

That The World May Know: Walk As Jesus Walked - Session 5: Do Not Forget Us

A Recollection by Ray Vander Laan

I do not think Jesus is going to return soon," stated a high school girl during a class I teach in a Christian school.

"Why not," I asked.

"Because Jesus said . . . " (and here she paused, know the importance of quoting the Bible accurately), "he said, 'Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me . . . and then the end will come' [Matthew 24:9, Matthew 24:14]. Jesus cannot return yet because we are not being persecuted. He said so."

Silence hung heavy in the classroom. Students and I looked over at two young women from Sudan, West Africa. Tears streamed down one's face; the other stared out the window, nearly in tears. We knew their story. Muslim raiders from northern Sudan had brutally plundered followers of Jesus in the south. These teenagers had seen their families and friends slaughtered and their churches burned. Like many other children, they walked hundreds of miles to the relative safety of a refugee camp in another country. Eventually, through support of Christians in the West, they came to the United States and started new lives. Some do not even know if any other family members are alive.

"I am sorry," the girl who had spoken said tearfully, looking at her two classmates. "I guess we *are* suffering." She had not meant to overlook the suffering of these Christians. But, like many of us, because she was not being persecuted, it was easy to forget the suffering of Christians who are. As a class, we gathered around our Sudanese friends, put our hands on them, and prayed, deeply moved by their pain.

"What do you wish from us, your Christian brothers and sisters from the West?" I asked.

One Sudanese girl softly replied, "Do not forget us."

Her words still echo in my mind. Of course God said that when one member of Jesus' body in the world suffers, we all suffer. How easy it is, though, to pay attention only to what happens in our little region of the world. We do not easily feel the pain of brothers and sisters who live outside our communities of faith, who speak other languages and live in other cultures and in other times. Our sense of the body of Christ often is quite shallow.

This session is part of the commitment I made not to forget them. It not only explores the suffering of Jesus' body many years ago, it is also a testimony to the courage and passion for Jesus that I have experienced through several young disciples of Jesus from the Sudan. Together we are the body of Christ, past and present. And this body is suffering *today*. May God's grace strengthen us.

We Are One Body

We talk about the church being the body of Christ, but our view of what that means is often very limited. It is quite a stretch for us to see our connection in the body of Christ with Christians who live on the other side of the globe. Consider what the early disciples understood the body of Christ to mean. Let that broaden our awareness of what it means in light of our walk with Jesus.

1 As the Passover Lamb and head of the church, Jesus left an indelible image to remind us of what he has done for us.

- a. What is the image?
1 Corinthians 11:23 – 26

- b. How did Paul use this image to illustrate what it means to be part of Christ's body?
1 Corinthians 10:16 – 17

- c. What does **taking** *Communion* represent?
- d. Is the significance of Communion limited to the early church?
- e. Does this realization alter your view of the body of Christ?

- 2 The teaching that those who follow Jesus become members of one body – His body – occurs throughout the letters to the early churches.
Romans 12:4 – 5
1 Corinthians 12:12 – 27
Ephesians 1:22 – 23
Colossians 1:18

- a. Who is the head of the body?
- b. Who are the members of the body?
- c. What is the relationship between the members of the body?

- 3 Paul argued for unity among the body of Christ and for the value of all members and their respective gifts.
1 Corinthians 12:18 – 20
Ephesians 4:11 – 16

- a. Who has made the body exactly what it is?
- b. What are the purposes of the body?
- c. How does the body fulfill these purposes? Ephesians 4:15 – 16

We Share in the Suffering of Christ's Body

Jesus experienced great physical suffering in order to redeem sinful humanity. The unity of the body of Jesus is essential not only to our understanding of how to walk as Jesus walked but to our understanding of suffering within the body of Jesus, the church.

- 1 What were the sufferings of Jesus? What did His suffering accomplish for all of humanity?
Luke 9:22
Colossians 1:21 – 22
1 John 2:1 – 2
- 2 Why was Jesus willing to suffer for the sins of every person?
John 3:16 – 17
John 10:14 – 16
Philippians 2:5 – 8
1 Timothy 1:15 – 16
- 3 How do we know that those who follow Jesus will suffer?
Matthew 16:24 – 25
John 13:15 – 16
John 15:20
- 4 Why should those who walk with Jesus be willing to suffer?
Philippians 2:1 – 5
1 Peter 2:21
- 5 What is the relationship between one member of the body of Jesus who is suffering and the rest of the body? How does God want the member to respond to the members who are suffering?
- 6 1 Corinthians 12:25 – 26

Our Spiritual Inheritance

Many Christians today use the word *faith* to describe an intellectual understanding of Biblical

truth, but intellect alone cannot make a person a true disciple. The Bible links faith to *action* – applying one's beliefs in everyday life. Being a disciple involves knowing God's Word *and* obeying it.

- 1 The heritage of faith passed down to us by the great men and women who put their belief into action daily and served God faithfully must be remembered.
Hebrews 11
 - a. How is faith described in this chapter?
 - b. How does acting according to faith fit with that definition? In what ways did these people demonstrate their faith? What kinds of things did their faith accomplish?
 - c. What did God often do in response to these actions of faith?
- 2 Several times in Hebrews 11, the text mentions God rewarding his followers. How much does the hope of reward promised to Jesus' disciples influence your daily life and your willingness to speak boldly for Jesus?
- 3 Some of the faithful are named. You will probably be able to match names with many of these acts of the faithful.
Hebrews 11:32 – 38
 - a. In what ways did these people suffer for their faith?
 - b. What did some of them accomplish by faith?
 - c. How did the world treat them because of their faith? Might some of these faithful followers have been from Cappadocia?

Trials and Persecution Test a Disciple's Heart

There are no easy answers to the question, "Why do Christians suffer?" Sometimes God gives us an answer; more often, we do not know. We suffer because of the believers who suffered in order to give us the faith. We suffer to pass on that faith to those who come after us. We suffer because of our hope for the heavenly crown that awaits us.

- 1 If we respond to the call of Jesus, the Rabbi who suffered so much for us, what should we expect to happen in our lives?
Luke 6:40
John 15:18 – 21
1 John 2:6

Are any of Jesus' disciples exempt from persecution and suffering?
- 2 What is the purpose for some of the suffering a disciple will face?
Matthew 10:17 – 19.
- 3 Testing the hearts of his people is nothing new to God. What are some of the tests? What did God want to accomplish through it?
Exodus 16:4 – 8
Exodus 16: 16 – 20
Exodus 20:18 – 21
Deuteronomy 8:1 – 6
Judges 2:20 – 23
Zechariah 13:9
- 4 God's testing of his people did not end with the coming of Jesus. The testing and the value of what it accomplished in the body of Christ intensified.
2 Corinthians 1:8 – 11
Hebrews 5:7 – 10
1 Peter 1:6 – 9

- 5 Why does God allow intense testing of his people? What are the benefits and results?"
1 Corinthians 3:10 – 15
- 6 What reward is promised to disciples who faithfully endure testing?
James 1:12

Do Not Forget Us

It has been estimated that more people were killed for Jesus' sake during the 20th Century than during the 19 centuries preceding it. Rebecca represents the tens of thousands of nameless, faceless followers of Jesus whose lives are at risk every day because they walk with Jesus. We must not forget.

- 1 It is not easy for those who are spared suffering and persecution to remember the persecuted, especially when separated by many miles. We must enter their experience with prayer, encouragement, and whatever support we can offer.
2 Timothy 1:8
 - a. What did Paul, who was imprisoned in Rome, ask of Timothy?
 - b. Would you expect him to ask this?
 - c.
 - d. In what ways would knowing that Timothy was doing this have encouraged Paul? How would it encourage suffering believers today?
- 2 What encouragement did John offer to Christians who were experiencing severe suffering for Jesus? How would this message encourage suffering believers today?
Revelation 1:9
- 3 Few people have ever had the passion for walking as Jesus walked that Paul had. Paul

longed for the support and care of the body of Christ when he suffered.
Philippians 1:3 – 8
Philippians 4:14 – 19

- a. How aware of and concerned for Paul's suffering were the Philippians?
- b. What did his relationship with the Philippian believers mean to Paul?
- c. In what ways did the Philippians bless Paul? How did God view their actions?

References

Exodus 16	Exodus 20
Deuteronomy 6	Deuteronomy 8
Judges 2	1 Kings 19
Psalms 26	Psalms 119
Psalms 139	Zechariah 13
Matthew 10	Matthew 16
Matthew 28	Luke 6
Luke 9	Luke 11
John 3	John 10
John 13	John 15
Acts 2	Acts 4
Acts 5	Acts 8
Acts 9	Acts 14
Romans 12	1 Corinthians 3
1 Corinthians 10	1 Corinthians 11
1 Corinthians 12	2 Corinthians 1
Ephesians 1	Ephesians 4
Philippians 1	Philippians 2
Philippians 4	Colossians 1
Colossians 2	2 Thessalonians 1
1 Timothy 1	2 Timothy 1
2 Timothy 3	Hebrews 5
Hebrews 11	Hebrews 12
James 1	1 Peter 1
1 Peter 2	1 Peter 4
1 John 2	Revelation 1