

exploreGOD

"IS CHRISTIANITY TOO NARROW?"

JOHN 14:1-6

This Week's Core Competency

Salvation by Grace – I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by his grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Many people are put off by Christianity's exclusivity. It's not surprising that some are willing to engage in the most severe kinds of scripture twisting to argue that Jesus isn't the only way to God. They contend Jesus isn't the only way to God because the way of Jesus is known to all religions. One of their ilk writes:

"I heard about a sermon preached by a Hindu professor in a Christian seminary several decades ago. The text for the day included the 'one way' passage, and about it he said, 'This verse is absolutely true—Jesus is the only way.' Then, he continued, 'And that way—of dying to an old way of being and being born into a new way of being—is known in all of the religions of the world.' The 'way' of Jesus is a universal way, known even to millions who have never heard of Jesus.

"The way of Jesus is thus not a set of beliefs about Jesus. That people ever thought it was is

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

— Jesus

strange, when we think about it—as if one entered new life by believing certain things to be true, or as if the only people who can be saved are those who know the word 'Jesus.' Thinking that way virtually amounts to salvation by syllables"

(<http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/2000/08/Jesus-The-Way-The-Truth-The-Life.aspx#C5JCp7MmXI9dDydI.99>).

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). The apostle John quotes the words of Jesus because he is writing to convince his readers that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [they] may have life in his name" (20:31). Jesus did not say that he had the way, discovered the truth, or found the life, as if these things were found in something or someone other than himself. Neither is salvation found in walking the way he walked or living the way he lived; it is found in him. As John says in another place, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them" (3:36).

Salvation is not by syllables; "Jesus" is not an incantation. But neither is it by works; no one is saved by following the way of Jesus as best he can. To say that John 14:6 is about "the way of Jesus" amounts to misreading the passage. The text identifies Jesus as "the way." To go outside the text to identify "the way" as a "universal way, known even to millions who have never heard of Jesus" is to misunderstand what both Jesus and John meant. "No one comes to the Father except through me" implies as much.

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On this matter one author writes: "The first thing to notice about John 14:6 is the 'I am' statement identifying Jesus equally with 'the way and the truth and the life.' Jesus claims not merely to know but to be the way, truth, and life. Since he adds that 'no one' [*oudeis*] comes to the Father except by this way, we infer that anyone who wants to come to the Father must find that way that uniquely leads to the Father, namely, Jesus himself. And there seems to be no reason for the definite article that accompanies each of the three terms—the way, the truth, and the life—except that all others who may claim to be the truth and the life are thereby exposed as untrue and without life. In the early church, belonging to 'the Way' became an identifying mark by which Christians distinguished themselves from those who did not believe in Jesus (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22)" (R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, "A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, Counterpoints, 236-37).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

John 14:1-6

1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And 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. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going."

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

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Cf., other translations

1 "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a

place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (ESV)

1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And 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. 4 And where I go you know, and the way you know."

5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (NKJV)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

* Circle "troubled" in v. 1.

* Circle "trust" in v. 1.

* Bracket "Father's house" in v. 2, "a place" in vv. 2-4, and "comes to the Father" in v. 6.

* Circle "rooms" in v. 2.

* Box "if" indicating a *condition* in vv. 2, 3.

* Box "to" indicating *purpose* in v. 2.

* Underline "come back" in v. 3.

* Box "that" indicating *purpose* in v. 3.

* In the margin next to v. 5 write, "Cf., 13:33."

* Highlight "the way," "the truth," and "the life" in v. 6.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. The disciples had good reason to be "troubled." Explain.
2. Jesus' commands, "Trust in God; trust also in me," were certainly apropos. How so?
3. "Mansions" is so misleading and "rooms" is so bland. Suggest a better translation.
4. Jesus is going "there" (v. 2). Where?
5. His reason for going "there" gave the disciples reason for cheer. Explain.
6. What is the *purpose* behind Jesus' second coming?
7. How could Jesus say his disciples knew the way to where he was going when they clearly didn't—did they?
8. What was Thomas's problem?
9. Comment on the relationship of the three metaphors: way, truth, life.
10. **Discussion:** Talk about whether you think people who have never heard about Jesus have any hope of eternal life.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of its message to clarify your understanding of the passage.

Like a punch to the gut, Jesus' surprise announcement left the disciples reeling—feeling sick, truly troubled. They were in the upper room, Judas was gone, and Jesus' hour was looming. "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now; Where I am going, you cannot come" (Jn 13:33). Peter, perhaps not hearing what Jesus said next about a new commandment, was the first to say anything. "Lord, where are you going?" It was doubtless the question on all their minds; it was the question Jesus would answer in John 14:1-6.

But before he did, he offered these well-known words of encouragement: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." In other words, continue to believe in God, and continue to believe in me even after my announcement. The tense of his verbs suggests that he is not urging trouble-free men to avoid worrying. No, he's telling men overcome with anxiety to stop worrying because, as he goes on to say, his departure is for their benefit. One author writes, "A storm raged within these men as they heard Christ announce that He would shortly leave them. To quiet the storm Christ said, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled' (John 14:1). In order to quiet their fears, Christ first exhorted them to faith. He said, 'Trust in God; trust also in me.' God had proved himself faithful in dealing with his people throughout the Old Testament. The recorded history of God's dealing with his people gave abundant evidence of his faithfulness. God was to be trusted. Christ had proved himself faithful in providing for the needs of these men during their time of fellowship with him. He had never failed them. The demonstrated faithfulness of God and of Christ provided a solid foundation for their continued faith in a faithful God and in his Son" (J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 436).

Then he answered Peter's question this way: "I'm going to my Father's house where there are plenty of places to live. And I'm going to prepare one there for

you." The Authorized Version following the Latin Vulgate uses the word "mansions" in its translation of what Jesus said, but, as practically every commentator acknowledges, this is somewhat misleading. The Father most certainly has a nice house! But Jesus' emphasis is not on the lavishness of the facility as much as on its adequacy. There is plenty of room there for all his disciples. Beyond that, the fact that Jesus is going to prepare a place for his disciples has a particularly profound implication that he goes on to explicitly mention, "I will come back and take you to be there with me." This clear reference to his second coming has a strong "with me" element expressed in the following purpose clause "that you also may be where I am." Just think about that for a minute. Christ wants his disciples—he wants us—to live with him and his Father! Amazing!

Peter wasn't the only one with a question; Thomas had one too. "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Speaking for the others, he confessed that they didn't know where the Father's house was—if that's where Jesus was going—and not knowing where it was, how could they know the way there? His question paved the way for what one author calls "the premier expression of the theology of the entire Gospel: 'Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"' (Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John*, 392).

This celebrated meditation of Thomas a Kempis captures the Savior's sense: "Follow thou me. I am the way and the truth and the life. Without the way there is no going; without the truth there is no knowing; without the life there is no living. I am the way which thou must follow; the truth which thou must believe, the life for which thou must hope. I am the inviolable way; the infallible truth the never-ending life. I am the straightest way, the sovereign truth; life true, life blessed, life uncreated" (*The Imitation of Christ*, 56).

The Message of the Passage

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life; no one can go to the Father's house to live except by trusting in him.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the first two "living questions" below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

“Is Christianity Too Narrow?”
(Use the space below for Sunday’s message notes)

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **troubled** "On three previous occasions we learned of Jesus' deeply troubled feelings (Gk. tarasso): when he faced Lazarus' tomb (11:33), when he contemplated the cross (12:27), and when he reflected on the betrayal of Judas (13:21). Jesus' confidence in the greater power and purposes of God made it possible for him to confront each of these crises. Now the disciples must face the same feelings" (Burge, 391). "If the present imperative is significant, its meaning will be 'stop being troubled.' Jesus is not urging trouble-free men not to start worrying. He is talking to men whose hearts are far from tranquil" (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT, 636).

v. 1 **trust** Or "believe" (cf., ESV, NKJV, TEV, NRSV, HCSB). "The two verbs rendered 'trust' (pisteuo; cf. notes on 1:12) could be either indicative or imperative, leading to the following principal translations: (a) indicative/indicative: 'You trust in God and you trust in me'—which at some marginal level is true, but not obviously appropriate in this context since the core problem of the disciples' felt turmoil is lack of trust; (b) indicative/imperative: 'You trust in God; trust also in me' (or the variation of Bultmann [p. 600], 'Do you believe in God? Then believe also in me')—which makes sense as an invitation to extend the object of their faith beyond God as they have known him in the past to Jesus as well, but it is not clear, from their troubled hearts, that their trust in God is very secure at this point; (c) imperative/imperative: 'Trust in God, trust also in me' (NIV). This is the way the verbs were taken in nearly all the Old Latin MSS, and it makes most sense of the context" (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC, 487, 88; cf., Morris, 637).

v. 2 **Father's house** The Father's house is where the Father dwells, i.e., heaven.

v. 2 **rooms** "There are many dwelling places (Gr. mone, cognate with the verb meno, meaning "to abide" or "remain") in heaven. The Latin Vulgate translated the noun mansiones that the AV transliterated as "mansions." The NIV "rooms" is an interpretation of mone. The picture that Jesus painted of heaven is a huge building with many rooms or suites of rooms in which people reside. The emphasis is not on the lavishness of the facility as much as its adequacy to accommodate all believers. Other revelation about heaven stresses its opulence (e.g., Rev. 21:1-22:5)" (Thomas L. Constable, "Dr. Constable's Notes on John," 2015 ed., 241, www.soniclight.com). "The simplest explanation is best: my Father's house refers to heaven, and in heaven are many rooms, many dwelling-places. The point is not the lavishness of each apartment, but the fact that such ample provision has been made that there is more than enough space for every one of Jesus' disciples to join him in his Father's home" (Carson, 489). "The imagery of a dwelling place ('rooms') is taken from the oriental house in which the sons and daughters have apartments under the same roof as their parents" (Merrill C. Tenney, "The Gospel of John," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 9:143).

v. 2 **you [that]** Some manuscripts insert Gk. *hoti*, here meaning "that," before the last clause, which explains the translation in the ESV, "If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" "The thrust of such a rendering is in meaning only a whisker away from the NIV" (Carson, 490).

v. 3 **come back** "The image is straightforward: Jesus is leaving for heaven and there will prepare a place for his followers; then he will return to take them there. But when will this 'coming' occur? At Easter? At the coming of the Spirit? At our death? At his second coming? Scholars have pointed to each of these. For some, it is each one together, so that the verses represent a sweeping all-inclusive promise of encouragement. Even though it is Christ who comes in each event, the best view takes 14:2-3 as a plain promise of the Second Coming" (Burge, 391). "This was a promise that the separation which had so distressed them would not be permanent. It would only be temporary. They could look forward to a blessed reunion with Him. One day He would come as a Bridegroom for His bride and take them to the place that He had been preparing for them during the time of His absence" (J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 436).

v. 6 **the way** The repetition of "the way" in vv. 4, 5, 6 adds emphasis. "The second half of this verse shows that the entire verse must be taken as the answer to Thomas's question. This means that way gains a little emphasis over truth and life. This is not to say the v. 6a should be interpreted as a Semitism, the first noun governing the other two ('I am the way of truth and life', and hence 'I am the true and living way'); the three terms are syntactically co-ordinate, and Greek has other ways of expressing subordination. Still, if Thomas's question and v. 6a demonstrate that way is the principal theme, it follows that truth and life enjoy a supporting role: Jesus is the way to God, precisely because he is the truth of God (cf. notes on 1:14) and the life of God (cf. notes on 1:4; 3:15; 11:25) . . . Only because he is the truth and the life can Jesus be the way for others to come to God, the way for his disciples to attain the many dwelling-places in the Father's house (vv. 2-3), and therefore the answer to Thomas's question (v. 5)" (Carson, 491).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Imagine yourself walking through a forest. You are getting deeper and deeper into the trees and soon realize you are lost. Everything looks the same. You are turned around and can't remember the way from which you came. You panic for a moment until you spot a clearing ahead. At the clearing there is a fork in the road. On the left fork stands a statue pointing down one path. On the right is a park ranger, in uniform, standing at his station. He is pointing down the right path. Which do you choose? Unless you like being hopelessly lost, you choose the right path with the living guide. Our Living Savior has made very clear to us the way of salvation. Other religions may claim to have the answers to life but they do not have the Resurrected One who experienced death but was raised to life. What confidence we can have in our Savior! In a world that believes more in tolerance than in truth, we have assurance that God loves us and desires for us to know Him. To start a conversation with your kids, get a maze book or print one off a website. Work the maze together and remind them there is only one way out of a maze. There is only one way to God as well - through Jesus Christ His Son!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read John 14:1-6

1. Who is talking in this passage?
2. What does Jesus say is the answer to a troubled heart?
3. In what 3 ways does Jesus described himself? (v. 6)

What Do You Think

Jesus said He is going to prepare a place for us and that He would come back and take us there someday. Describe what you think heaven will be like?

What R U Going To Do

There are many places in the Bible that tell us Jesus is the only way to God. Look up these passages and list one truth you learn. Matthew 11:27; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5-6)

Core Comp

Salvation by Grace - I believe that I become a child of God through faith in Jesus, not because of anything I do.

Memory Verse

Psalm 145:4 - One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

**Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.
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30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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