

THE HOPE OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

SERIES: PREPARING FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

By Danny Hall

In our study of the Upper Room Discourse, as we come toward the end of the evening Jesus is continuing to bring the disciples along in their understanding, to prepare them for what he has in store for them. Questions, doubts, fears, and insecurities have come bursting into their lives. They have been building up dreams over these three-plus years with Jesus—dreams of his coming into his kingdom, taking the throne of Israel, throwing off the yoke of Roman oppression, and re-establishing Israel as a great nation; dreams of their ascending with him to places of prominence. The hopes they have been conditioned to look for their whole lives surely are about to come to pass—but Jesus has begun to talk to them about a whole different kind of scenario. The hostility has been rising around him, and they are now beginning to realize that something radically different from what they were anticipating is about to take place. Unable to understand all that God is doing, they are focused on their own sense of loss. They are caught in a place of ambiguity, of troubled heart. So Jesus continues to speak into that as he prepares them to understand what is beautiful about what is ahead.

At the end of the Passover meal, having washed their feet and predicted their failure, Jesus brought them to a point where he knew he could teach them about his kingdom. As they moved out from the upper room and went down through the Kidron Valley, through the vineyards toward the Garden of Gethsemane, he used the picture of the vine to illustrate beautifully what it meant to be connected to him. He talked to them about God the Father as the vinedresser who would prune their lives and rebuild them into people who would be able to be leaders in his kingdom. He warned them of opposition that would come and talked to them about loving one another. He talked to them about the Holy Spirit as the one who would encourage them and empower them for ministry. But all the while they were still in a state of confusion, wondering what was going on and asking questions among themselves.

Now Jesus is wrapping all this up, and in the remainder of the chapter he wants to leave them with a couple of kingdom values to have in mind as they are about to launch into this endeavor that they have been called to. These values are embodied in two fruits of the Spirit (the second of which we'll consider in the next message) that will be produced in their lives and that will allow them to be transformed by God's grace, if they can get beyond their myopic view of their own little piece of the story—if they can step back and see the grandeur of the wonderful, overarching purposes of God. You and I also need to step back from our focus on our little part of the story and see the larger context of God's purposes for our lives.

Let's read John 16:16-24 to see how Jesus wants to enlarge the disciples' vision and bring a sense of hope to them as they approach their future.

“A little while, and you will no longer behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.” Some of His disciples therefore said to one another, “What is this thing He is telling us, ‘A little while, and you will not behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’?” And so they were saying, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is talking about.” Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, “Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, ‘A little while, and you will not behold Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me’? Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. Whenever a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she remembers the anguish no more, for the joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore you too now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you. And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full.”

Jesus begins this section of his teaching by making a simple statement: “A little while, and you will no longer behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.” He has said similar things already in these chapters, and the disciples are still trying to figure out what he is talking about.

To begin with, Jesus is foretelling events that are going to transpire within twenty-four hours of that very moment. He is predicting his own crucifixion. “There is going to be a time when I am going to be separated from you, when I give my life in sacrifice for the sins of the world.” They have no idea of this.

“And again a little while, and you will see Me.” When will this be? Well, he might be referring to when he is going to be raised from the dead. They will see him then. Some people think he might be talking about his second coming in his power and glory, which we still await. And I would suggest a third possibility that comes from this body of teaching. Remember, in chapter 14 he talked about going away and coming to them again (see Discovery Paper 4733). He was going to be coming to them specifically in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. So in a real sense he also looks forward to the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit will come upon them and make real to them his presence abiding with them even when he is physically gone away from them. In a sense they will “see” him again then, too.

In reality Jesus is probably foreshadowing all of that. He knows he is going to be raised from the dead and will see them. He knows that he will one day come again and establish his kingdom forever. He knows that in between, he will be personally present in the midst of his people through the Holy Spirit.

While there is this very short interlude when he will be separated from them because of his death on the cross and burial in the tomb, they will break forth into glorious reunion when he is once again joined with his people. But the disciples of course have no context with which to evaluate this, so they are puzzled. It still sounds bizarre and out of any context they have been used to that their Savior, the Messiah, is going to die and leave them. They can’t quite grasp it. So immediately Jesus speaks into their confusion by giving them a couple of things to think about.

The first thing he gives them is what I like to call a perspective with a promise. In verses 20-22 he wants to enlarge their vision, to help them step back and see a very important kingdom principle.

Joy out of sorrow

He begins, “Truly, truly . . .” This is sometimes translated “Verily, verily.” Usually this phrase means something like “Wake up and listen!” One of the finest Bible teachers I knew back in college had a similar habit. Whenever he got to an important point he would say, “Look up here!” In the same way Jesus is saying, “Pay attention!”

Then he continues: “You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy.” In these three short verses he will use the words “sorrow” or “sorrowful” four times, the words “weep” and “lament” and “anguish” once each, and the words “joy” and “rejoice” five times. All through these verses sorrow and lamenting are contrasted with joy and rejoicing. The word “lament” is associated with mourning someone who has died, again foreshadowing the fact that his leaving them is going to include his death. (In that culture lamenting, sometimes done by professional mourners, was not only an outward demonstration of grief but a testimony to how significant the loss was.)

The disciples are going to be sorrowful, but their sorrow will turn to joy. Now, I find myself thinking of life as a balancing of happiness and sadness. There are certain things we get really joyful about, and certain things that are obviously very sorrowful, and we hope that life is filled with more joyful than sorrowful times. But that isn’t what Jesus says. He doesn’t separate them out. He says joy comes out of the very thing that makes us sorrowful! God takes those moments in our lives that seem difficult or catastrophic or insurmountable, and his power transforms those very things into sources of great joy. The ultimate example, of course, is Jesus’ own death. Out of this, which will cause the disciples great grief, God will produce the greatest joy, because it is through that act that he will conquer sin and death and the grave, and through that they will be liberated to follow and know God!

Jesus illustrates this wonderful kingdom principle through the very easily understood picture of childbirth. The labor and birthing process are agonizingly difficult. It’s certainly more than I want to bear, and I’m glad I can be a spectator! But as soon as the baby comes and is laid in his mother’s arms, the pain is replaced by tremendous joy.

When I exercise the courage to look at my own life, I realize that I spend a lot of time and energy trying to rearrange my life to make it comfortable, to avoid pain and difficulty. We all do that. I don’t mean we have to go out looking for pain, but Jesus says the wonderful kingdom principle is this: Your greatest pain, sorrow, or tragedy is where God wants to demonstrate himself strong, to redeem. He wants to transform those difficulties into sources of joy.

There is another side to this perspective with a promise. At the end of these verses Jesus makes a little change in his wording that gives us a wonderful insight into his heart. He has been saying, “You will no longer see me, and then you

will see me again.” But in verse 22 he says, “I will see *you* again. . . .” There is a note of anticipation in his voice here. It’s not just that they should be excited that they are going to see him. He himself is anticipating his reconnecting with them. Our wonderful Savior loves us enough, having called us and chosen us to be his ministers in this world (John 15:16), having told us we are his friends, that he is excited to see us! This speaks of Christ’s initiative toward us, his reaching out and connecting with us at a deep and wonderful level. He is about to go to the cross to conquer sin and death and the powers of hell itself, to establish the principles of righteousness and justice and forgiveness and new life in him, and he shares that victory with us and invites us to participate in it. He is again establishing in us the wonderful kingdom value of transforming sorrow into joy as he invites us into his own victory and loves to be connected with us in this whole endeavor. And we are transformed as our eyes are opened to the larger picture of what God is doing.

In the following verses Jesus moves on to talk about what I call prayer with a purpose.

Every resource available

In verse 23 he says, “And in that day you will ask Me no question.” I think “that day” is looking forward to Pentecost, when the Spirit will come and give them understanding of all this. And then once again he says, “Truly, truly [look up here!], I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name.” This is the third time in this Upper Room Discourse that he has made this same promise. He is reminding them that they have everything they need to be his people in the kingdom of God. This loving Father is the source. Through Christ, in his name and authority, as they are called by him to be the people of God in his kingdom for his purposes, the door to the Father is open. (Notice again that Jesus isn’t saying that the Father is a celestial Santa Claus, that we can ask for anything we want and he will give it to us.)

As leaders in expanding his kingdom, we need never fear. When we are headed off to something terrifying like Children’s Ministry or whatever arena of ministry it is, we wonder how in the world we can ever do that, and we begin to doubt whether we have what it takes. There are questions in ministry that I don’t have the answers to. Life’s problems and issues are complex and difficult to understand. But when Christ calls us to be ambassadors for him in the world, he promises that when we choose to engage in ministry for him, if we will ask the Father, he will give us what we need.

This beautiful picture of what it means to follow Christ is supposed to produce something beautiful in us.

Joy in ministry

Notice what Jesus returns to in verse 24: “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your *joy* may be made full.” God wants to fully resource us for all he has called us to do, and out of that we come back to joy! You see, the fruit of the Spirit that God wants to produce in our lives as we go out to live in his kingdom is joy! He is not calling us to a ministry of drudgery. He doesn’t want us to loathe the idea of serving him. He is not looking to use us up. He wants us to experience *full joy*. The joy God produces in our hearts when our lives connect with the lives of others is a wonderful and beautiful thing. If you have never known the incredible joy of being in a place where you know that God used you to touch the lives of other people, I can only say there is hardly any other joy comparable to it. I remember earlier times in my life when I knew God had graciously chosen to use my presence and my words to touch another person’s life, and there was incredible joy that came from seeing God’s Spirit work in and through me.

One of the privileges I had working in Eastern Europe for a while was meeting men and women who lived for Christ under circumstances day by day that were far more demanding than anything I had ever known. I remember the story of a man in Romania, back in the height of the heavy persecution by the Ceausescu’s regime in the late seventies and early eighties. In the old Soviet industrialization there were huge factories, and the hierarchy of workers in them was highly political. To be given a place of importance, in what we would call middle management, was a reward for party loyalty and company loyalty over time. And this man had achieved such a place.

Then he came to Christ, and his conversion became known. In a public ceremony they invited all of the workers of that factory together, and before them all he was given an opportunity to denounce his faith. He refused. Then he was

demoted from his place of management all the way to the bottom rung. He was given a broom to sweep the floors of the factory. His meager salary was reduced to almost nothing.

But he began sweeping floors with the joy of the Lord. And a funny thing began to happen. He'd be sweeping between the machines, and he'd hear a "Pssst!" He would be beckoned back into the shadows, where people would ask him, "Tell me about this Jesus who so transformed your life and filled you with joy, who has given you the courage to give up all this. I want to know about this Christ."

Joy comes out of incredible places. When we are willing to surrender our lives and lay them down for him, when we are willing to say, "God, I want you to change me, to use my heart and life," we open the door to incredible joy as we pray and trust that God will resource us completely. This is a theme throughout the Scriptures. In Philippians 4:4 the apostle Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" In Psalm 100:1-3 the psalmist says:

"Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth.

Serve the LORD with gladness; come before Him with joyful singing.

Know that the LORD himself is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;

We are His people and the sheep of His pasture."

This describes the people of God as people of joy, and that joy comes from understanding by faith the incredible purposes of God, even though we do not understand fully the steps that he is taking us through.

We have grown accustomed to looking for solutions from worldly sources. We think that perhaps if we elect the right people, our society will be better. Now, we do live in a participatory democracy, and we have the opportunity as citizens who are believers to enter the public square. And I think we should have a voice there. But we are fooling ourselves if we think that politics is going to save our country. We sometimes think we just need to defeat key people on the international scene using our military might, and that will make the world a better place. No matter what happens in that realm, sin will still be present and we will still live in a world full of problems.

What we are called to do above all else is to be the people of God. What the world is crying out to see is men and women living righteously and justly, full of love and compassion for one another and for the world, living out God's grace. It is a daunting, huge task, but one that is possible because Christ is sufficient. Living in us, he invites us to trust the Father to provide everything we need. This is the wonderful, incredible calling of being a follower of Jesus, walking with him and trusting him. Out of that a life of joy emerges as we see God moving and working.

There are times when I think my life is characterized more by whining than joy. I am very adept, as you are, at pointing out all the things that ought to change in my circumstances. Yet down in my heart of hearts I know that when I quit being seduced by the things of this world, fix my eyes on Christ, and say, "Lord, carry me into your adventure, allow me to be the person you called me to be," it's then that I experience the greatest joy. There is nothing that this world has to offer that can compare with what Christ is offering us: being his people in his world, living out of his resources, making a difference that counts for eternity, pointing toward that day when he will indeed be acknowledged by all as King of kings and Lord of lords. We get to be a part of that. That's the joy of the kingdom that he wants to leave with us.

Scripture quotations are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE ("NASB"). © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, 1996 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Catalog No. 4739
John 16:16-24
11th Message
Danny Hall
September 15, 2002

[Back to Index page](#)

Copyright © 2002 [Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of

Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the prior written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to: Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.