

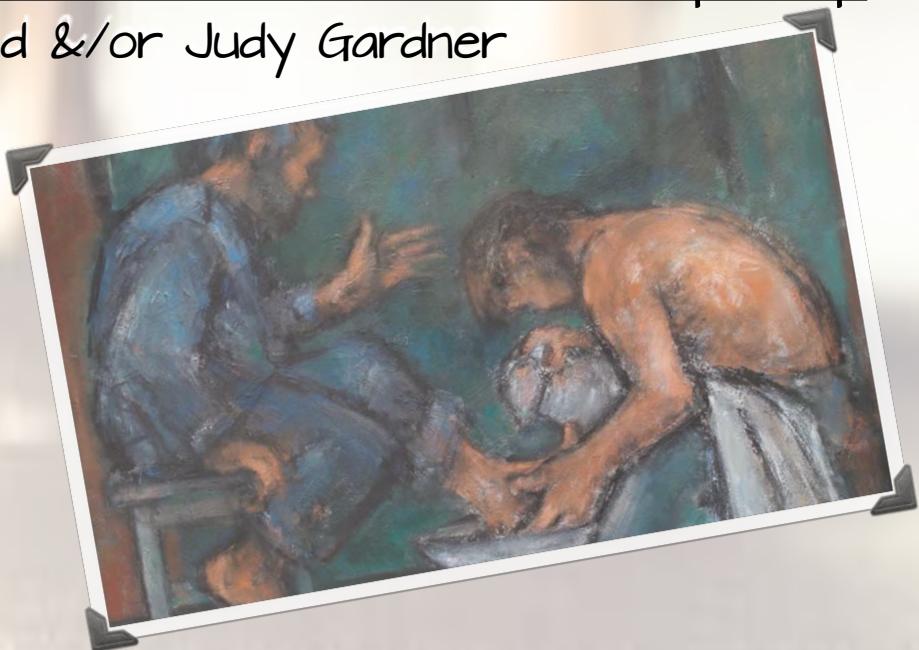
April 10-14, 2023 Edition

The Year(s) Of ^{Following} Jesus Part 67

The Last Supper: A Crash Course In Discipleship

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we begin looking at the last 24 hours of Jesus' life on this earth before His crucifixion. It is the single most recorded day in the entire Bible. More ink is given to this 24 hour period of time than any other day. And this week we are going to spend some time looking at the Last Supper. Matthew, Mark & Luke all record Jesus' words when He instituted the ritual of communion. John on the other hand leaves that part out but spends a great deal more time recording Jesus' teaching beginning with John 13 and flowing all the way through John chapter 17. What John leaves us with is the longest continuous teaching of Jesus in the entire Bible. It's what occurred to Him to tell His disciples when He's getting ready to leave them to continue the mission He began. I guess you could call it Jesus' "crash course" in discipleship. It's His last minute instructions on what He hopes they'll remember when He's gone. And it starts like this:

Jesus knew that it was time for him to leave this world and go back to the Father. He had always loved those who were his own in the world, and he loved them all the way to the end... Jesus knew that the Father had given him power over everything and that he had come from God and was going back to God. John 13:1-3 (NLT)

So much in just that short 3 verses! He knew the end was rapidly approaching. He knew He had loved His disciples from start to finish. And God has given Him power over everything. Isn't that a strange thing to say? That God had given Him power over everything. What doest that mean? Well, if you take Philippians chapter 2 seriously it means Jesus lived most of His life on this earth relying on God & the Holy Spirit for any power that He needed to perform miracles. Philippians 2 tells us that Jesus "emptied" Himself of His equality with God in order to come to this earth and take on the form a human. I think that probably means that Jesus never performed a single miracle by His own power before that final night on this earth. But now it's back- all of the power by which Jesus carried out God's words in creating everything that exists from nothing. All the power of the universe was now at His disposal once again.

What would you do first? Have you ever thought about it? If you had the power of God how would you use it? When I used to be a youth minister one of my favorite things to do was to ask kids, "if you could have any superpower, what would you choose?" Their answers are very illuminating. Flying. Invisibility. Super strength. How about you? What super power would you choose? What would you do if you suddenly had all the power of the universe at your disposal? Do you know what Jesus did? He served:

So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him. John 13:4-5 (NLT)

He served. Turns out it was His superpower. Who would have guessed? But John chapter 13 is not the only place that we learn that serving was His superpower. In fact, do you remember me mentioning Philippians chapter 2? There is a section of that chapter where Paul records a hymn that was already well known among the Christian churches of the first century. It was one of the songs they'd sing (well... it was more like chanting back then rather than the harmonies we are used to) when they gathered to remember and worship Jesus. And it is incredibly similar to John chapter 13:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death- even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11 (NRSV)

Do you see the similarities? When He was in Heaven Jesus arose from His throne and stripped off his godly Nature. When He was in the upper room with His friends He got up from His place at the dinner table and stripped off His outer robe. When He left His place in Heaven He took on the form of a slave. When He left His place at the table and washed His disciples feet He took on the job of a slave (and believe me... everybody there that night would not have just been stunned- they would have been offended on His behalf because foot washing was a job for the lowliest slave in the house).

John chapter 13 was just another example of Jesus being Jesus. It was a living depiction of what His entire life had been about since He left Heaven to come to this earth to rescue us. We'll spend this week focusing on the Last Supper to see what we can learn from Jesus in this crash course on discipleship.

Tuesday Reflection: So what is the first thing we learn from Jesus in John's description of the Last Supper? Well, the first thing I see is this paradox that is Jesus' life. From a human stand point what He was doing and how He lived His life didn't make much sense. Even His disciples had a tough time following Him:

Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will." John 13:6-7 (NLT)

That should have been on a sign that hung around Jesus' neck while He walked this earth, don't you think? No matter what He did when us humans didn't get it He could just point and say, "here's your sign." You don't understand now what I'm doing but someday you will. I think we who are followers of Jesus in the 21st century could use one of those signs even now. How often has Jesus done something in your life that you just didn't understand? I can't even count the times. I have a feeling that in those moments Jesus wants to point us to John 13:7- "you don't get it right now but someday you will."

His promises can be so confusing when we look at them through the prism of our own lives. Why does He do what He does. Why doesn't He do what I think He should do? How are the things that are happening in my life evidence of His love. Jesus is still paradoxical from our limited perspectives even today (at least He is to me). But think about how His followers must have felt. His words and His actions just didn't seem to mesh. He made such lofty claims about Who He was and what He had come to do and how He would achieve that goal. But then His life was like the complete opposite. He lived a life of such humility and lowliness that when compared with His statements sent the mind boggling. There are a lot of voices in our culture that say Jesus never claimed to be God but they must not have read the Bible

before (or they don't believe the Bible which is a whole other argument...). Let's look at just a few of Jesus' claims about Himself:

In John 8 He said to know Me is to know God. In John 9 He said to receive Me is to receive God. In John 12 He said if you've seen Me then you've seen God. In John 6 He said, "I am the bread of life." In John 8 He said, "I am the light of the world." In John 10 He said, "I am the gate to eternal life." Think about that for a minute. He didn't say I control the gate, or I tell the gatekeeper who to let in. He said "I am the gate." What does that mean? In John 11 He says, "I am the resurrection and the life." He doesn't say I control the resurrection or I decide who gets in on the resurrection. He says that He is the resurrection. Huh? In John 14 He says, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Wow. I could go on but I think you've got the idea, right? He made some absolutely outrageous claims in His time on this earth.

But then let's talk about His behavior. His actions. He lived like a servant. He was the most humble human being who has ever lived. His life and His words don't seem to add up. But that's because we don't truly understand God and we are working with a flawed definition of what greatness is. Tomorrow we'll continue this conversation but for today maybe spend some time thinking about Who He claimed to be and how He lived His life and how mind bending that was to the people all around Him.

Wednesday Reflection: Ok... so yesterday we looked at how Jesus' claims about Who He was and the way He lived His life seemed very paradoxical to the people of the first century. Even His closest friends didn't always get it. Do you know how I know they didn't get it? Because of the recurring argument they got into. It was always an argument over the same question- which one of us is the bigger deal in Jesus' Kingdom?

Jesus HATED that argument.

Every time He caught them in the midst of that debate He'd stop and gather them around and try to explain that their definition of greatness was flawed. It happened all the time. But I never really realized (until this week while preparing for this lesson) that this argument broke out during the Last Supper! Seriously? With Jesus sitting right there? Yup. They started arguing about which of them was most important and Jesus said this:

Who is more important: the one sitting at the table or the one serving? You think the one at the table is more important, but I am like a servant among you. Luke 22:27 (NCV)

Do you see what He's saying? He's saying, your definition is all out of whack. You think the most important person would be sitting and being served and yet here I am among you serving you. The thing Jesus left unsaid that nobody then or now would debate is that Jesus>me (that's "Jesus is greater than me for you old fogies who aren't up with the hip kids say of typing things nowadays ;o)

This is Jesus' crash course in discipleship. He's getting ready to leave them and He knows they've been having these arguments for years. He's trying to give them one last lesson that they'll never forget and He decides the best way to get it through their thick skulls is by shocking them and so He washes their feet. Now Luke doesn't tell us about the foot washing and John doesn't tell us about the argument but when you read them together all of it starts

to make much more sense- at least it does for me. Greatness does not equal being served- it equals serving. One of my absolute favorite quotes about Jesus is by a nineteenth century Scottish preacher named John Watson (at least I think this quote is his... maybe I should say "as best I can figure out through my buddy google this quote was first written by John Watson").

In Jesus we see tenderness without weakness. Boldness without harshness. Humility without any uncertainty- in fact he had towering confidence. He had unbending conviction and yet complete approachability. An emphasis on absolute truth but always bathed in love. Power without insensitivity. Integrity without rigidity. And passion without prejudice.

The first time I heard that I had to write it down really quick and then spend some time reflecting on it. Tenderness without weakness. I can remember wondering how I'm doing at that? Boldness without harshness. Yeah... that's a tough combination to master, am I right? Humility without uncertainty. Ouch. I won't go on but maybe the best thing you and I could do today is spend a few minutes going over that list of Jesus' attributes and asking, "how am I doing at this?" Because this is what Jesus is calling all of us to. It is a perfect description of how He lived His life. And it's what sets Him apart from every other human who has ever lived (that's right... spoiler alert- you and I are never going to be perfect at living up to these attributes but He still wants us to try and improve in all of them).

Think about it for a minute. If Jesus had made all those lofty claims about Who He was and what He was capable of without the humble, lowly behavior that He demonstrated He would have just been another egomaniac with a messiah complex trying to take over the world like Pinky & The Brain (don't know who I'm talking about? Google it and you're welcome ;o) But if He had just lived a humble and servant life without the outrageous claims about Who He was/is then He would have just been another prophet of love and tolerance. No, it was the combination of His lofty claims and His humble behavior and way of life that makes Him stand out totally unique in all of human history. On the one hand we see a God of infinite power and glory and might but on the other hand we recognize something we never would have considered in our wildest dreams- that this God in all His might and glory and power is absolutely beautiful and loves me more than I could possibly imagine. It's like Jesus is saying to His followers in John chapter 13- "you guys argue about greatness all the time- even tonight when I've told you this is the last meal we'll ever eat together- but if you were paying attention you would see in both My washing of your feet and tomorrow in my crucifixion that My definition of greatness is the single greatest contradiction of human wisdom that the world could possibly imagine."

In other words, if you want to understand the nature of greatness- just watch Jesus.

Basically Jesus says, "I'm going to ascend to the heights by descending to the depths." If we want to become great we will have to follow the same path by realizing that in Jesus' Kingdom the way up is down. The way forward is backward. And the way to true greatness is through serving. Jesus' life may seem like a real paradox but it's only because we don't understand true reality. Why don't you go back up the page to the quote about Jesus by John Watson and spend some time soaking in Jesus' reality?

Thursday Reflection: So Jesus' life was a complete paradox (to all of us humans who were working with a flawed definition of true greatness). If you were with me yesterday then you are working through that and what it means in your own life. Now let me drop the next bomb on you (well, in actuality it's Jesus Who did this so I'm just the messenger... yeah... let's look at it like that, shall we?)- Jesus invites you to step into and live within His paradoxical way of living. Did that make sense? In other words, He wants you to live the same kind of life that He did (you know... the kind of life that seemed like a paradox to everyone who knew Him). Right after He turns their ideas of what greatness is and what it looks like Jesus says this to His friends (and don't let that distract you from the fact that as He said these words He was looking over the heads of His friends in that room with Him across 2,000 years and into your eyes [and yes- my eyes too] and saying this to you as well):

After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. John 13:12-14 (NLT)

Can you imagine the confidence? We talked about this yesterday but let me just stop for a minute and point it out again. This guy got up from the table and stripped down to His skivvies (I'm not trying to be disrespectful- that's what happened). He wrapped a towel around His waist and washed all of His disciples feet. And when I say "all" that includes Judas who would betray Him in just a couple of hours- what's the deal with that?!?! But I digress. He gets done and puts His robe back on and then says, "you call me Teacher and Lord... and rightfully so. That's exactly what I am to you." He says this right after He's washed their feet which was not only a job for a slave but it was the job that only the lowest slaves would be asked to perform. Jesus does that incredibly humble thing and then makes another outrageous claim- I am your Lord and Teacher.

Then He says- I want you guys to wash one another's feet, ok? Now there are some churches that believe Jesus was being very literal and here and they have actual foot washing ceremonies at their churches where everybody joins in the foot washing to obey Jesus' instruction. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that but I don't think that's what Jesus is doing here. I think He's saying to each and every one of us, "if I was willing to do this for you then there shouldn't be anything that God asks you to that you consider to be 'beneath' you." Does that make sense? We need to be willing to do the dirty jobs that anybody could do but nobody is doing. When Jesus saw a situation like that and knew God was asking Him to serve He never hesitated- He jumped in and became a servant.

Which leads to another question- does that mean I have to do every dirty job that nobody else will do? At Bible study on Wednesday night someone said, "what about when people try to take advantage of you? Does this mean I have to let them do that?" I said, "nope." Then she followed up with this question: "how do I keep that from happening?" and my answer was, "become more like Jesus." Think about it for a minute. Jesus did all kinds of servant like things for people in response to need and desperation but He never responded to demands. In John chapter 6 when He was trying to get away by Himself and recover from what had been arguably the single worst day of His life up to that point (we'll talk about one that was

worse in two weeks when we get to the cross where ironically He put our needs above His while He was suffering beyond anything that you or I can imagine) the people figure out where He's going and meet Him there. Jesus believed serving them was something God was asking Him to do and so He served them. He taught them, He healed them and He fed somewhere in the neighborhood of 15,000 people with a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread. He responded to need. But the next day when the same people came and demanded He feed them again He said, "nope." None of what He did was in response to a demand (although there was that one time in John 4 when His mom kinda pushed Him into turning water into wine at a wedding but that's another story for another time I guess ;o)

Obviously we can't see into other people's hearts the way Jesus could which is why this is tougher for us in some ways but that's what following Him is all about. Trial and error learning to serve without letting others take advantage. And keeping yourself from getting taken advantage of isn't just about you, either. It's also about the person/people trying to take advantage. It's not good for us when others let us take advantage of them. It turns us into spoiled, selfish brats. And today when you woke up your number one job was to become more like Jesus. Your second most important job was to help those that God has entrusted into your life to become more like Jesus. Letting anyone take advantage of you doesn't help them become more like Jesus.

So embrace the uncertainty and the certainty. You may not know how all of it is going to work out and there may be painful moments as you practice and try it all out but of this you can be sure- Jesus wants you to wash feet. What that will look like He can't wait to see.

Friday Reflection: So Jesus is inviting us to join Him in serving the people of this world. He wants us to "wash one another's feet". We kind of talked about what that means yesterday but today let's finish up the week by asking, "why?" Why does He want us to wash each other's feet?

A couple of reasons. First off because that's Who He is. It's what He does. He wants us to be like Him. There is nothing that gives Him greater pleasure than when one of His children chooses to bear the family resemblance. When one of His kids chooses to carry on the family tradition. To join the family business. Serving was pretty much the main point of His life and not just His life on this earth- it's just a part of Who He is. Always has been- always will be.

Theologians have asked the question for thousands of years, "why is Jesus' life on this earth defined by service?" Do you want to know what an awful lot of them believe about that question? A lot of really smart people believe that for all of eternity even before there was a world filled with people that God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit existed in relation to one another. I know the trinity can make our heads hurt trying to wrap our minds around 3 separate persons wrapped up in One God but that's what the Bible tells us. And their existence, their very Nature is wrapped up in service. There is no jockeying for position with the three of them. They serve one another. Seek the good of one another. The Shack movie wasn't perfect (what is, right?) but one thing I really appreciated about it was how it depicted (in allegorical form) how God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit interacted with one another.

Jesus' life of service on earth was really just an extension of His eternal Nature and a reflection of the Nature of God.

So He wants us to be like Him but there's another reason He wants us to serve:

I have given you an example to follow: do as I have done to you. How true it is that a servant is not greater than his master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends him. You know these things-now do them! That is the path of blessing.
John 13:15-17 (TLB)

Service is the "path of blessing." It's the place God's blessings flow. If you've ever looked around at other folks who just seem to have God's blessings pouring down into their lives and wondered where your blessings have gone you might want to check what path you're on. I'm not saying this will always be the answer and there are times when we are on the path of blessing and we don't feel the blessings for lots of different reasons so don't go getting all guilty and blue on me- unless you've been living a life of selfishness and arrogance in which case a little guilt might not be a bad thing. But for most of us doing our best we can often just not notice the blessings in our own lives.

But do you see the importance of walking this path? If there is a pathway upon which God's blessings flow (and according to Jesus there is) then the smart money would be on walking that path (if God's blessings are what you're after).

So go ahead- let's become more like Jesus. Let's join the family business. Let's bear the family resemblance. Let's become servants together. And as we descend into service God will lift us up into the heights and define our little old lives as "great".

Jesus is awesome!