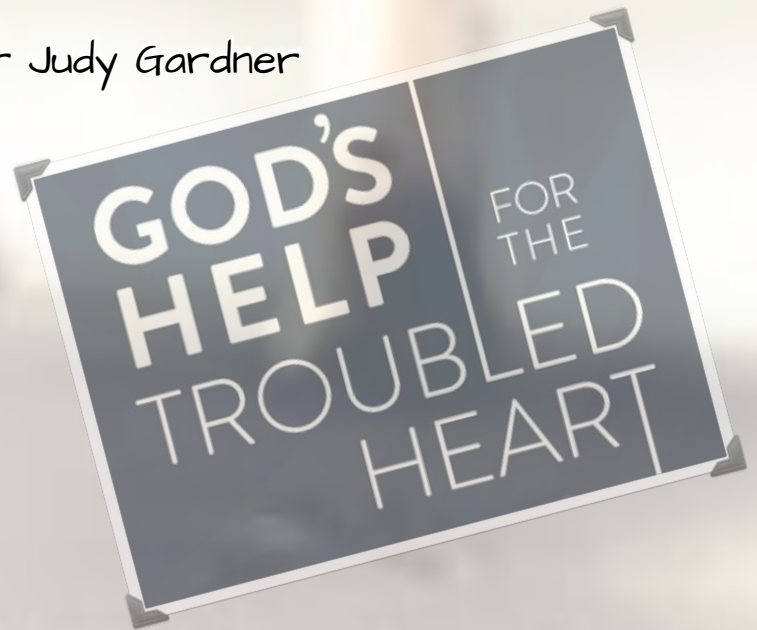


September 22-26, 2025 Edition

Following
The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 194
How To Deal With A Troubled Heart

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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 yuo 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're going to spend some time talking about how to deal with a troubled heart. I know that the last couple of weeks have been tumultuous for a lot of people in this country. People are struggling with feelings of anger, frustration, confusion, sorrow, fear and so much more (no matter which side of the political divide you find yourself on). I can't tell you how to fix what seems to be so broken in this world but what I can do is look back to a time in the gospels when someone was dealing with feelings of anger, frustration, confusion, sorrow and fear and talk about what Jesus told them to do.

On the night of the Last Supper Jesus was gathered with His disciples in the Upper Room celebrating His last Passover feast with them. Over the last 6 months of Jesus' life the apostles had watched as their Rabbi went from a fairly light hearted attitude to something much darker. The closer Jesus gets to the cross the more you see the stress impacting His human side. About 6 months before the cross- right after the Transfiguration- the Bible says:

As the time drew near for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.
Luke 9:51 (NLT)

He knew that what He had come to do was drawing near and it bothered Him. His teaching started getting much darker and direct. For the first 3 years of His ministry He taught a lot of parables with veiled or subtle meanings. But the last 6 months He starts telling them exactly what was going to happen to Him in Jerusalem:

Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead. Mark 8:31 (NLT)

The disciples didn't like this at all- especially Peter. Peter decides that he's going to put a stop to all this ridiculous talk of dying and look at Jesus' response:

As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. "Get away from me, Satan!" he said. "You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's." Mark 8:32-33 (NLT)

Why in the world would Jesus call Peter "Satan"? Why not correct Peter gently the way He usually did before this? The only reason that makes sense to me is that this was a HUGE temptation for Jesus. It must have reminded Him of His time in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. Every one of the temptations that Satan brings to Jesus are thinly veiled invitations to bypass the cross- something that Jesus' human side strongly desired. Jesus' time on this earth was not easy for Him. But He kept on going and yet we see so often the stress impacting Him. We see it when He curses a fig tree for not having any fruit on it. Yes He makes uses it as a living illustration of a deep spiritual truth- that anything (or anyone) who isn't bearing fruit the way we're supposed to is not living up to our sacred responsibilities. We also see it when Jesus cleanses the Temple just days before His death. And yes I know it was a strategic thing to do if His goal was to make the Jewish religious leaders so apoplectic that they would do anything to get rid of Him. But He was in the Temple the day before He cleansed it and all He did was look around and then go home for the night. But for some reason the next day He makes a whip and starts flipping tables. Have you seen The Chosen

season 5 yet? And if you're questioning whether Jesus could possibly have impacted by stress like we are you don't have to look any further than Gethsemane where the stress got so bad He was sweating drops like blood.

So on the night of the last supper it's not just Jesus who's feeling the stress. The disciples were too. And who can blame them? I mean think about it- He has been making the Jewish religious leaders so mad that they have already tried to kill Him multiple times. And now it's not just Jesus who's in the crosshairs- it's the disciples too. But as long as we've got Jesus around we're safe, is what they must have been thinking. But now Jesus is talking like He's leaving and you can see how much that troubles the disciples:

Simon Peter asked, "Lord, where are you going?" And Jesus replied, "You can't go with me now, but you will follow me later." John 13:36 (NLT)

And so yeah, the disciples are dealing with some seriously troubled hearts. They have no idea what's going on and they're confused and scared. There are a lot of people in this world right now who can relate. So what do we do when we end up troubled and scared? Well this week we're going to look at how Jesus tells the disciples to handle their troubled hearts. Maybe it will help us to apply the same lessons He taught them and move beyond the darkness, confusion, sadness and anger.

Tuesday Reflection: Ok so when we are dealing with some seriously troubled hearts because this world just seems to be going to hell in a hand basket (my brother-in-law Jeff Martin who used to be our worship pastor at Riverside used to always say, "where are we going and why are we in this hand basket? but I digress ;o) how do we deal with those feelings? Well on the night that He told His disciples that He was leaving- really leaving- and that they couldn't come with Him just yet how did He tell them to deal with their troubled hearts?

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God; trust also in me. John 14:1 (NLT)

Have you ever noticed that when Jesus tells us to stop doing something He always tells us what to replace it with? Here He tells them, "don't let your hearts be troubled" but I don't know about you- when my heart is troubled just telling me to stop it doesn't do much. In fact the polarity responder deep within me just wants to lean in my troubled heart even more whenever someone tells me to knock it off. But Jesus gives the disciples an assignment- since you already trust in God then trust also in me. But that's easier said than done, isn't it? I mean what does it look like to trust in Jesus?

We've talked about the Greek word for believe before and I think it might help to understand what Jesus is asking for here. The Greek word that is translated as "believe" is pronounced, pistos. And yes it is sometimes translated into English as "believe". But it's also sometimes translated into English as faith, trust and sometimes commitment. You can't understand what the Bible means when you read the word believe, faith or trust without lumping all four of the possible English translations together (belief, faith, trust and commitment) and trying to understand how all of those ideas work together to create one Bible word- pistos.

So when He tells them to “trust also in me” what do you think the disciples heard. Sure they would have thought He was asking them to believe in Him but they also would have heard Him saying, “have faith in me, put your trust in me and when belief, faith and trust fail you then you will have to resort to the commitment you made to me when you became my follower. If you read the disciples stories you can see that their faith/belief/trust waver often. But their commitment rarely did. Jesus seems to be letting them know that on this night they will really need that commitment if they’re going to survive.

And so do we. What do we do when our belief/faith/trust in Jesus starts to wobble? Well if you’re anything like me that happens a lot so this might be a valuable lesson for all of us. When our belief/faith/trust starts to waver that’s when we need that commitment we made when chose to follow Him. Do you remember the day you made up your mind to do more than just agree intellectually that Jesus was who He claimed to be? On that day you decided to do more than just agree that you thought He was the Son of God- on that day you decided to believe **in** Him. You decided to have faith in the way He saw the world and to put your trust in Him. In essence you decided to bet on Jesus. On that day you made a commitment to Him and sometimes that’s all we have to fall back on.

We’ll continue to talk about what it means to trust in Jesus tomorrow but for today maybe spend some time reflecting on the day you decided to bet on Jesus. Do you remember how you felt? Do you remember what you were thinking. I remember how naive I was. I had no idea what was coming down the pike from that one decision. But it’s an adventure I wouldn’t trade for anything in this world. How about you?

Wednesday Reflection: Yesterday we began looking at how Jesus told the disciples to handle their troubled hearts on the night before Jesus would die. He had told them He was leaving and they couldn’t come with Him yet. He told them they would follow Him later. And the first thing He tells them to do is to trust in Him. But what does that look like? Well thankfully we’ve got lots of stories in the gospels where we see this concept at work.

Once when Jesus had just returned from a trip to the-other-side-of-the-lake He was met at the shore by a massive crowd. Among them was a man named Jairus. Jairus was an important man in Capernaum. He was the leader of the local synagogue which would make him sort of the pastor of the town’s only church but more than that he would’ve been like the mayor as well. At this point Jesus has already made the religious leaders in Capernaum so mad that they were plotting to kill Him. Jairus was one of the religious leaders in Capernaum.

I have a feeling this was an awkward meeting. Jesus knew Jairus was plotting His death. Jairus knows that Jesus knows that Jairus is plotting Jesus’s death. So what could possibly get Jairus to swallow his pride and come to Jesus for help? His daughter was deathly sick. He doesn’t know what to do and Jesus is his last desperate hope. I imagine if it was me I’d be pretty sure Jesus was going to turn me down flat because I was his enemy. But it turns out that Jesus responds even when He’s our last desperate hope. Jairus asks Jesus to come heal his daughter and Jesus just says, “take me to her”.

Can you imagine the relief Jairus must have felt at that moment. But that hope was short lived because not long after this some people come from Jairus' house and bring some bad news:

While he was still speaking to her, messengers arrived from the home of Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. They told him, "Your daughter is dead. There's no use troubling the Teacher now." But Jesus overheard them and said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid. Just trust."

Mark 5:35-36 (NLT)

Can you imagine what Jairus must have felt at that moment? Have you ever gotten that kind of news when you weren't expecting it (and when are we ever expecting that kind of news)? That kind of news will send a person into an entirely different reality than they were living in before. Everything seems to be going in slow motion and nothing makes sense except the pain of loss. I don't know if Jesus had to reach out and grab Jairus' face and turn it towards Him but we do know what Jesus says to him- don't be afraid. Just trust. Literally what He says is, no fear, only trust. And there's that word again- trust. Jesus asks for a lot, doesn't He? But oh man, does He ever give a lot back in return. At that moment do you imagine it was easy for Jairus to summon up some faith/trust/belief in a man who had, up until just a few minutes ago, been his greatest enemy? I don't think so. So what is Jesus asking for? Commitment. Let's follow this through, Jairus. You've come this far. Don't you want to see what's going to happen?

Somehow Jairus decides to "trust" Jesus. Even though he probably knows that doing so will mean the end of his tenure as the most important person in Capernaum. But we'll gamble quite a bit on something (or someone) that we think could help our kids. So Jairus takes Jesus to his daughter and Jesus resurrects her. Can you take a minute and read that last sentence again? And can you take just a minute and be amazed by that sentence? You want to know how Jesus' disciples were able to turn this world upside down when they had no education, no money, no power and no influence? It's because for 3 1/2 years they hung around with a guy who could cause sentences like that to be written. He resurrected her. Maybe that's what one of the many things the disciples are remembering as they try to summon up some faith/trust/belief in Jesus on that incredibly dark night of the soul.

How do you summon up that kind of trust/faith/belief? Maybe you recall the stories of the Bible and the Man who could cause sentences like "the dead man sat up" to be written (it's another story of another time when Jesus casually resurrected someone). I know I think about those stories a lot but I also look back at my own life and how faithful Jesus has been to me when I don't deserve any of that. How could He care about someone like me? Why does He care about someone like me? I'm still not sure I understand but I can still look back at all the times Jesus has showed up and saved me in my life. But what do we do when no amount of looking back will ease our troubled hearts?

It's not secret that my wife, Judy, has struggled with depression and anxiety for most of her life. As difficult as it can sometimes be for me to understand why Jesus would care about someone like me, it's way harder for her (no I'm not saying she wonders how Jesus could care about someone like me but that she struggles to understand why/how Jesus could care about someone like her. No matter how hard she tries sometimes she can't shake her troubled

heart. In moments like that she has a favorite verse that she goes to so she can be reminded of something incredibly important:

This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our troubled hearts, and he knows everything. 1 John 3:19-20 (NIV)

Even when our hearts condemn us there is a way to rest in His presence because God is greater than our troubled hearts. Isn't that beautiful? He's greater than Judy's troubled heart (even when she can't feel it), He's greater than my troubled heart and He's greater than your troubled heart. I know the world is screwed up right now. Heck when hasn't it been? We always think what we're dealing with must be much worse than anything in the past. But it's just the same old song and dance. This world is broken and it will continue to be broken until the day that Jesus returns to bring us home. So maybe to day you and I could spend some time reflecting on what it means that God is greater than our troubled hearts. Even when your heart condemns you remember- our hearts do that to us all the time- God doesn't. So, no fear- only trust.

Jesus is awesome.

Thursday Reflection: So the first thing Jesus tells the disciples to do when dealing with an extremely troubled heart is to demonstrate trust/belief/faith/ in the midst of our struggle and when those things fail- follow through on the fourth component of Biblical faith- commitment. Next He goes on and tells them it's important to look to the future:

There is more than enough room in my Father's house. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know the way to where I am going. John 14:2-3 (NLT)

Now that last thing He tells them is interesting- that they know the way to where He was going- but we'll dig more into that tomorrow. For today let's just focus on what He's telling them to focus on- the future. He never tells them He's going to make it easier and smoother for them while He's away. Because that's something He can't promise. There are just some things we have to go through in order to get to the other side. It's like that meme you'll see sometimes on social media that says, sometimes the only way out is through.



I don't know about you but that's not what I imagine the disciples were hoping to hear from Jesus. And yet He looks them (and you too) right in the eyes and without flinching He says, when life gets really difficult and you're going through hell just keep looking forward to the reward that awaits you. I know it sounds trite but He's not asking you to try some wild new experiment that has never been attempted much less been successful. As it turns out there are tons of examples of weak, flawed, messed up and flawed people who have given this a try and even with tons of screwups along the way they were able to get through hell not by going around it but by

going through it (metaphorically speaking of course in every case except for Jesus- He literally got through hell and lived to talk about it). The Bible is filled with examples of these people who did their best to look to the future when their hearts were troubled. If you don't have time to read the entire Old Testament to learn about them there's a Cliff's Notes of some of the most obvious examples of this in the New Testament. It's found in Hebrews chapter 11 and it's known as the Hall Of Faith (sort of the like the hall of fame but this hall revolves around faith/belief/trust/commitment). Look at what the Cliff's Notes tell us about a guy named Abraham:

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith-for he was like a foreigner, living in tents... Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God. Hebrews 11:8-10 (NLT)

If you know anything about Abraham's story you know that he went through some pretty rough times while trying to walk this path of faith/belief/trust/commitment. Much of it was brought on him by none other than himself (I resemble that remark). But in spite of Abraham's weakness and flaws he was able to somehow keep walking with God even after a major screwup (he lied about Sarah being his wife and told a powerful man who was attracted to her that she was his sister so that these powerful men wouldn't kill him to take Sarah as their own wives. He did that... twice). How was he able to keep moving forward? Because Abraham was looking to the future. He was looking forward to a city that was designed and built by God- a city with eternal foundations.

That's the city Jesus is trying to get the disciples to start looking forward to during the Last Supper. He's trying to tell them that even if they have to go through hell in order to get there- and the disciples were about to walk through there themselves as they watched the next days unwind- that they could find the hope they needed to keep going by looking forward to the city designed and built by God Himself. And this is fascinating to me- not only did the disciples have the stories of faith from the Old Testament to guide them in this but they were about to get a living example of it as Jesus is preparing to do the same thing as He walks through hell Himself. The book of Hebrews was written to Christians who were going through intense persecution. It's interesting how that book tells us to get through our toughest trials and times of suffering:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. Hebrews 12:1-3 (NLT)

Look to Jesus. That's the advice that the book of Hebrews gives us. Watch what He did on the cross. And what did He do? He endured all of the shame and humiliation and pain that He had to go through by focusing on the "joy awaiting Him". But what joy was there in the

cross? Only this- that Jesus knew what His work on the cross would accomplish. It would reunite us with Him and His Father. And that thought brought Him such joy that He was able to endure the unendurable. That's how much He thinks of you. He would rather go through everything He went through than lose you forever. And now we're advised that when we're faced with the unendurable- whether it's truly unendurable or only feels that way- we can keep moving forward if we keep our eyes on Jesus. And now that He's gone through all of that on the cross we have an eternal city with foundations built by God Himself that is on the other side of whatever suffering and pain you might experience here.

He's not saying what you're going through isn't that bad. What He's saying is, you will get through anything if you keep your eyes focused on your future with Him. And what good is that going to do? Well keeping your eyes on the future fills us with hope. No false hope. Not wishful thinking. But a hope that can keep you tethered even when the strongest storms of your life come blowing:

Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us. Hebrews 6:18-20 (NLT)

I love this imagery. We are told here that hope is like an anchor that Jesus is holding onto. To use a metaphor that's kind of backwards if you think about it too much it's like being in a ship on the surface of the ocean when a storm comes. I'm no sailer and I know I've heard you shouldn't anchor your ship when you're in an intense storm but the imagery is beautiful. No matter how much the winds of this life may threaten your little ship if you have the hope of looking to the future and what Jesus has prepared for you then you're anchored firmly in Jesus. The storm cannot break the anchoring line- not when Jesus has the anchor in his grip.

So no matter what kind of storm you might be going through today or what kind of storm may develop in the future, Jesus' advice to the disciples (and to you) is that when you find yourself in hell, keep going and don't let go of that hope for the future that is an anchor for your soul.

Friday Reflection: What does Jesus tell His disciples to do when He sees they are really struggling with troubled hearts? Well first He tells them to trust in God (we focused on that part on Tuesday and Wednesday). Then He tells them to focus on the future (we looked at that yesterday) and then He tells them not to worry about directions. So let's set this up, shall we? Jesus tells them not to "let" their hearts be troubled and afraid. Then He tells them to look to the future by telling them all about His Father's house. He tells them He's going to go there and prepare a place for them. And then he tells them something kind of strange:

You know the way to where I am going. John 14:4 (NLT)

But they are not reassured. Why not? Because they don't realize that they know the way which is kind of true- they didn't know the way but He tells them they know the Way. So when Jesus tells them that they know the way to where He's going Thomas says what's on all of our minds:

"No, we don't know, Lord," Thomas said. "We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?" John 14:5 (NLT)

I love the way The Chosen chose to deal with this part of Jesus' story. When Thomas says they don't know the way Jesus gets a bit flabbergasted. But I think it's only because of how close He is to the cross. We talked on Monday about how much the stress of the cross was impacting Jesus in those final days before the cross. But no matter what kind of tone He had when He answered Thomas the message is clear- they may not know the way but they don't need to know the way because they know the Way. Confused? Yeah me too. So let's just read what He actually said:

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!" John 14:4-7 (NLT)

Now they didn't capitalize the words way, truth or life here but if you were reading this in the original language in which it was written you would see the massive emphasis on these words. He's not saying He's a way, a truth and a life. He's basically saying, I am THE WAY, THE TRUTH & THE LIFE. But what's He getting at? Well He's telling them they don't need to know the way because they know Him and He uses first century Jewish marriage rituals to help them understand how all of this is going to go (and I think this is one of the coolest things I've ever learned about Jesus).

That entire night (the night of the Last Supper) Jesus uses imagery from the Jewish marriage ritual. He starts it when He's instituting communion and He says the words, "this cup is my blood poured out for you." How do those words bring to mind the Jewish marriage ritual? Well in the first century if a young Jewish boy wanted to marry a young Jewish girl he didn't just propose to her and then go home to tell the family about it. They had to get the families involved from the very beginning. The boy's dad would sit down with the girl's dad and they'd hammer out the bride price (a dowery of sorts that guaranteed the girl's future if the husband died or left and she had no one to provide for her). After the bride price was hammered out the young man would pour a cup of wine and hold it out to her and say the words, "this cup is my life, given for you."

And at that point a Jewish girl had more say over her future than any other moment in her life. If she wanted to marry the young man she'd take the cup, drink from it and then hand it back to him and say, "I accept your life and I offer you mine in return." But if she didn't want to marry him she would just turn the cup upside down and spill the wine on the ground. I don't think any interpretation into that gesture is necessary is it? But if she drank from the cup offered to her then the couple was officially betrothed. But they didn't get married right away. There was a 6 month waiting period during which the young man would build a room onto his father's house where he and his bride would live. Most people lived in extended family dwellings back then with grandma and grandpa and mom and dad and the kids and even more kids once the kids started having kids. There would be a large communal area where cooking and eating and most of their living took place. But at night they would all retire to their own rooms that were built onto the main living space.

So if the young lady drank from the cup offered to her by her suitor then he would say to her, "then I go to prepare a place for you. And when it's ready I will come and take you to be with me". And then he'd go and start construction. When the 6 months was up and the place for the new family had been prepared then the wedding was ready to occur. All of the bride and groom's friends and family would join them at the groom's house and they'd have a giant parade/party all the way to the bride's house (where the wedding would take place). It was sort of like a Mardi Gras parade but you know, without all the debauchery that one normally sees in Mardi Gras parades. ;o)

After the ceremony was over the parade would reverse. They would walk from the bride's house back to the groom's house (which was now the bride's house too). The point is, the bride didn't have to know the way to the groom's house- even though she probably did in most cases- because she was with her groom and she knew that he knew the way to where they were going. So in a sense, because her husband knew the way to where they were going she did too as long as she knew her husband. Are you following?

Jesus uses the imagery of the wedding when He offers them the cup which represents His blood (or life, same difference in ancient thought) poured out for them. Then when He can see how freaked out they are He tells them no fear- only trust. He tells them that while He is going away for a while that eventually they will be reunited at His Father's house. That's the where He's going to go to prepare a place for them- to build onto His Father's house so there's a place for each of them. Again their minds would've been drawn into the wedding metaphor. And when He tells them that they know THE WAY Thomas disagrees. We don't know where you're going so how can we know the way?

You know the way Thomas because you know THE WAY. What does that mean? Well if you add it all up here's what I think Jesus is trying to get the disciples (and us) to realize. When the times comes for us to move on up to our Father's house we will close our eyes for the last time on this side of eternity. And when we open them back up for the first time on the other side of eternity we won't be alone. We won't be scared. We won't have to try to figure out complex directions or pass any kinds of tests to find our way. Why not? Because THE WAY will be there waiting for us, ready to take us to His (and our) Father's house. And when you consider the wedding metaphor Jesus uses I don't think Jesus will be alone. Because all of your friends and family that have moved on up to their Father's house before you will be there waiting for you and there will be a celebration like you've never experienced.

And together you'll all make your way to the place Jesus is trying to get us to remember is our destiny. And when your heart is especially troubled Jesus says you need to hold onto that more than ever. So I'll leave you with the final words Jesus spoke on this matter so that when you start to grow weary and overwhelmed you can bring these words to your mind and find the strength to keep going- even if you do find yourself going through hell itself:

I am leaving you with a gift- peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. John 14:27-28 (NLT)

Jesus is awesome.