

WEEK FIVE

DAY ONE

“He does not call us to do what he did, but to be as he was, permeated with love. Then the doing of what he did and said becomes the natural expression of who we are in him.”

- Dallas Willard

It is often far easier to serve others than to be served. There is something about offering our time or money to a cause that allows us to feel good about ourselves and connected to God’s work in the world. On the other hand, being served can be very uncomfortable. It is perhaps one of the most vulnerable human experiences to admit our need and ask another person to meet it.

In our reading today, we see Jesus serving his disciples in a very personal and affectionate way. The task of washing feet in an undeveloped, sandal-wearing, desert culture was typically reserved for a servant, not a well-respected Rabbi. In an absolutely shocking gesture, Jesus picked up a towel, taking on the role of a humble servant.

In this interaction with his disciples, Jesus provides a powerful picture of what he had come to the earth to do. In the same way, this is the process we all must go through to come into a relationship with Jesus. We admit our weaknesses and our needs and we allow him to see the full extent of the darkest parts of who we are. Just like that day centuries ago, Jesus takes on the role of a servant, humbly cleaning the stains of our sin and brokenness.

Jesus lived a life that was free of that nagging, persistent drive for significance so many of us feel. He looks for every opportunity he can to step out of the spotlight and serve others. Jesus provides us with a paradoxical picture of leadership unlike the world has ever known—that the path to greatness is through humble service. It is only when we allow ourselves to experience the love of the God who serves us that we have the capacity to truly serve others.

READ

John 13

REFLECT

1: Is it harder for you to serve others or to let them serve you? Why is that?

2: How do you typically respond when you have a need? Are you more likely to keep it yourself or ask for help?

3: What reactions do you have to Jesus in today's reading? How do his actions of humble service impact you today?

RESPOND

This week, we have seen how Jesus consistently chooses the way of humble, sacrificial service. The spiritual practice of humility can help us align ourselves with the character and heart of Jesus.

In the next week, choose at least one of these practices and incorporate them into your life. Keep it a secret between you and God:

- Look for an opportunity to intentionally let go of the need to manage your image or engage in self-promotion. When tempted to take credit for your ideas, remain silent.
- Do something anonymously to serve someone else
- As you interact with family and friends this week, intentionally avoid the spotlight by making them the center of your attention. Listen well, ask questions and be engaged in the lives of others.

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PRAY

Spend some time today placing yourself in this story. Imagine yourself sitting before Jesus and having him wash your feet. Think about the things in your life you're still trying to hide or feel ashamed about, and visualize them being washed away. Then, spend a few moments in prayer acknowledging and thanking God for his work in your life.

“God is enough. That is the root of peace. When we start seeking something besides him, we lose it.” - Brennan Manning

John 14-17 contain the final words, instructions, encouragement and prayers of Jesus before his arrest and execution. Anticipating the fear and obstacles his disciples were soon to face after his death, he shares deeply comforting words about his peace.

The peace Jesus offers runs in direct contrast to the standard ways of achieving contentment in this world. Jesus lived with a deep knowledge that he was fully known and fully loved by God, allowing him to completely focus all of his attention upon fulfilling his purpose in this world. Even more, the peace of Jesus was rooted in his deep connection with the human experience. Unlike the disciples, we have the privilege of knowing the end of the story. On the cross, we know that Jesus has gone before us into every storm we could ever face and we can trust him.

Jesus also explains that he gives in a way distinctly different from the world. It is no secret that we live in a world that primarily gives to get. Giving is often accompanied by praise and recognition, and only after our own needs have been sufficiently taken care of. Generosity has become a benchmark against which we measure and compare ourselves against one another.

Jesus gave without the desire for admiration or acclaim, never seeking to utilize his generosity toward us as a means to satisfy his own needs for meaning and significance. Jesus gave when it cost him everything. Today, Jesus continues to give his love without condition, without demanding that we earn it and with the promise of lasting, eternal significance.

When our hearts truly grasp the peace of Jesus, received through the quiet and unassuming method of Jesus, we are freed to live in this world in such a way that our lives are driven and directed by his love. While we will continue to face challenges, struggles and suffering in this world, his peace will allow our hearts to stand in the midst of trouble and not be shaken.

READ

John 14

REFLECT

1: What are some things that are stress/anxiety provoking in this season of your life?

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2: What three assurances of his love does Jesus give his disciples?

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3: How can believing in and trusting Jesus give us peace in the midst of the struggles we face in our lives?

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RESPOND

In order to further reflect and respond to the reading today, commit the following verse to memory:

*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”
(John 14:27)*

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PRAY

Looking back to your responses for Reflection Question 1, spend some time in prayer today that you would experience the peace of Jesus in the midst of the things in your life that are troubling you.

WEEK FIVE

DAY THREE

"To love someone is to desire and work toward their becoming the best version of themselves. The one person in all the universe who can do this perfectly for you is God." - John Ortberg

We all experience a gap between the ideal picture of the person we would like to be and the person we really are. We're all fighting a personal battle against mistakes we find ourselves constantly repeating, character flaws we can't shake and unwise decisions we keep making.

In our reading today, Jesus describes our relationship with God in terms of beautiful imagery—branches, vines and fruit. Our focus today will be to dig into one tiny aspect of this passage. In the beginning of John 15, Jesus describes that God engages in the task of "pruning" with his followers in order to help us experience the full extent of life with him.

It is absolutely true that God, in his grace, loves us fully and accepts us fully, just as we are. And yet, in his great love for us, he will stop at nothing less than shaping us into the person he has created us to be. Like a loving parent who disciplines their children, true love refuses to allow us to stay the same by giving us everything we want. Being pruned by God can be a painful process, but has a redemptive purpose.

As we are shaped by God into the people he has ultimately created us to be, Jesus encourages us to maintain a constant connection with him. His intention is that we would be as dependent upon him as a branch is to a vine for its survival. It is here that the Holy Spirit—the presence of God that lives within everyone who follows Jesus—provides us with the power, resources and strength to do things that we could never do on our own.

Through this inner working of God's presence in our lives, we have the capacity to really become the people we have always wanted to be as we become individual displays of God's love in action.

READ

John 15

REFLECT

1: How do you remain in or stay connected to Jesus—practically speaking, on a typical day?

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2: When have you experienced a time in your life that felt like God was “pruning” you and removing things in your life that were creating a barrier between you and what God wanted to do in your life?

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3: What “fruit” do you see God developing in your life?

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RESPOND

It was traditional during the time of Jesus as well as through the early years of the Christian church to pray at set intervals during the day—a practice called fixed-hour prayer. Taking intentional time to stop what we’re doing to pray is a great way to stay connected to Jesus throughout the day.

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PRAY

For the remainder of this week, set a reminder on your phone or computer to stop and pray three times during your day—in the morning, afternoon and at the end of the day.

Some Suggestions:

- Read a psalm and shift the words into your own prayer
- Pray over the events in your day. Ask for God’s presence to be with you in work meetings, as you interact with your kids or to direct the projects you’re working on
- In the evening, reflect on your day. Thank God for the moments you were able to experience his presence, confess moments you did not honor him and ask that he would give you peaceful rest to prepare for the coming day