

“A Prescription for Heart Trouble” (John 14:1–14)

Which of God’s commandments would you say is the most difficult for you to obey? Perhaps you would say, “The commandment, ‘Do not lie’ is most difficult because when I’m in a tight spot and I can twist the truth just a little, it seems harmless.”¹ You might say, “The commandment not to covet is really difficult to obey in a materialistic society.”² If somebody I know gets richer or they achieve a status that I want for myself, it’s hard not to be jealous of them.” Perhaps you might point to Jesus’ command not to lust as one being very difficult to obey in a sensual society.³ Or what about Paul’s commandment: “Do all things without grumbling?”⁴ Maybe you have thought complaining is your spiritual gift. There’s no way you could obey that commandment, right?

Indeed, there are many difficult commandments. I think one of the hardest commandments to obey is: “Do not let your heart be troubled” (John 14:1a). There’s so much to be troubled about: potential war and terrorist attack, political corruption, crime and violence, and economic pressure. If you weren’t feeling troubled, you probably are now. On top of the various national and international troubles, there are many “what if?” scenarios. What if I get cancer? What if I’m in an accident? What if my spouse leaves me? What if one of my children dies? What if I lose my job? What if I lose my friends and am rejected at school? All this and much more can bring on heart trouble. That’s why some pundits have said that we live in “The Cardiac Age.” Everyone seems to have heart trouble.

However, your heart trouble may not be based upon national or international concerns or “what if” scenarios. Your worry and fear may be intensely personal. You may be a single mother wondering how to be a good parent and provider. You may be a parent or grandparent agonizing over the rebellion of your children and grandchildren. Perhaps you’re recently divorced and facing life with one income, twice the obligation, and a lot of loneliness and rejection. You may be barely making ends meet and are feeling overwhelmed with your financial obligations. You may be a student standing on the horizon of the future wondering what direction to go. Or perhaps you’re dealing with chronic health problems and you’re weighing the myriad of options for treatment.

Today, if your heart is troubled and you’re feeling confused, concerned, and overwhelmed, you’re in good company. In John 14, Jesus’ disciples felt the very same way. At the ripe young age of thirty–three, their Lord is leaving them. The disciples were not expecting this. They were counting on Jesus being around for a very long time. They were anticipating Jesus to set them free from Roman oppression, and they were preparing to rule and reign with Him. Now it finally begins to dawn on them that Jesus is going to die, and their hearts are heavy and deeply troubled. Fortunately, Jesus addresses His disciples’ heart trouble with some heart-to-heart words. He says to them and to us: “*Believing leads to seeing.*”

In 14:1a, just a few hours before Jesus goes to the cross, He issues a difficult command to His disciples: “**Do not let your⁵ heart be troubled.**”⁶ This phrase is a present tense imperative that can be translated: “Stop being troubled!” This implies that the disciples are already anxious.⁷ This command also suggests that heart trouble is something to be conquered. Of course, if you’re like me, you’re expecting Jesus to give a “silver bullet” solution to overcome heart trouble. Jesus gives the cure for heart trouble in 14:1b: “**believe in God, believe also in Me.**” Yep, that’s it, belief . . . no more, no less. The grammatically balanced structure shows that Jesus is claiming equality with God. He is also commanding⁸ His disciples who are already believers to believe.⁹ Jesus knows that many disciples who believe in Him for salvation struggle to believe in Him in the course of their day-to-day lives. As a result, many disciples suffer unnecessarily with heart trouble. So Jesus says: You must believe that I will never leave you. You must believe I will never stop praying for you. You must believe in My sympathy. You must believe in the comfort of the Holy Spirit that I will give you.¹⁰ When (not if) you have heart trouble, it is simple belief in the right object, Jesus Christ, that will sustain you. *Believing leads to seeing.*

Jesus knows that His followers will be controlled by what they gaze at. So He turns their attention to the glories of heaven. In 14:2, Jesus declares, **“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places;¹¹ if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.”¹²** Many people who read these verses have assumed that Jesus has been working for 2,000 years getting heaven ready for us. It has been facetiously suggested that since Christ was a carpenter on earth, He’s been exercising the same skill in glory and He’s working to finish the rooms in time for our arrival. As magical as this notion may sound, this type of thinking is completely erroneous. Jesus clearly says that there *already* “are many dwelling places” in heaven (14:2a). There is no more need for further construction—the Father’s house is prepared. Jesus is simply saying that through His death, resurrection, and ascension the way to these “dwelling places” will be prepared completely for us.¹³

The reality of our heavenly home can help guard us from heart trouble. No matter how badly things may be going in your life today, Jesus has promised you a glorious eternity. Do you frequently dwell on Jesus’ your eternal dwelling? When we plan family vacations, do we just drive off with no prior preparation? No way! We obtain brochures, we talk to our friends, we examine maps and pack our bags. How much more we should prepare for eternity, for our heavenly home will be wonderful beyond words.¹⁴ This week, when you think about your weekend, your upcoming vacation, or your holiday schedule, think about your heavenly home. Discipline your mind to ponder the wonder of heaven. Although this is difficult to do, it will help you with earthly heart trouble.

The guarantee of heaven is confirmed by Jesus’ promise: **“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.”** In the Old Testament there are over 1,800 references to the return of Christ. Of the 260 chapters in the New Testament, there are more than 300 references to the Lord’s return—one out of every thirty verses. Twenty-three of the twenty-seven New Testament books give prominence to this subject. For every prophecy in Scripture concerning Christ’s first coming, there are eight prophecies about Christ’s second coming.¹⁵ In our fallen world, we can gain relief for our troubled hearts from the fact that Jesus is going to take us to be with Him. Often, this may be the only thing that will carry you through.

Christ’s words reveal that our destiny involves both *a place* and *a person*. The place is the Father’s house, a place which will contribute to happiness; but being there comes from knowing a person—Christ Himself. Today, if you are uncertain of your eternal destiny, trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior. He is the right person, who will take you to the right place. *Believing leads to seeing.*

In 14:4, Jesus assures His disciples: **“And you know the way where I am going.”** Having revealed the beneficial importance of His departure, Jesus uses a mysterious statement to “bait the hook” and draw the disciples into further discussion.¹⁶ He basically says: Men, after all the time I have spent with you, surely you know that I’m going to the cross. I’ve repeatedly spoken of being lifted up, of being betrayed, of dying so you must come to grips with the fact that although I now speak of going to My Father, I am going via the cross.¹⁷

Almost before Jesus could get the words out of His mouth, Thomas blurts out: **“Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?”** (14:5). The one who would become “Doubting Thomas” is uncertain here as well.¹⁸ He contradicts Jesus’ statement that the disciples know where He is going and wants to know how they should know the way. Yet, Thomas did know these facts, but he was unconscious of it and never utilized the information. This is a great example of the educational principle of the law of use and disuse. If you don’t use it, you lose it. This is why so many people can attend church all their lives and never grow in Christ.¹⁹ Such individuals have knowledge in the deep recesses of their minds, but have not been able to effectively articulate it or translate it into obedience.²⁰ But before we’re too hard on Thomas, to his credit, he’s not afraid to admit his ignorance and take it to the light. This is impressive, and the church needs to welcome those who have spiritual questions.

Jesus doesn't hesitate to enlighten Thomas. In 14:6 He declares, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."** Jesus' response reveals once again that heaven is not so much a place, but a Person (the Father), and the way to that place is another Person (the Son). Jesus is the way to the Father. Jesus is the truth of all we find in the Father. Jesus is the life that is given to us by virtue of our access to God.²¹ Put simply, Jesus is the only way a person can have a relationship with God and spend eternity in heaven. This is an exclusive claim that goes against the grain of our society. Hence, John 14:6 has been called, "The Scandal of Christianity." So controversial and so significant is this statement that my next sermon will focus on the ramifications of this verse. But for now, please understand that Jesus insists that He is the only way to God. *Believing leads to seeing.*

In 14:7, Jesus continues His response to Thomas; however, His words are not directed to Thomas alone. John uses plural verbs to show that Jesus is speaking to all of the disciples. After all, Thomas is the courageous spokesman for all the disciples. Jesus says, **"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also;²² from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."** Three times in this one verse, Jesus uses the verb "know" (*ginosko*).²³ The word is used in the Old Testament sense, which speaks of intimate personal relationship, not cognitive knowledge (cf. Gen 4:1; Jer 1:5). Jesus is saying to His saved disciples: You've never come to really know Me. Since you lack intimate knowledge of Me, you don't really know the Father. However, in the prologue of this book John writes, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained [exegeted] Him" (1:18). This is why Jesus can confidently say, "from now on you know Him [the Father], and have seen Him." Jesus is God! Throughout the gospel of John, Jesus claims this again and again and again.

Amusingly, at this point, the disciples use a tag-team approach.²⁴ In 14:8, Philip chimes in, **"Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."** Can you say open mouth and insert foot? Jesus just finished saying that He has shown the disciples the Father (cf. 14:7). But Philip is not yet satisfied. Here we see the longing and need in men to get a glimpse of God and experience His reality. "Show us God and we will believe" is what Philip is saying. Philip is a materialist who wants something more tangible than metaphysical distinctions or theological abstractions. He wants to see some concrete evidence.²⁵ Philip does not understand that *no one* has seen God. It is beyond the human capacity. Even Moses' request on Mount Sinai was refused (Exod 33:18–23). This desire in man to see God is why humankind is so prone to various forms of idolatry and the pursuit of things we can see and touch and hold (cf. Rom 1:18–32).

Yet Jesus, always the patient and gracious God, answers Philip's request with some impassioned words: **"Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves'"** (14:9–11). Jesus is the perfect image, the exact replica, of the Father. To see the Lord Jesus is to see and experience God the Father. Thus, Jesus urges His disciples to believe in Him because of His words. But if they cannot believe because of His words alone, He urges them to believe because of the works He does. *Believing leads to seeing.*

John closes this section in a very surprising way. If I had been writing this gospel, I would have been tempted to tell my readers to identify their personal heart trouble and assure them that Jesus will provide a cure. But John records words from Jesus that deal with fruitful ministry and Christ's kingdom agenda as a means to comfort disciples who are struggling with heart trouble. This is a brilliant approach! In 14:12, Jesus says, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, he [she or anyone] who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father."** Jesus proclaims that His disciples will perform even "greater works" than He has. That's quite a statement, isn't it? I don't recall the disciples turning water into wine, feeding thousands, or raising anyone from the dead. Hence, the "greater works" here do not refer to greater in degree, but greater in the sense of *extent* and *effect*.

As to *extent*, Christ's ministry was limited to Palestine, but through the church, His work went forth not just in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, but to the farthest parts of the known world (Acts 1:8). As to *effect*, multitudes from all over the world would come to believe in Christ and be placed into the church. When we examine the early chapters of Acts we find that from a numerical standpoint, the works of Peter and the other disciples surpass those of Jesus in a single day. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached a sermon and 3,000 people believed in Christ (Acts 2). On that day more are added to the church than had become followers of Jesus during the entire three years of His earthly ministry. All of this occurs through Jesus' power because He goes to the Father. Jesus releases the Holy Spirit to accomplish great exploits in and through the church.

What I love most about this verse in the midst of a discussion of heart trouble and anxiety is that John and Jesus are saying: As difficult as your troubles and trials are right now, please know that the church is going to accomplish God's eternal purposes. If you're feeling discouraged and overwhelmed, observe the kingdom work of the church. The church is touching lives not only in this county, but in our country, and throughout the world. When everything that could go wrong seems to be going wrong and your heart is hurting, please know that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church and God's kingdom will advance. As difficult as your individual heart troubles are, they are momentary (2 Cor 4:16–18). God assures you that as you take your eyes off of your own troubles and focus on Christ's work in His church, you will be strengthened. *Believing leads to seeing*, specifically seeing God work in and through you and His people.

Jesus concludes in 14:13–14 with these words: **“Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”**²⁶ After reading these verses, you may be wondering if the TV preachers are right after all. Like Aladdin's lamp, these verses have suffered centuries of misuse. All too often, Christ has been looked on as a magic genie; and prayer, the fervent rub of the lamp. So many times, our prayers are like a stanza from “Old MacDonald's Farm”: “a gimme gimme here and a gimme there . . . here a gimme . . . there a gimme . . . everywhere a gimme gimme.” But the verse is not a *carte blanche* to gratify our every desire.²⁷

So what are we to make of these verses, which appear to be a promise to grant any request so long as it is asked in Jesus' name?²⁸ Two observations are very important. First, the key to understanding these verses is context, context, context. The pronouns “whatever” (14:13) and “anything” (14:14) you ask Jesus for are specifically related to ministry and the works of Christ. There is no promise for your individual desires to be met. Second, this apparently blank check type promise has a condition that we often overlook: “in My name.” We overlook this condition because many Christians think it means simply making our request and then adding the phrase “in Jesus' name” at the end. Yet, to ask in Jesus' name is to ask in His will, because it is to be in union with Him.²⁹ This further develops the union between Jesus and God the Father in 14:10–11. Jesus is saying that every request you and I make should be attuned to His will with a desire to see Him glorified. That means the request must be consistent with the character of Christ. To do something in the name of another is to act as his representative. As an ambassador speaks in the name of the king, so we must be subject to the will and purposes of Christ.³⁰ The main purpose of prayer is not to get us out of bankruptcy or to lessen the pain of an inflated tumor. God is interested in these problems and often does do just as we ask. But His primary purpose goes beyond our immediate needs. It is His glory that is of primary importance.³¹ Jesus is promising His disciples that their requests concerning fruit bearing would be answered because this would bring glory to God. Jesus is not promising that every request made in His name would be fulfilled.³²

What do you want God to accomplish in and through you and your church for the sake of His kingdom? What are the “greater works” you want God to bring about? Do you have vision to dream big dreams for Him? Do you have faith to pursue God sized goals? If so, God is yearning to answer your prayers because they are about His kingdom and His glory.

It's been said, "Confession is good for the soul, but bad for the reputation." True as this may be, I'm here to tell you that I understand to some degree what it is to experience heart trouble. Let me just share with you on a very personal level that I often feel like I am not the husband that I want to be. There are times when I don't love Lori like Christ loves the church. This hurts my heart and grieves me deeply. As a father, there are times when I am not the spiritual leader that I need to be for my three children. When I see them growing up so quickly and recognize that I am losing opportunities to influence them, I can't help but have heart trouble. There are times when the task of pastoring is overwhelming. At times I feel like I am failing in the goal of bringing people to maturity in Christ. I feel at times that this church needs someone whose skills are different from my own. There are times that I am so confused about which way to go that I am almost paralyzed.

I share these things with you for a reason. I want you to know that I know some of the heart trouble that you feel. What gets me through is what God is doing in the world in and through His church. May you and I take our heart trouble to the Savior and pray that He helps us take our eyes off our concerns and put them on His work. *Believing leads to seeing.*

Scripture References

John 14:1–14

John 1:1–5

John 5:21–40; 6:33–63

Colossians 1:15–20

Revelation 21:1–4, 22–27

Ephesians 2:19–22

1 Peter 2:4–10

Study Questions

1. What troubles my heart most about living in Jesus' absence (14:1a)? Do I strive to believe in Jesus in the midst of life's challenges and uncertainties (14:1b)? How do I choose to trust in God when everything within me wants to worry and stress over my circumstances? What have I learned during those times when I have either trusted Christ or disregarded Christ? How would I explain these experiences to a younger believer?
2. Is the promise of heaven a significant motivation for me (14:2–3)? Why or why not? How prepared am I to go to the place Jesus has prepared for me? What can I do to increase my anticipation for my heavenly home? Are there specific pursuits, pleasures, or possessions that are keeping me from adopting an eternal perspective? If so, how can I eliminate these distractions? Read Colossians 3:1–3 and 2 Timothy 4:8.
3. Why is it so difficult for the world to accept that Jesus is the only way to God (14:6)? Do I struggle with this teaching? How can I explain this "hard to swallow" biblical teaching to my neighbors, coworkers, students, family, and friends? How has Jesus revealed Himself to me as the way, the truth, and the life? Will I share what Jesus has done in my life with those in my sphere of influence?
4. How would I describe my personal relationship with Jesus Christ (14:7–10)? How would those who know me best describe my relationship with Christ? In what specific ways is my intimate/experiential knowledge of Christ lacking? What am I willing to do about it? Who can I call this week that has a dynamic walk with Christ and can help me press on in my spiritual maturity?
5. Do I genuinely believe that God wants to accomplish greater works through His disciples (14:12–14)? What works does God want me to perform? Am I available to obediently pursue those works? Do I pray prayers of faith expecting God to accomplish great things through my family, my church, and me? This week, will I begin to pray for God to increase my faith in what He can do in and through His people?

Notes

- ¹ Col 3:9: “Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices” (cf. Eph 4:22, 25).
- ² Exod 20:17: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (cf. Rom 7:7; 13:9).
- ³ Matt 5:27–28: “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”
- ⁴ Phil 2:1:14: “Do all things without grumbling or disputing” (cf. 1 Cor 10:10; 1 Pet 4:9).
- ⁵ Jesus is no longer talking to Peter (John 13:36–38); He shifts to the plural to include all His disciples in 14:1.
- ⁶ On three previous occasions we learned of Jesus’ deeply troubled feelings (*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).
- ⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*. Revised edition. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 565.
- ⁸ Jesus’ answer can be read either as an indicative (“You [already] believe in God and you believe in me”) or as an imperative (“Believe in God! Believe also in me!”), since the Greek forms for the indicative and imperative are identical in this case. The imperative for both verbs seems preferable (as it is in 12:36; 14:11) since Jesus is charging his disciples to hold fast in light of the upcoming crisis. Gary M. Burge, *The Gospel of John*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 390.
- ⁹ Borchert is likely correct: “Trust may be better than believe.” Gerald Borchert, *John 12–21*. New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H, 2002), 103.
- ¹⁰ Revised from Michael Eaton, *John*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, UK: Sovereign World Trust, 2009), 217.
- ¹¹ The Greek word *monai* (“dwelling places”) was translated “mansions” in the KJV. This rendering occurred because when Jerome translated the NT into Latin he used the word *mansiones*, and the KJV translators adopted the English word with the most similar meaning. But the Latin word means “lodging-places” (similar to the NASB’s “dwelling places”). Unfortunately, the translation “mansions” gives the impression that these “dwelling places” are palacious houses, which is deceptive. The noun *mone* is found only here and in John 14:23 in the NT. It is connected with the verb that means ‘to abide, dwell,’ which is used quite often in John 15. It points to places to stay, nothing more nothing less.
- ¹² Alcorn writes, “The sense that we will live forever somewhere has shaped every civilization in human history. Australian aborigines pictured Heaven as a distant island beyond the western horizon. The early Finns thought it was a distant island in the far away east. Mexicans, Peruvians, and Polynesians believed that they went to the sun or the moon after death. Native Americans believed that, in the afterlife, their spirits would hunt the spirits of buffalo. The Gilgamesh epic, an ancient Babylonian legend, refers to a resting place of heroes and hints at a tree of life. In the pyramids of Egypt, the embalmed bodies had maps placed beside them as guides to the future world. The Romans believed that the righteous would picnic in the Elysian Fields, while their horses grazed nearby. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, said, ‘The day thou fearest as the last is the birthday of eternity.’ Although these depictions of the afterlife differ, the unifying testimony of the human heart throughout history is belief in life after death. Anthropological evidence suggests that every culture has a God-given, innate sense of the eternal—that this world is not all there is.” Randy C. Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 2004), xix.
- ¹³ Burge, *The Gospel of John*, 405.
- ¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *John*. Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), Electronic ed.
- ¹⁵ Robert Jeffress, *As Time Runs Out* (Nashville: Broadman, 1999), 10.
- ¹⁶ Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker* (Salem, OR: Charis, 2001), 99.
- ¹⁷ D.A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14–17* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 26.
- ¹⁸ See John 20:24–25. Yet, note that Thomas is also portrayed as a man of faith, who urges the disciples to join him in being willing to die for Jesus (11:16).
- ¹⁹ Derickson and Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker*, 101.
- ²⁰ What a great reminder to take the knowledge we hear and act upon it. As James, the half-brother of Jesus says, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (Jas 1:22).
- ²¹ Philip W. Comfort and Wendell C. Hawley, *Opening the Gospel of John* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1994), 232.
- ²² John places the verb *ginosko* (“known”) at the beginning and the end of John 14:7a for emphasis.
- ²³ Borchert, *John 12–21*, 112: “The question that could be raised is: When will the disciples truly come to know Jesus?”
- ²⁴ Borchert, *John 12–21*, 113: “We might not be too quick to judge the disciples because if we had been walking in their sandals, we might have been even slower in perception.”

²⁵ For more on Phillip, see John 1:43–48; 6:5–7; 12:20–22.

²⁶ This is a good example of the need to consult parallel passages before making dogmatic statements on biblical subjects. One must balance “whatever we ask” with (1) “in My name” (John 14:13-14; 15:7,16; 16:23); (2) “keep on asking” (Matt. 7:7-8; Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8); (3) “two agreeing” (Matt. 18:19); (4) “believing” (Matt. 21:22); (5) “without doubt” (Mark 11:22-24; James 1:6-7); (6) “not selfishly” (James 4:2-3); (7) “keep His commands” (I John 3:22); and (8) “according to God’s will” (Matt. 6:10; I John 5:14-15). See Bob Utley, *John and I, II & III John*: <http://freebiblecommentary.org/pdf/EN/VOL04.pdf>, 134.

²⁷ Charles R. Swindoll, *Following Christ . . . The Man of God: A Study of John 6–14* (Fullerton, CA: Insight for Living, 1985), 87.

²⁸ Similar statements appear in John 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24, and 16:26. Jesus repeated this promise probably because it is so great that it is almost unbelievable.

²⁹ Elsewhere John writes, “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (1 John 5:14–15).

³⁰ Erwin Lutzer, *How to Have a Whole Heart in a Broken World* (Wheaton: Victor, 1987), 45–46.

³¹ Lutzer, *How to Have a Whole Heart in a Broken World*, 46.

³² Comfort and Hawley, *Opening the Gospel of John*, 233.