



home

Discussion Guide

Home—John 14.1-6

Getting Started: 10 minutes

o What are of your favorite things about being home for the holidays?

Setting the Stage: *“Home sweet home.” “There’s no place like home.” “Home is where the heart is.” Our language is full of words that speak of the importance of home. The tragic irony is that many of us spend our lives searching but never really finding our heart’s true home. We seem to inherently know the importance of home as well as the basic structure of what our true home is. However, even as the thought of home allures us it eludes us. Why is this? Is it possible to ever truly find our way home? Perhaps we are searching for something that we know exists but we are searching in the wrong places. Could it be that we are looking to belong in places and structures that are less than ideal, less than perfect, and so our longing is never really satisfied? Where else can we look? Where else can we find home, the place in which we truly belong, if not here? What if home was not found in a place but with a person? What if home was not realized in a structure but in a relationship? What might home then be and how might we find it?*

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read John 14.1-6.
- In what ways does Jesus point the way home?
- Thomas struggled to understand how a person could truly be at home with God the Father. He did not see God as knowable or approachable. In what ways did Jesus address Thomas’ struggle?
- In your mind, how might Jesus’ promise of home resonate with people’s deepest desires? Can you elaborate?
- Do you feel that Thomas’ words might resonate with people’s deepest fears? Would you explain?
- Jesus offers to bring us home to the Father in and through himself. Is there a point in your life that you have allowed Jesus to bring you home? What has this experience been like for you?
- If you have not approached Jesus and allowed him to bring you home, what might keep you from doing so?
- In what ways might we take this message of homecoming to others in a way that they might understand and respond?

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o Housekeeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

Group Notes

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Context and Background

The last discourse: In John 13-16, we have a record of Jesus' last discourse with his disciples before his crucifixion. In this final discussion, Jesus sought to prepare his disciples for his impending crucifixion, and for life as a disciple beyond the experience of the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Jesus prepares his disciples by explaining his betrayal (John 13.18-30), commanding future faith and practice (John 13.34-35), encouraging his disciples (John 14.1-14), and outlining the life of a disciple in the future apart from the presence of a physical Jesus (John 14.15-16.33). In the present text (John 14.1-6), Jesus seeks to encourage his disciples as they wrestle with the shock of his betrayal and departure. Jesus has just told them that he will be betrayed and that he will leave them for a place that they cannot immediately follow him (John 13.18-38). While Jesus alludes to the fact that the disciples will one day join him, the reality is that the disciples will for a time experience loss and separation (John 13.36-38). This reality causes great consternation on the part of the disciples. A great deal of this consternation is probably due to the nature of the disciple/teacher relationship. A disciple by definition is one who follows in order to learn from a teacher for the purpose of becoming like the teacher. Jesus is now stating that he and his disciples will be physically separated. In the minds of the disciples this effectively ends the discipling relationship they have with Jesus. How can they remain a disciple if they do not have a physical Jesus to follow? Jesus will explain that the discipling relationship can continue through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14.16-20). However, he first must explain the necessity of his departure and deal with the very real and raw feelings of the disciples.

Way, Truth, and Life: The last discourse of Jesus is structured around answers to questions posed by the disciples, all of which are based on misunderstandings of Jesus' words. In this way, the last discourse resembles the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus in John 3. In John 14.1-6, Thomas misunderstands Jesus' statements concerning his departure. Jesus has stated clearly that he is going to his Father and that he will return and take the disciples to be with him in the presence of the Father (John 14.1-4). However, Thomas claims he does not know the Father and thus the way to the Father is obscure; that is, Thomas does not understand how to approach God the Father or if He is approachable at all. Thomas' statement resonates readily with the modern reader. Many people wonder if God is knowable, and if He is knowable, how one might know Him. In response to Thomas' question, Jesus responds that he is the way, the truth, and the life. In this single statement, Jesus answers affirmatively that God is knowable and outlines the way in which He might be known. Jesus claims that he is the way to the Father. He then qualifies this statement by noting that in him is truth and life. These two words—truth and life—qualify Jesus' claim to be the way to the Father. As such, Jesus is stating that in his person one discovers the truth about the Father and the life found in the Father. In short, Jesus is claiming that the Father is knowable through himself (see John 14.8-14).

The Text

An encouraging word (John 14.1-4): In John 13-16, Jesus is preparing his disciples for life in light of his crucifixion and ultimate resurrection and ascension. The bottom line for the disciples is that Jesus will physically depart to be with the Father. This troubles the disciples. They cannot grasp how the departure of Jesus can be anything other than a devastating end to their discipleship journey. Jesus encourages them that they are not facing the end but the beginning of the discipleship journey. Jesus tells them to believe in him like they believe in the Father; that is, Jesus wants the disciples to orient their lives around him like they have God the Father. They can do this because Jesus is going to the Father, but one day he will return and will take the disciples to also be with the Father. The future date to which Jesus refers has been debated. It may refer to the return of Jesus as seen in the book of Revelation, or it may refer to the death of the disciples. It can also refer to the realization of promises about the Holy Spirit in John 14-16. Whatever the exact referent might be, the promise of Jesus is actually quite simple. By placing their faith in Jesus, the disciples will find they can have a physical and real relationship with God the Father. Jesus will ensure that the disciples live physically with the Father. This is a wonderfully encouraging word for it speaks the promise of the restoration of life and creation. Jesus is promising that he will bring his disciples back into a relationship that was intended by God in creation (Genesis 1-2). Jesus then surprises the disciples by claiming that they already know and understand this truth.

A fuller explanation (John 14.5-6): Thomas counters Jesus' statement that the disciples know the way to a relationship with the Father. Thomas actually notes that the disciples do not know where Jesus is going so they can't know the way. This is a polite way of stating that Thomas is not sure of the possibility of a relationship with the Father. To him, the Father seems unknowable. Jesus patiently replies to Thomas by stating that the way to the Father is found in his own person. Jesus provides the path. He then notes that what is true about the Father and the life found in Him are also found in Jesus. This response to Thomas is actually one in which Jesus notes that a relationship with the Father is not a future reality but a present reality through the person of Jesus which will one day be experienced in complete fullness.

Application: Can God be known? If so, how might He be known? These questions are not new to the human experience but have been part of the human condition from the beginning. They arise from a deep desire to be with God. Within each of us is a longing to be with the Father, to be at home with Him for this is life as we were created to experience it. Yet life as we presently experience it seems to negate any possibility of being at home with God much less even knowing or approaching Him. In Jesus we discover that God is knowable and that in and through him we can be at home with the Father. This was his mission, a mission to bring us home. In and through him we discover what being home can be like in an ever-increasing way.