

# THE FOUNDATION FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP – PART 1

## *SERIES: PREPARING FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP*

**By Danny Hall**

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As the followers of Christ we have been given a mission. In the next few messages we are going to explore together what it is. It may seem like an impossible mission, but we'll find that it is more than possible in Christ. What God has called us to do is an amazing task, an incredible privilege, and an exciting adventure. It gives us a wonderful way to view our individual lives and our corporate life as the body of Christ. Our mission, should we choose to accept it, is to be the people of God, the builders of God's kingdom.

We're in a series of studies on Jesus' Upper Room Discourse teaching. Let's review our introduction to this study. In the first four messages (Discovery Papers 4729 – 4732) we looked at John 13, which told of Jesus' final evening with his disciples before he would go to the cross. As he pulled them together to celebrate Passover, he demonstrated true leadership and spiritual maturity in a remarkably stark, personal example: he washed their feet. Then he had some pointed things to say to them in explanation.

None of the disciples had thought of washing the others' feet, because they were preoccupied with their thoughts of glory in the coming kingdom. They were anticipating that Jesus would overthrow the Romans and become the leader of the nation of Israel, and they would be his right-hand men. They were caught up in their own little world, discussing who would be the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus captured that moment to give a wonderful, powerful picture of what it means to be truly great in God's kingdom as he performed the task of washing their feet.

In the midst of that Jesus told them that one of them would very shortly betray him. Concern rippled through them: "Who is it, who is it?" Peter, ever boastful, stepped forward and said, "I will never deny you!" But Jesus confronted his pride: "Peter, before this night is over, you are going to deny me three times."

Jesus was beginning to strip away the self-confidence, pride, and false ambition that had arisen among the disciples so he could prepare them for something that they had never anticipated. Yes indeed, they were going to be leaders in the kingdom of God—but the kingdom of God wasn't going to look anything like what they had planned and hoped for. It was not going to be an earthly kingdom that would overthrow Roman rule, and they were not going to be suddenly lifted to a place of great religious and political influence in place of the establishment that had oppressed them for so long.

In chapters 14-16 Jesus teaches the disciples very profoundly about the wonderful leadership of the kingdom that will be offered to them. He tells them, "I'm going to be leaving you, but don't worry. Even though I'm going to hand all this over to you, you will be ready." Can you imagine what's going through their minds? They have been getting more and more excited about the potential of privilege and power and freedom, since they have come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior. They have read into that what they have been taught all their lives, that this means the establishment of Israel as a great kingdom. But now in this teaching of the washing of their feet and these pointed predictions about their failure, Jesus has undermined their self-confidence—so that he can replace it with a different kind of confidence.

John 14-16 is important for you and for me, and I have fallen more and more in love with this portion of Scripture. The reason is that just as Jesus handed the leadership of the kingdom of God to the twelve, he is now handing it to us in our day. The stream of spiritual leadership in the kingdom of God has flowed down through history from the original twelve, and now we are the people of God, and we have been tasked with being emissaries of Christ himself, those who love the world as Christ loved the world.

You may say, "I don't really want any part of that. I just want to come to church on Sunday so I can feel good about covering the religious base in my life. I don't know about this spiritual leadership, taking my turn to lead God's kingdom in expressing Christ's love in the world." We may all actually prefer that Jesus show up and do it in person, and that we just follow him around. But the disciples inherited a season of leadership and trust, and so have we. And Jesus lays out for us an incredible array of promises and descriptions of what it will be like to give us confidence and

joy.

Now, as you have no doubt noticed, the world seems to have gone crazy around us. There are many news stories of child abductions, and of wars. To think that it is in the midst of all this chaos that you and I are handed the responsibility of being Christ's ambassadors to this world!

Early in Tolkien's book *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Gandalf tells Frodo of the return to power of the Enemy, the Dark Lord Sauron. Frodo responds, "I wish it need not have happened in my time." Gandalf says, "So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us." (1) We would all like to live in a world that is more peaceful, righteous, and comfortable than the one we face today. But what we as the people of God have to decide is how we will we respond to the task that God has given us in these times.

As Christ undermines our own worldly self-confidence and ambition, I suppose our hearts could be very troubled, as the disciples' were at the close of chapter 13. Jesus' prediction of Peter's failure, coming on the heels of his prediction of Judas' betrayal, coming in turn on the heels of his washing their feet led him to conclude that his disciples were unsettled. Everything they had thought about was coming unglued before their eyes; what in the world was going on?

Into this troubled state, both theirs and ours, Jesus speaks. Having brought the disciples to the point of an acceptable, and wonderful, vulnerability, he finds them ready now to receive his teaching on how to carry on. John 14:1-14:

**"Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."**

## **A place in the Father's house**

The entire Upper Room Discourse begins and ends with words of comfort that in the tribulation of this world, Christ will be their anchor. He knows what a daunting task he is giving them. He knows how vulnerable and insecure they are about to feel as they are launched into this without his physically being present with them as he has been for the last three years. So he says, "Let not your heart be troubled," or literally, "Stop letting your heart be troubled."

He begins by giving them a sense of comfort and security about their relationship with God. He says first of all that it's a matter of faith, trusting what they know. "Believe in God, believe also in me." This statement can be interpreted in different ways. Both clauses can be read as statements of objective fact: "You do believe in God, you do believe in me." Or they can both be read as commands: "Believe in God, believe in me." Or the first clause can be read as a statement of fact, and the second as a command: "You believe in God, so believe in me." Probably they are both commands. What he is trying to get them to see is that that in the midst of their distress and insecurity, the road toward confidence in what God is doing is the road of faith, a principle he is going to develop as this passage goes on. "You ought to have a basis for confidence in who God is," he is saying. "You know the history of God with his people. You have recited since childhood the glorious stories of his deliverance of Israel and the building of the kingdom of Israel. You have seen the God of the universe act on your behalf—believe in that. And now you've walked with me these three years. You've heard me teach. You've seen God work through me in the things I've done—so believe in me." The first step toward confidence as spiritual leaders in his kingdom is faith in the One who is the source of all strength and purpose and prospects.

One of the things that is so easy for us to do is to take our eyes off of Christ and get them on what's going on around

us. I have always been a news junkie. I constantly read newspapers and listen to news on the radio and to commentary on television. I follow everything from sports to national, international, and local news. But one of the things that happens when you live in an information-saturated world is that your mind drifts toward all the problems. What is the solution to the Middle East? Should President Bush really go after Saddam Hussein? What are we to do about child abductions? What's the answer to the rising housing costs in Silicon Valley? Beyond that, there are the problems of our own personal lives. It's so easy to focus on all that is difficult and wrong. How will I ever figure out how to talk to my neighbor or my friends about Christ, even when I want to? We get locked into the turmoil within us. So Jesus says, "Take your eyes off all of that and put them back on me. Believe in God, believe in me." When we put our faith in him, focusing on him, we begin to understand all that God wants for us and has done for us.

Jesus follows this up with the wonderful promise that our home with the Father is a certainty: "In My Father's house are many dwelling places . . . I go to prepare a place for you." The phrase "My Father's house" is one Jesus used earlier in John to talk about the temple. It is reasonable to assume that the disciples would think of that. But he is about to inaugurate a new and different age of God's work. The temple of God is no longer going to be a physical structure; instead it's going to be a spiritual "building." God's presence will be residing in the hearts of individual believers and in the collective community of faith called the church, or the body of Christ. And in that fellowship with Christ there are many dwelling places. There is room for all. God's calling us to himself speaks of communion, fellowship, intimacy. Jesus says, "If it were not possible to have this unlimited access to the very presence of God, to live and commune with him, both individually and corporately, now and forevermore, I would have told you. But this is the nature of the kingdom of God. And more than that, I am going to prepare a place for you."

The phrase "prepare a place" has been understood in different ways. This passage is often used in Christian circles as a passage of comfort for people who are grieving over lost loved ones. It's a wonderful passage in that context. But that is not the context in which Jesus says it. When he says, "I go to prepare a place for you," I think here he is talking about what is going to happen immediately: he is going to the cross to prepare a place for us in the Father's house. All the intimacy and marvelous fellowship that flow out of that will be described for us across these three chapters.

"If I go and prepare a place for you," Jesus continues, "I will come again, and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." Again, the phrase "I will come again" is most often taught as Christ's second coming. It's often understood that Christ has gone to heaven and somehow there is still some preparation of our place there going on, and one day after it's all finished, Christ is going to come again.

Jesus' words here foreshadow his second coming, but their fulfillment is more imminent and profound and accessible to us today. A few verses later in this chapter Jesus will tell the disciples, "I am going away, but that's a good thing, because I am going to come again. That is, I am going to send the Spirit of God who is going to dwell in you, and I am going to remain with you through the Spirit. There is going to be an intimate spiritual connection through the presence of the Spirit in your life that will allow you to have this deep fellowship and communion with God himself."

Paul's words in Ephesians 1:13-14 allude to the final, second coming of Christ in the same way: "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory." Jesus' saying, "I will come again," has two parts to it. First, there is an immediate fulfillment when the Holy Spirit is poured out in us and Jesus lives within us and we commune and fellowship with him as the people of God. And second, one day he will come to earth again and the kingdom of God will be finally and eternally established, and we will live with him face-to-face for all eternity. The Holy Spirit, as Paul said, is a pledge, a down payment, so to speak, for that final redemption. But it is not true that all the blessings of Christ are reserved for some future day. His presence and all the strength, power, and guidance that are tied into being a child of God are not some future thing, but a present reality. What Christ wants his disciples to see is that even though he is going away, he will be alive in them through the power of the Spirit. We'll examine that more closely in the next message.

Jesus sums up, "That where I am, there you may be also." Now, where is Jesus? Again, this is not about some heavenly fulfillment. In the next few words Jesus says, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me." Where Jesus is, is in intimate, glorious communion and fellowship with the Father. And where he wants us to be is right in the middle of that. Do you understand what that means? Our Lord and Savior went to the cross to prepare a place for us to live in vital connection with God himself, in union with the Father and the Son in the presence of the Holy Spirit—the

wonderful, glorious, triune God. That is the great beauty of this.

Now, the disciples wanted political change in their day. They wanted a visible kingdom of Israel to be established right then, and they wanted to be princes in that kingdom. You and I would love for all of our problems to be solved. We want complete freedom from burdens in Christ. In fact, some people today promise that Christ is going to remove all your problems, that you will be prosperous and always healthy. But there is not one word about that in this passage. Those kinds of blessings may or may not come. In this passage the essential blessing that Christ gives us is relationship with God. How are we able to be the people of God in our world without being overwhelmed? How are we able to face the task that God has given us with joy and anticipation and not with troubled hearts? Christ has given us himself that we might be united to him and live in that fellowship.

## **The way, the truth, and the life**

Jesus says, “And you know the way where I am going (I’ve been telling you for three years).” Well, the disciples are about as dense as we are, so Thomas immediately says, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going. How do we know the way?” They obviously haven’t quite got it, so Jesus makes this wonderful statement in verse 6: “I am the way.” If the goal is communion with the Father, to enter into that wonderful fellowship with him as he establishes his temple among us and in us, how do we get there? “Let me go over this one more time,” Jesus says. “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life.**” Throughout John’s development of Jesus’ thought, to know God, to live in fellowship with him, is what true life is, and the only way is through Jesus. Jesus will actually say that in his prayer in John 17:3. Thomas’ question was about how to get to the Father, so the first clause, “the way,” probably has the greatest emphasis in that sentence. Jesus is the way to the Father—the true and genuine way, the right way, against all other kinds of ways.

In our world today there is no such thing as an absolute, philosophically or religiously or theologically. It is very, very inappropriate and theologically incorrect to say, “Jesus is the way.” So I won’t say it, I’ll let Jesus say it! He says, “I am the genuine and true way, and I am the life.”

Now, Jesus didn’t say, “I am the way,” because he was trying to win a popularity contest among all of the religions. And he didn’t say that in order to win a debate or establish himself as superior in a condescending way. Being representatives of Christ’s kingdom and proclaiming that he is the way, you and I are tempted at times to use that as some sort of badge of superiority. “My religion is better than your religion.” We have a sense that we can win the debate, show that Jesus is better, and so on. There is sometimes a certain pride and arrogance that is attached to the way that we communicate the truth that Jesus is the way.

But Jesus’ heart is broken for broken people. He proclaims himself the way to the Father because he knows he is motivated by wanting to mend broken hearts and heal wounded people. The debate about religion is superfluous to the fact that people are hurting and in need. Christ goes to the cross to prepare the way, and he declares himself to be the way, because it is at the cross that the healing of the world takes place. So Christ wants to reach into the lives of these disciples, who are now being shaken to the core, with all their ambition and pride exposed, and say, “It is in me that you will find healing. It is through me that you will find the Father.”

It was the proclamation that Jesus is the way by which Christ reached into my life many years ago when I was an arrogant eighteen-year-old, a cocky but insecure agnostic. He broke my heart and healed it by the glorious grace that flows from his cross. There is story after story that we could tell of why Jesus is the way. At the cross healing comes, forgiveness comes, the brokenness of this world can find a place to be mended, and access to the Father is open.

Jesus says in verse 7, “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you do know Him, and have seen Him.” It is present possession. “You already knew me, but you didn’t know that I was the one who revealed the Father. Now you know. Now you’ve seen him.” Philip responds, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus says, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” Verse 10: “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?” Jesus’ question anticipates an affirmative: Yes, they have come to see that he is in the Father, and the Father is in him. Everything that he has said and done has flowed out of his relationship with the Father. “Otherwise believe because of the works you have seen.” Jesus draws their attention to all the powerful, incredible teaching he has given them across these three years, and to the miraculous works he’s done. “You’ve seen the Father at work in me. You know that I am

connected with the Father. Trust in that, walk in faith, and you too can enter into that fellowship.”

## **Building God’s kingdom**

Jesus now makes a couple of closing statements for this portion of the discourse. The first is a most miraculous and incredible statement of encouragement about our being a part of God’s kingdom. He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father.” He opens up an amazing world of our being part of the building of God’s kingdom.

How in the world can we do greater works than Jesus did? This has been understood a lot of ways. Obviously Jesus did miraculous things that you and I may never get to duplicate; we may never raise anyone from the dead or touch anyone and heal them. But Jesus says the greatest miracle is the changing of lives, the establishing and growing of God’s kingdom. At this point historically there is incredible rejection of Jesus, and the group that is following him is being winnowed down to a small band of the faithful. By the time he goes to the cross there will be betrayal and denial, and after the resurrection there will be a band of only 120 who are still together, praying for the promise of the Spirit. After all the multitudes who followed Jesus, only a handful will remain. Yet just days hence, Peter will preach at the temple on the day of Pentecost, and more than 3,000 people will come to Christ. The apostle Paul will take the gospel to places Jesus never went. Lives will be healed, and God’s kingdom will begin to grow. Throughout the history of the church there is story after story of the miraculous power and working of the kingdom of God as it expands through God’s people.

Beyond that, he says, “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in my Name, I will do it.” Now, this isn’t like Santa Claus’ saying, “Send me your list.” Asking in the name of Christ means asking according to the will of Christ. As we align ourselves with Christ in the establishment and expansion of his kingdom, what we ask, God will do. I wonder how many times I’ve really prayed in his name and believed that God would touch the lives around me for his kingdom. How many of us have prayed in faith that God would pour out his Spirit among us that we might be energized to be the people of God? How many of us have broken out of our self-satisfaction and our petty worries about whether we were bored in church, or whether we would get out in time to see the ball game, or whatever else was on our minds, and cried out to God, “Lord, in your name, glorify yourself, expand your kingdom, and use me to do that,” then in glorious anticipation that God would answer those prayers, walked out of church with a sense of commission and commitment and blessing? Jesus’ saying, “If you ask anything in My name, I will do it,” is a call for the people of God to be people of prayer and of anticipation that his gospel can change lives, and that we as his people are called to be part of that.

You and I must face the challenge that it is now our turn. The task has been given to us. As daunting as that may seem and as uncomfortable as it may make us feel, the glorious truth is that we are ready and adequate when we trust Christ. He went to the cross and brought us into an intimate relationship with the Father to encourage and empower us. He has promised us that through his personal presence and power, we will be able to do greater things than he did as the kingdom of God expands into areas that we cannot even anticipate. So he longs for us to cry out and believe him for the outpouring of his Spirit and the transformation of our culture, our neighborhoods, our families through the power of the gospel. He says to us, “Don’t let your heart be troubled. Stop worrying and start trusting. Get beyond your fear and insecurity. Believe God, believe me. You are secure in me. You are adequate in me and commissioned by me. We’re going to succeed in this.” That’s the call of God and that’s the promise he leaves us. The question is, will we walk in faith and see new and fresh and wonderful things in our midst?

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## NOTES

(1) J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings, Part One: The Fellowship of the Ring*, © 1954, 1965, 1966, 1982, 1993, 1994, Ballantine Books, New York. Pp. 55-56.

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John 14:1-14  
5th Message  
Danny Hall  
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