

More Than a Proof Text: An Introduction



The “More Than a Proof Text” column features short articles that simply bring a word of God to life. They aim to demonstrate how a Scripture passage becomes a personalized message, how ministry engages a person. They aim to give a glimpse of the surprising ways that a truth rescripts a life. These provide examples of how you might actually speak a vivid, relevant message into the life of another person. The emphasis is on *relevant* and on *message*. These are not Bible studies or an exposition of a passage. Careful study and accurate exposition reside in the background, but these illustrate ministry happening in the foreground. Yet they are not proof texts scattered into someone’s life like pixie dust. Each connects the dots between a person’s complex struggles and a simple truth that bids to rearrange that person’s reality map.

This issue’s “More Than a Proof Text” article explores the encouraging words Jesus spoke in John 16:33 as he prepared the disciples for his departure. As you read, take in the author’s points slowly. Ponder how Jesus’ words hold out the same hope for us. Consider how the author brings the passage to bear with two examples from her counseling. And may this snapshot become a tool in your toolbox that you can use in your own ministry when a similar need arises.

—*David Powlison*

Counselor's Toolbox

More Than a Proof Text: “Jesus takes you to heart in your sorrows” (John 16:33)



by LAUREN WHITMAN

Imagine you are a parent going on a trip without your children. What would you need to do in order to feel comfortable about leaving them behind? The answers are obvious. You'd arrange childcare and meals. You'd write down a schedule, provide thorough instructions, and give detailed information about where you'll be while you're gone. You'd anticipate needs (and even crises) and plan for how to respond to them. In all these ways, you'd dedicate intentional, thoughtful attention to ensuring your children's wellbeing in your absence.

This is analogous to what Jesus is doing in the extended conversation with his disciples in John chapters 13–17. He knows he is going to leave them soon and return to his Father. And so he is preparing them for his departure. He does not want them to be caught unaware of what is happening. He wants to reassure them of the help he will provide in his absence. He wants to instill a sense of hope and confidence that will make a difference in how they experience life when he is no longer physically present with them.

What will life be like when he is gone? What is the hope he provides? Jesus discloses much to them and gives specific guidance in these chapters. He commands them to love one another as he has loved them. He calls them his friends—not servants—and tells them he has chosen them to bear fruit as they remain in him. He shares the difficult news that the world will

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hate them because he has chosen them out of this world. The world has hated him first so they can expect to be hated as his followers. He promises to send the Spirit—“the Advocate”—who will testify about him. He then calls the disciples to also testify about him.

He then says one last thing before he begins to pray for them. This is the verse we’ll focus on. Let’s listen to his words.

I have told you these things so that you will have peace in me. In this world you will have sorrows. But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

By these words, he continues to shepherd them through the changes that are coming. He is caring for their souls. He is bestowing words that will mean something when it counts. These truths will *matter* in times when they will most need encouragement. What a pastor!

It is no surprise that what Jesus says to his disciples throughout the course of this conversation is applicable to us as well. We live in a time when Jesus is not physically present with us. So we, too, need hope and confidence from him in his absence. Let’s think about how Jesus’ words can apply to us.

Here are five points I’ve drawn from this passage and shared with people I have counseled. I haven’t discussed all of these at one time. Depending on the person and the situation, I have drawn out one or more of these, both from Jesus’ immediate words and from the chapters that provide context for what he says in John 16:33.

Jesus is honest. Jesus tells his disciples “these things” because he is an honest man. Truth telling is an inherent part of God’s character. So when you hear him say, for example, “You will have sorrows,” you must reckon with these words because they have come definitively from the mouth of God. People tend to wrestle with these words because they are difficult to hear. And yet we can all bear witness to Jesus’ truthfulness. “Sorrows” encompasses so much of what we experience in life: trials, afflictions, hardships, and troubles. These categories are general so they allow you to speak relevantly about what Jesus says to people going through any kind of challenging circumstance, from the smallest frustration to the greatest affliction. What we face matters to Jesus—and his words speak to it all.

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