

July 26 Lesson 8 (NIV)

WISDOM TO FOLLOW

DEVOTIONAL READING: Proverbs 3:13-18

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 3:17; 8:32-36; John 14:1-14

JOHN 14:1-14

¹“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ²My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going.”

⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

⁶Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

⁹Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹²Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

KEY VERSE

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” —John 14:6

MANY FACES OF WISDOM

Unit 2: Wisdom in the Gospels

LESSONS 5–8

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- I. The Way Introduced (JOHN 14:1–4)
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Dual Preparations
- II. The Way Revealed (JOHN 14:5–7)
 - A. Thomas’s Question (v. 5)
 - B. “I Am” the Answer (vv. 6, 7)
Like Father, Like Son
- III. The Way Explained (JOHN 14:8–14)
 - A. Philip’s Desire (v. 8)
 - B. God’s Oneness (vv. 9, 10)
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- A. To Know God, Know Jesus
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Gethsemane Geth-*sem*-uh-nee (G as in *get*).

Nazareth Naz-uh-reth.

Introduction

A. What Does God Look Like?

“What does God look like?” This is a classic question—asked by children and adults, believers and skeptics alike. It is a theme of celebrated novels and popular movies.

Deep inside we often think God looks like us—perhaps due to our reading Genesis 1:26 a certain way—but older and wiser. On the other hand, when we realize that “God is spirit” (John 4:24), it means he is invisible (1 Timothy 1:17; Colossians 1:15). He may allow created beings to see manifestations of himself at times (Exodus 24:9–11; Revelation 22:3, 4; etc.), but we cannot see his true essence (1 Timothy 6:16). To ask the question “What does God look like?” is therefore not legitimate.

Since that question shouldn’t be asked, what about the question “Would you like to see God?” You might answer no because nobody can see God’s face and live (Exodus 33:20). Or you might

answer yes because when Christ returns, “we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Jesus’ interaction with one of his disciples helps us sort through this yes-and-no desire.

B. Lesson Context

Of the four New Testament’s four Gospels, John’s is the most distinctive. All four agree that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah. When telling the gospel story, Matthew, Mark, and Luke narrate many of the same episodes, usually with very similar words. John’s Gospel shares much less material with the other three and offers many teachings that are not found elsewhere. He tells of extended conversations between Jesus and his opponents, as well as between Jesus and his followers. These provide perspective on Jesus’ identity and mission as the divine Son of God who became human.

John connects these conversations to Jesus’ miracles, which John calls “signs” (John 4:48; 20:30; etc.) to emphasize that they point to Jesus’ identity and mission. Like the other Gospels, John arranges his material to focus on Jesus’ death and resurrection, in which we see Jesus’ mission come to its amazing fulfillment.

Our lesson text comes near the beginning of the chapters in John’s Gospel that focus on Jesus’ words and actions on the night before his crucifixion (John 13–18). Much of this material is Jesus’ private teaching to his followers.

Hanging over the discourse is the shadow of Jesus’ looming crucifixion (John 13:1). By what seems to be Satan’s defeat of Jesus (13:21–27; 19:16–30), is actually Jesus’ defeat of Satan. Though Jesus would no longer be present as he had been, his followers would not be alone, for Jesus promised to send God’s Holy Spirit (14:16, 17, 26). By the Spirit’s power, they would continue the work that God had begun in Jesus (16:7–14).

This section of John begins as Jesus washed his disciples’ feet. This was to show them, in part, that in his death he, their Lord, would be serving them (John 13:1–17). As Jesus brought his teaching to a close, he prayed for his followers, asking the Father especially that they be unified as he and the Father are unified (17:6–26). As Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was willingly surrendering to a death that would free his disciples from the guilt of sin (18:2–9).

I. The Way Introduced

(JOHN 14:1–4)

A. Believe (v. 1)

1. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.

When the disciples see events unfold that lead to Jesus’ death, their natural reaction will be to lose heart (compare John 14:27). Jesus anticipates this reaction with a call to belief. He connects belief in God with belief in himself.

In the original language, the verb translated believe, used twice, can be understood in at least two ways. One way sees Jesus as making two statements of fact: “You believe in God and you believe in me.” On the other hand, some students propose that the second phrase should be seen as an imperative. Therefore Jesus is saying, “Since you believe in God, you must also believe in me.” In this understanding, Jesus is urging the disciples to exercise reliant trust in himself as a logical extension of trusting the Father (compare John 3:15, 16).

Either way, Jesus is clearly defining faith in himself on the same level as faith in God. For the faithful people of Israel, there was no greater truth than that God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4). There can be no other implication: Jesus asserts that he is divine, that he is God. Faith in God and in Jesus is more than just affirming a truth. To place trust in Jesus is to place trust in God.

B. Follow the Son (vv. 2–4)

2a. “My Father’s house has many rooms;

In the Old Testament, expressions about one’s *house* can refer to all the members of a family or tribe (example: 2 Samuel 7:16); the word can also refer to the temple (examples: 7:6, 7, 13), the place where God’s people stand in his presence. Because God is enthroned in Heaven (Deuteronomy 26:15), we can understand God’s house to refer to Heaven as well.

It is not certain which way(s) Jesus intends the expression, but the end result is essentially the same. The Father has planned for his people to live forever in his caring presence. Jesus’ assurance is that in God’s family and in God’s presence, there is a place for all his people.

Rooms translates a word that refers to a dwelling place (compare John 14:23, where the same word is translated “home”). Jesus’ point here is not that Heaven is a grand place, though it certainly is, but that God has provided room for all members of his kingdom.

2b. “if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?”

In the trials that lie ahead, the disciples will have to rely on God’s faithfulness. Jesus’ statement suggests that his preparing *a place for* the disciples is an important promise of God’s ongoing care. They have many reasons to put their trust in God’s provision. Every stage of Israel’s history has demonstrated God’s faithfulness. The greatest demonstration of God’s faithfulness, namely Jesus’ resurrection, is only a few days away.

3a. “And if I go and prepare a place for you,

We may wonder if Jesus is referring to his death or to his ascension. Both are necessary for Jesus to *prepare* an eternal *place* for his followers: Jesus’ death will pay sin’s price for admission into Heaven, while his ascension will result in the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit to empower and teach his followers (John 14:26; 15:26). All that he has done and all that he is about to do is for the good of those who follow him.

3b. “I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Jesus’ pending departure will not be permanent. He is not abandoning the disciples, even temporarily (also John 14:18). He leaves to act on their behalf and *will come back* to complete that work.

Jesus’ declaration bears some similarity to God’s statement to Moses of his intent to deliver the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt (Exodus 3:8). In broad terms, God’s aim throughout Scripture is that his people *be where he* is. This is a reversal of Genesis 3:23, 24. Compare Revelation 21:3:

I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Jesus takes on himself the divine role of the one to rescue and gather God’s people.

4. “You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Based on Jesus' ministry and teaching to this point, the disciples should understand who Jesus is and what is about to happen to him. They should realize that Heaven is both his origin and destination (*where I am going*) and that he must die (*the way*) in order that they might be admitted to their heavenly home. But "should understand" isn't the reality, as the next verse reveals.

II. The Way Revealed

(JOHN 14:5–7)

A. Thomas's Question (v. 5)

5. Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Thomas is one of the original apostles (see Matthew 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:13–16; Acts 1:13). When hearing his name, most Christians probably think of him primarily in terms of the unflattering designation Doubting Thomas, given his statement in John 20:25.

But two other texts also reveal his character and/or mental state. One is John 11:16, where Thomas speaks with great courage. The other is the verse before us, where he reveals that he does not understand Jesus' teaching, even though Jesus expects that the disciples already know what he is saying. Thomas is not alone in being what today we might call clueless; Jesus' disciples constantly struggle to understand his teaching (see Matthew 15:15–20; 16:5–12; Mark 4:13; 7:17, 18; John 16:25–30). Full clarity must wait until after the resurrection. Thomas won't completely grasp things until he sees the risen Lord.

B. "I Am" the Answer (vv. 6, 7)

6a. Jesus answered,

Jesus answers Thomas with what is now one of the most well-known sayings of Jesus in the New Testament.

6b. "I am the way

The word *way* translates an ordinary word that commonly refers to a pathway of some sort. This can be either a physical one (such as a highway; Matthew 22:9, 10) or a figurative—but no less real—one (example: "the way of God"; 22:16). Jesus describes himself in terms of the latter (compare John 10:9; Hebrews 10:19–22).

6c. "and the truth

God is the source of all that is true. Those who worship God must do so in truth (John 4:24). In Jesus the truth of God is supremely manifest (1:1–5, 14). There is no better or higher truth than he. All that is true comes to its focus in him.

6d. "and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

As God is the source of all that lives, so God's *life* is fully in Jesus (John 1:4; 5:26). To belong to Jesus is to have life (10:10), the life of eternity that transforms the present and the never-ending future (3:16). To be apart from Jesus is to be separated from life, as our first parents were separated from Eden's tree of life in their sin (Genesis 2:9; 3:22–24). There are not many ways to God—only one, and Jesus is that one (Ephesians 2:13–18).

7a. "If you really know me, you will know my Father as well.

This is a rebuke. Having followed Jesus throughout his ministry, the disciples believe that they know him. But in knowing him, they ought to know his *Father as well*. The Father is the one of whom Jesus has taught, whom he has served, to whom he has prayed, with whom he is fully united (John 1:18; 10:30; 1 John 2:23). But Thomas's words had revealed a lack of understanding.

7b. "From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

The rebuke gives way to a promise, however. From now on, the disciples do indeed *know* the Father. Jesus' resurrection will enable them to realize this even more fully. Seeing Jesus, they see God the Son, who is completely one with God the Father. Hearing this discourse of Jesus will enable the disciples to reach a new realization about the Father and the Son following resurrection morning.

III. The Way Explained

(JOHN 14:8–14)

A. Philip's Desire (v. 8)

8. Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

The apostle *Philip* has appeared three times thus far in John's Gospel: twice bringing someone to Jesus (John 1:43–48; 12:20–22) and once offering a weak answer to a probing question (6:5–7). Prompted by Jesus' words about *the Father*, here Philip expresses both a longing to see God and a failure to understand Jesus' teaching.

Philip's request reminds us of Moses when he asked to be shown God's glory (Exodus 33:18). God answered by allowing Moses only a partial vision (33:19–23).

B. God's Oneness (vv. 9, 10)

9. Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Exasperated, Jesus points out to *Philip* what he has missed throughout Jesus' ministry: that Jesus is in complete unity with God *the Father*, expressing the divine nature fully in all that Jesus has done. God is one, so to see God the Son is to see God the Father (2 Corinthians 4:4). The Son and the Father share the same divine nature (Hebrews 1:3).

This remarkable, paradoxical realization has led Christians who have reflected on the gospel to formulate an understanding of God called the Trinity. There is but one God. But the Father and the Son are distinct divine persons, and the Holy Spirit is also. God is one in nature but three in persons, giving and receiving perfect love without beginning or end. In this divine mystery, God is unlike any created being. Only he is both one and three in this way.

10a. "Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority."

Though he is responding to Philip specifically, Jesus' question is for all the disciples to answer. He asks in such a way that expects an affirmative response. Everything that the disciples have heard and witnessed demonstrates the utter unity of God *the Father* and Jesus the Son (John 10:37, 38). Jesus fulfills the will of God. Everything that God has done has its focus and climax in Jesus.

10b. "Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work."

The *work* to which Jesus refers includes miracles, sometimes called “signs” (compare John 2:1–11; 4:46–54; 5:1–15; 6:1–21; 9:1–12; 11:1–44). These works are from *the Father*. Miracles clearly indicate the work of God.

C. Jesus’ Works (v. 11)

11a. “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me;

The disciples have followed Jesus as their master, eager to receive his teaching. They should put their confidence in him now, given their previous trust, even when he challenges their very ideas of who God is.

11b. “or at least believe on the evidence in the works themselves.

Jesus’ claims regarding his identity are proven by his mighty *works* (John 5:36; 10:38). The disciples have witnessed deeds that God alone can do. They can rely on what those reveal about Jesus’ unity with the Father.

D. Believers’ Greater Things (vv. 12–14)

12. “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Very truly signals the beginning of an important assertion (examples: John 3:3; 5:19; 16:23). The challenge Jesus presents is for the disciples to imagine that what he has done will be surpassed by their own *works* (compare Matthew 21:21).

Jesus’ work is the decisive inauguration of God’s kingdom. But that work continues and grows in Jesus’ followers. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, who will be given after Jesus’ resurrection (John 15:26), the disciples are to share the good news in doing Jesus’ work. By faith in their Lord, they will be able to see how God is fulfilling through them his promise to gather a people to himself.

13. “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

The followers of Jesus accomplish even greater things because they are empowered by their Lord, by the Spirit, and in answer to their prayers. To *ask* in Jesus’ *name* is not merely a formula that we say at the end of a prayer. It is that we ask while believing that he has the divine authority to answer; but we are also submitting to his will and purpose. We cannot ask under Jesus’ authority for that which Jesus does not want to give us. So Jesus gives here not a blank check to cash as we wish. Rather, he gives the assurance that *whatever* we need to do his work of even greater things, he will supply (Matthew 7:7–11). By this means *the Father will be glorified* as the world sees and hears who the Father truly is.

14. “You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Believers have full assurance that Jesus will supply our every need. To drive the point home, Jesus repeats it.

Conclusion

A. To Know God, Know Jesus

In Jesus of Nazareth, we indeed see God! Fully human and fully divine, Jesus spoke and acted with authority that belongs to God alone. For this reason, his followers came to understand that God was personally present in Jesus.

The God who is incarnate in Jesus is patient, as Jesus was patient with his disciples. He is just, as Jesus was just with the mighty and the lowly. He is gracious, generous, and merciful beyond comparison, as Jesus willingly gave his life for the unworthy, even for his enemies. To know Jesus is to know God. To reject Jesus is to reject God. To follow God's path of wisdom is to follow in the path of Jesus, to love and serve as he did.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, as you are revealed to us in Jesus, empower us by the Holy Spirit to live according to the pattern you set forth so others see you in us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen!

C. Thought to Remember

To know the Son is to know the Father.¹