (John 14:6) It's a favorite verse for evangelicals to pull out of context and allow to stand alone. (We tend to do that with a lot of verses, actually.) But to fully appreciate what Jesus was saying, we really need to understand the larger/fuller context.

This statement is part of a much larger discourse...the largest discourse in the Gospel of John, spanning from John 13 to John 17, and one of the longest discourses we have in all the Gospels.

It occurred in what we know as the Last Supper. John gives a view into this evening that the other Gospel writers do not. We see Jesus washing the disciple's feet—which, personally, outside of the crucifixion itself, to me is the most significant action statement Jesus ever made. We see Jesus predict Judas' betrayal as well as Peter's denials. Within this Passover observation, according to the other Gospels, Jesus had thrown a curveball at the disciples by instituting what we now recognize as the Lord's Supper...telling them that the days of the Old Covenant were coming to a close and the days of the New Covenant beginning was imminent. (Please remember, as we've noted earlier in this series, that John's particular angle throughout his Gospel was to highlight/emphasize the deity of Christ.)

Throughout the various Gospel accounts, a consistent theme arises of Jesus highlighting, through word and deed, that the hallmarks of the Jewish faith were all really signposts and foreshadows pointing toward Him. This stands true in the present passage as well. Whereas modern readers (especially evangelicals) tend to read this passage with heaven and the second-coming in mind, a more precise reading shows that Jesus was continuing the theme of demonstrating how He was fulfilling the Jewish faith.

When Jesus referred to "My Father's house" and when He talked about "preparing a place for you", He was alluding to the Temple, which was the Jewish symbol of God's abiding Presence. Jesus was putting an end to the role of the Temple, but not to God's Presence with them. In fact, He was broadening, opening wider access, to God's Presence through Himself. Also, when He mentioned, "I will come back" He was referring to coming back from the dead, not returning at the second coming. (That is not to deny the second coming...but rather simply to say that is not what's being referred to here.)

And that brings us to the "I AM..." statement: "*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.*" To any Jewish person, "way", "truth" and "life" would be euphemisms or metaphors for the Law/Torah. And their understanding was that access to God was through obeying the Torah. So whereas we (modern day evangelicals) like to use this verse to demonstrate Jesus' superiority over any other rival claims to knowing God (which is certainly true enough); the context demonstrates that His first concern was helping them

understand that union/connection/relationship with God was now through Him, not through the Law...and that this had always been the divine intention.

So BIG picture: God's plan all along was to create beings (humans) whom He could share life with. As we know, we screwed that up pretty royally. But God never forsook His plan. His desire has always been/still is to dwell with us and for us to enjoy dwelling with Him. In fact, this is "salvation", this is "eternal life" ...union with God...the "with God" life. He wants this so badly that He became one of us...JESUS! Jesus is God's proof of His desire and love, and God's means of bringing it to fruition. We can KNOW God. We can LIVE WITH God! What is God like? God is like Jesus. God has always been like Jesus.

Throughout the Gospel of John, and within this particular discourse, we see the important and strategic use of the word KNOW. To KNOW Jesus is to KNOW God. That's because Jesus is God. To claim to KNOW GOD but not KNOW Jesus is a fallacy. Also, to KNOW God is to obey Him. This has always been the case. The only "change" if you will, is that in the past God revealed/communicated His will through the Law, but now He has revealed/communicated His will in and through Jesus (and, of course, the Holy Spirit...who enlightens and enlivens our ability to grasp all this.

Notice how the writer of Hebrews opens that letter/sermon:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. (Hebrews 1:1-3a)

All of this, of course, had the minds of the disciples swimming in confusion. This was heavy; this was revolutionary; this was earth-shattering. This was either completely crazy, or the most wonderful thing ever. So we can forgive them if they were a little slow on the uptake. They, like us, had/have many preconceived ideas, many engrained ways of understanding things, and have been conditioned to see things a certain way. For anyone, then or now, accepting Jesus (His words, His claims, His teachings, His Lordship, etc.) takes an extreme paradigm shift. And it's not a "one and done" sort of shift; it's learning to live in a new reality. It's a disorienting and reorienting process. We live in Jesus-centered universe, whether we like it or not. We can either "get with the program", i.e. function in reality; or live in an illusion/delusion.

One of the aspects of this new life/reality that we have to come to grips with is learning to live in harmony with the Holy Spirit. The rest of this discourse in John sheds more light on the Holy Spirit than anywhere else in Scripture. Much of what we know of the Holy Spirit is thanks to John recording Jesus' words on the subject. I would strongly encourage reading the rest of this discourse.

As was mentioned in the sermon, the last few verses of the present text (14:12-14) can be confusing/disorienting. (And that's OK.) Jesus mentioned that His followers (then and now, we presume) "*will do what I have been doing...even greater things than these...*". It's hard to

imagine doing “greater” things than Jesus did, isn’t it? The safe (perhaps tame) way of understanding this is to simply say that His followers would have a wider scope of ministry...taking it global; whereas Jesus’ earthly ministry was geographically limited. That’s the “easy” way to interpret these words. But when we read the book of Acts, we see the ministry of Jesus continue, in power, through the apostles and early church. Today, many of us, sit here scratching our heads wondering why we don’t see and experience similar signs and wonders. We read/hear about them in other places. Are we missing something? Perhaps. Personally, when I encounter head scratching moments/questions, I try to lean more heavily into Jesus, trusting He’ll make me aware of what I need to know. And I try to beware of coming up with theological/doctrinal stances that are limited to my own narrow range of experience. Living with Jesus, as I understand it (and what seems to be the experience of the disciples) is being open to new possibilities; allowing Him to stretch our current frame of reference.

- Q. What is your mental and emotional response to John 14:6 when viewed as a stand-alone statement? (Really analyze your thoughts and feelings, and share that.)**
- Q. Use your imagination and try to come up with a scenario that could rival what the experience must have been like for the disciples to try and absorb what Jesus was saying. What kind of scenario for us would be as earth-shattering, mind-blowing, paradigm shifting?**
- Q. As you consider your experience of the Christian faith, would you describe it more as seasoning your life with a particular flavor or as living an alternative reality? Explain. (Or perhaps describe it in a different way altogether.)**
- Q. Do you know Jesus? Or do you know about Jesus? Describe the difference. Describe your relationship with Jesus.**
- Q. Relationships naturally take nurture and cultivation. How are you nurturing/cultivating your relationship with Jesus?**
- Q. What is the difference between having Jesus as part of your/our life, and having Jesus at the center of your/our lives?**
- Q. Allow your mind and heart to reflect on the idea that the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of the Universe knows you and wants you to know Him. What do you/we do with that?**
- Q. The church, rightly understood, is the people who know Jesus. Our gift to the world isn’t a higher moral/ethic that would make the world a better place if adopted, but rather the invitation to know God and the embodiment of knowing God. What do you think would change (both in our experience and in our reception by others) if we operated consistently with that conception?**

- Q. What aspects of the Christian faith/experience leave you scratching your head? How do you handle or deal with that?**
- Q. Do you, or how do you, enjoy God's presence? Do you, or how do you, recognize His voice and His hand in your life?**
- Q. To know Jesus is to obey Jesus. How do you feel about that? In what ways are you challenged to obey Him? (Or, what do you find particularly difficult to obey?) Why do you think that is?**
- Q. How would/do you/we respond to the popular idea that there are many ways to God?**
- Q. How has following Jesus been a disorienting and reorienting experience for you? What is the church's role in the process of disorientation and reorientation?**