

MONDAY, 4/8

Read John 14:15.

This week we will be exploring Jesus' words to His disciples as seen in a portion of John 14-15. What Jesus tells them here helps us flesh out what He meant when He told Peter to feed His sheep. Obedience is at the core of John 14-15 and helps frame what Jesus says in the verses preceding it.

In John 14:10-14, Jesus is addressing His mission. Jesus' mission was to bring glory to His Father. He accomplished that in His death on the cross and resurrection; in fact, He is still about the work of bringing glory to His Father. That is what He is doing this precise moment as He sits at His Father's side. This is important because when we join Jesus in His mission to bring glory to the Father, Jesus will work in us. We can ask for the things that will bring glory to God, and Jesus will act.

Jesus follows up this promise with the call to obedience. I realize obedience tends to elicit some degree of resistance. Obedience implies listening to and yielding to an authority. Let's just say that there are things we consider more exciting to do than that.

Jesus isn't advocating for obedience for the sake of obedience, although it would be appropriate for Him to do that as Lord. He could play that card, but He doesn't; instead, Jesus asks for the obedience that is motivated by love. There is a big difference between the two.

Obedience for the sake of obedience is motivated by obligation. Obligation is a poor motivator. At some point, your enthusiasm will wane and you'll slide into disobedience. You'll go back to doing what you really wanted to do in the first place.

Love, on the other hand, is a great motivator. When we are motivated by love, obedience becomes an expression of the love we have. Because we love Jesus, we want to do what He says. We trust Him and believe that He indeed will lead us to the best life.

This is what Jesus wants from us. It's why He says, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Love will compel us to listen to Jesus and act on what He says because we see an opportunity to serve Him. We want to serve Him because we know how He has served us. Obedience shouldn't be forced, but rather flow naturally out of your love for Jesus.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, I love You. I know You first loved me and gave Yourself for me and for the world. I want my obedience to be grounded in response to the love You have shown me. Help love to be the motivation to my saying 'yes' to You. Amen."

TUESDAY, 4/9

Read John 14:18-21.

Jesus moves from obedience to announcing the coming of another Companion like Himself in the Holy Spirit. This Companion or Counselor will be with those who belong to God's family. Paul will expound on this idea of belonging to God's family in Romans 8. He says that when we believe and put our hope in Jesus, we are then adopted into God's family as sons and daughters. We can now cry out to God as Father. He hears us and responds to us.

Jesus speaks to the same kind of intimacy here using different language. Jesus speaks to our new life with God in terms of a covenant relationship with Him.

Jesus models a covenant relationship with God in that the Son and the Father act together as one. They share the same heart and values. They love the other more than they love themselves. John's gospel is intentional about pulling back the curtain of heaven so that we can see what it means to be in that kind of covenant relationship with God through the relationship shared within the Trinity.

Jesus is one with His Father, and He invites us into that same oneness. Jesus is saying that we can enjoy that kind of relationship with God. It's as if the Father and Son open their arms to welcome us into the huddle. In that intimate space, we are invited to share the fullness of their joy and love. In the context of that relationship, we reciprocate the love we are given by being obedient to God. We have nothing to give God but ourselves, and obedience is how this giving over of ourselves is expressed.

Now the beautiful thing about that is that obedience is not only the sign of love, but it also leads to greater revelation. Within that covenant relationship of oneness with God, we will discover more of Him. This follows the idea of Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesians 3 when he prays that we may have the power to grasp "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

This is the life of covenant relationship that Jesus envisions for us. It is a life where our understanding of His love expands with each day. It is within this love that we grow in our love for God, which is expressed through our service to Him.

Praying Together:

"Lord, Your love is infinite. Take me deeper in my knowledge of Your love so that I may grow in love. I want to live out of Your fullness rather than my own strength. May this life come from the life I share with You. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 4/10

Read John 14:23.

Jesus is asked the question, "Lord, why are You about to reveal Yourself to us and not to the world?" It feels like Judas (not Iscariot) was worried about Jesus' being exclusive to the disciples. Perhaps he understood Jesus to say that He was coming back only to them rather than the world. Jesus seeks to clear up this misunderstanding. He isn't talking about the Second Coming here, but rather the covenant relationship that He shares with His followers.

The short answer to Judas' question is that God loves everyone, but there is a special love for the children who enter into relationship with Him who reciprocate that love. There is an intimacy that can take place there because both hearts are aligned, which is necessary for there to be a relationship. It's not that God doesn't love those who have yet to enter into relationship with Him; it's just that He can't share the kind of relationship He wants with them because their hearts are far from Him.

I can't help but think of a family I once counseled who had two children—one who was rebellious, and the other who was still close to their parents. The parents were able to enjoy the obedient child. They could share a relationship without being pushed away. It wasn't that they loved the rebellious child any less; after all, the parents were in my office because they wanted to reach out to their lost child! It's just that they couldn't be close.

Jesus' teachings in Luke 15 highlight His desire to reach those who are lost. In that chapter, Jesus tells three stories about the joy the owner feels when he finds something of value that was lost. The first is a shepherd who finds a lost sheep. The next story is a woman who finds a lost coin. The final story is a lovesick father whose son comes back home. This is God's heart for everyone.

The reality is God wants to be close to you. In fact, God wants to take up residence in you. That's how close He wants to be with you. It is possible for us to be that close to God, but in order to do so, we must make room to be in relationship to Him. We make room for Him by having an obedient heart. By having an obedient spirit, we welcome God into our lives to take up residence within us without reservation and without boundaries.

Praying Together:

"God, what joy it brings us to know that You want to take up residence in us. You long to be one with us. We pray that we might know the fullness of the life You want with us. We also pray for those who are far from You. Help us to show and speak of the joy of knowing You so that others may find the life that is truly life in You. Amen."

THURSDAY, 4/11

Read John 14:24.

Here Jesus re-emphasizes the primary message on obedience to reinforce what He said before. The bottom line is: if you love Jesus, you will listen to Him. If you don't love Him, you won't listen to Him.

This brings to mind the passage from Matthew 7 when Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter heaven." That verse often stirs up some fear as we consider whether or not Jesus is talking about us, but Jesus offers more clarity. He says the ones who will enjoy heaven are those "who do the will of My Father." What Jesus is pointing to is the important role obedience plays in our faith.

We know what it is like to be both obedient and disobedient. We have all been through childhood, where at least at some point, obedience to your parents was natural. You did what they asked because you loved them and didn't think about doing anything else. Then we hit the teenage years, which, for many of us, was a different story. We didn't want to do what our parents wanted. In fact, sometimes we would do the very thing they told us not to do just to spite them.

We chuckle at that now because those days have passed for many of us, but have you ever stopped to analyze that kind of attitude? If we stop to think about it, we can see how such combativeness is unloving. While we can chalk some of this up to our development into our own person, we have to admit we weren't very good sons or daughters in those moments.

The faith to which God calls us isn't about simply affirming belief in Him. Again, you can believe in God and not allow yourself to be changed by Him. Our belief in Him must move us to trust Him. This is a critical move toward faith because trust frees us to obey Him. Since we trust God, we can place our lives into His hands without reservation because we know that He will lead us to the fullness of life. This is when we begin to walk in obedience as we allow God to guide us. This is how Jesus defines faith because it leads to tangible action. In other words, faith produces fruit. If we love Jesus, then we will give ourselves into His hands so that we can produce fruit for Him. Our obedience is an expression of our love for Him.

Praying together:

“Father, You gave Your Son the words to share with us to open our eyes to what it means to walk with You. We love You and trust You. We receive Your words for the blessing that they are. Impress them upon our hearts that we may listen and do what You ask because we love You. Amen.”

FRIDAY, 4/12

Read John 15:9-10.

One of the gems that comes out of John's gospel is the insight we receive into Jesus' relationship with His Father. In John, Jesus speaks about His relationship with His Father often so that we can understand what it means for us to be in relationship to God.

Here is what it looks like. As God's Son, Jesus loved His Father, and the way He expressed that love was through obedience to Him. The Father loved the Son and entrusted His power and kingdom to Jesus as an expression of His love. The Father shared everything with His Son because He could trust Him.

The amazing thing about this is that He wants to do the same with you. He wants to share His power and Kingdom work with you. The question is this: can the Father trust you? Can He trust that you will listen when He speaks? You see, the Father could entrust everything to Jesus because He knew His Son loved Him and would never betray Him. The Father knew Jesus would be obedient to the vision He had laid out. The Father wants to invite us into His work and supply us with everything we need. Our response is to offer our obedience to Him.

This is the way Jesus lived in relationship to the Father. He loved His Father and demonstrated His love through obedience to Him. The Father loved His Son and shared everything with Him in order to express His love. This tells us something amazing about obedience. Obedience is the byproduct of our identity as God's children. It is living into who we are now in light of what Jesus has done on our behalf. In Christ, we have received a new identity, and obedience empowers us to live into that identity. Through our obedience to God, He enables us to live into who were created to be.

This is certainly true when we look at Peter's story. After Jesus restores Peter, there is this new desire to obey and honor Jesus. He follows Jesus' instructions to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Spirit. When the Spirit comes at Pentecost, Peter proclaims the crucified and risen Jesus. As a result, 3,000 people believe. Peter shares the Good News of Jesus and builds up the church. In fact, at the end of his life, as a result of his love for Jesus, Peter embraces the cross he tried to avoid years ago when he denied knowing Jesus.

Praying Together:

“Jesus, You have loved us in the same way that Your Father loved You. Thank You for showing us the vast depths of the Father's love! Help me to remain in Your love. Help me grow and thrive in Your loving care. Amen.”

SATURDAY, 4/13

Read John 15:11-12.

Would you like to share in Jesus' joy? What if I told you that you could. You can experience the same joy that Jesus has. How can you live in His joy? By obeying the Father as He does.

Here Jesus speaks to the joy that flows out of obedience. When we are living into our identity as God's children by being obedient to our Heavenly Father, we can expect to have joy. We can experience joy because there is nothing between us and God. There is no sin or disobedience that stands as an obstacle between us. We are free to enjoy each other.

As Annie and I rear our two kids, I can't help but think of how this relates to our relationship with them. Our relationship is at its best when the girls recognize our love for them and listen to us because they love us. It's not about our having control over them. It's about their trust in us. When we are functioning in this way together, there is so much joy in our relationship. There isn't tension or heightened emotions. There is no need for harsh discipline or tough talks. We are free to enjoy one another.

Jesus says that our joy is complete when we live in that kind of covenant relationship with God. When the love that we have for each other is expressed through His sharing with us and our obedience to Him, we can experience boundless joy. We can have the joy of Jesus.

Verse 13 reminds us of the command to which we are called to be obedient. Jesus said again, "Love one another as I have loved you." When we walk in obedience to Jesus by loving others in this way, then He shares with us His joy.

If you want Jesus' joy today, then prayerfully ask Him to open your eyes to an opportunity to love someone as He would.

Praying Together:

"Lord, there are opportunities before me this day and every day to love others as You have loved us. You experienced such joy when You served others. I want to share in Your joy by serving others as You have. Amen."

SUNDAY, 4/14

Read John 15:13-17.

We are never more like Jesus than when we love sacrificially. This is what it means to live into our new identity in Him. We are a new creation in Him, created to love to the limit.

Here's what I love about this passage. When we love like Jesus by proving our identity is in Him, we are no longer identified as servants but as friends. This is a significant identity shift. As Jesus explains, a servant isn't in a place to know his master's business. He is not in a place of privilege. He is afforded only the knowledge he needs to accomplish his assigned task. A friend, on the other hand, has complete access to intimate information because he or she sits in a position of privilege. A friendship relationship is marked by trust and intimacy. As a result, a friend is invited to come closer than any other. A close friend may be entrusted with information no one else knows.

This is what Jesus points to here. He tells the disciples that He revealed to them the things His Father told Him. He made known things no one else had the privilege of hearing. This is one of the benefits of being in covenant relationship with God. When we possess an obedient spirit, the Father shares everything He has with us. We are privy to intimate knowledge of God that may be unknown to those who don't share that kind of relationship.

There is a greater degree of intimacy when we share the work of the Kingdom. I remember eating lunch with two soldiers who fought in battle together. Their shared experience united

them together in a way I could not touch. Their shared experience bound them to each other. That same intimacy is available to us when we share His Kingdom work.

It is out of this covenant relationship that we bear fruit. We don't bear real Kingdom fruit by working hard out of our own strength. We bear fruit for the Kingdom when we stay close to Jesus and do what He says. This is how He lives and works in us.

From this place of intimacy with Jesus, we can ask Him to supply the demands of service and expect Him to come through. Jesus, our covenant partner, is eager to work on our behalf in order to bring glory to His Father.

Praying together:

"Holy Spirit, teach us how to love. Remind us that You have made us friends, not just servants. Servants are forced to do what they don't want to do. Friends are invited to share in life together. You want to share Your life with us, to share Your work with us. We say yes to You and look forward to all You will do in and through us. Amen."