

Series: Called to Follow
“The Conduct of a Disciple”

John 13:1-17

As we open God’s Word today, we are resuming our sermon series about being a disciple of Jesus. Throughout this entire semester, we have been studying the gospels and discovering the marks of a disciple. We have learned throughout the study that many call themselves Christians for a host of reasons, but it is clear that Jesus did not call us to be “Christians” in name only but to instead be devoted followers who live our lives completely for Him. Even though we celebrated the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus over the past few weeks, today we are looking back to another encounter with the disciples that took place shortly before these things occurred. In fact, this is the very background of the message today. In John 12, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey as the people praised Him and waved palm branches before Him. By the time we get to the end of the chapter, Jesus directly foretells that He would soon die and even depicted His manner of death (John 12:32). Now that we come to John 13, we see the disciples gathered together with Jesus in the upper room. It is the Feast of Passover, which marks a very specific time in Jewish history. As they were all remembering God’s gracious deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, Jesus was also looking ahead to the greater deliverance of sin that He was about to offer through His death on the cross. As we read the words of Scripture and as the scene unfolds, I pray that the Lord will capture our hearts as we study “The Conduct of a Disciple.”

Perhaps it sounds strange to refer to the disciples’ conduct, but it is an appropriate word to use. The word “conduct” can be a general word used to describe one’s “actions or practices.” In another sense, the word can also be used to describe one’s “lifestyle and general behavior.” Webster’s dictionary defines “conduct” as “a mode or standard of personal behavior, especially as based upon moral principles.” Surely there are many ways that we might describe the personal behavior of a disciple of Jesus, but as we look at the Scriptures today I believe we see that the conduct of a disciple of Jesus is not merely based upon moral principles but upon a heavenly example. To determine appropriate conduct for a disciple, all we need to do is examine the conduct of Jesus Himself. What was important to Him? What did He model for us? What were the things that He did and how did He do them? The more closely we study Him, the more we will discern what our own conduct should be today. John 13 provides us with a simple but profound picture of what Jesus was all about. As we study the text, I want you to consider, “Is my conduct the same as Jesus? Are the things that were important to Him important to me? Am I following His example?”

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As a follower of Christ our ambition is not to please the world, to please others, or even to please ourselves. As Christians, our desire is to love the Lord and live for Him so that our lives bring glory and honor to Him in all that we do. As a result, we must look to Jesus in all things, and that is especially true in determining our conduct. ****ILL:** Years ago, Gatorade had an ad campaign focused on Michael Jordan. Regardless of many popular opinions, MJ is the greatest to ever play the game. LeBron, Steph Curry, Giannis, and all others fall way short. When Michael Jordan was at the peak of his career, every young boy who liked basketball looked up to him and wanted to be like him. Gatorade came up with the clever slogan “Like Mike, if I could be like Mike.” Their ads

showed all sorts of scenes of Michael Jordan dunking the ball and making impossible moves, and then he came to the sideline to open the Gatorade and take a big cold refreshing drink. The hidden message was that if you drink Gatorade then you, too, could be like Michael Jordan. Like many messages in the world, however, it wasn't entirely true. I personally drank a whole lot of Gatorade growing up, and I still can't dunk a basketball. ☺ The good news for all of us today, though, is that our ambition is not to be like Michael Jordan or anyone else. As a follower of Jesus, our ambition is to be like Him. **Romans 8:29** says, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren." God is working in us today to transform us into the likeness of Jesus. This, though, does not mean that we are to sit back and do nothing and then all of a sudden we'll somehow turn out to be like Jesus. Becoming more like Christ means that we are to be faithfully seeking Him, studying Him, submitting to Him, and surrendering our will to Him. As we do this, God works within us to mold us and to shape us to be more and more like Jesus. Is that your prayer today? Is that your desire? The old song said it well, "To be like Jesus, to be like Jesus, all I ask is to be like Him. All through life's journey from Earth to Glory, all I ask is to be like Him." If that is true in your life today, then John 13 is a rich passage that shows what is important to Jesus and what should be important to us as disciples. I believe that God is calling us to three primary actions:

I. Recognize the Example of the Lord (vs. 1-5)

The entire theme of this Scripture is focused on Jesus' profound act of service. It is sometimes a surprise to people when they learn that Jesus was actually God in flesh because when He came to this earth, He did not act as a king. His actions were so different that even the disciples didn't fully get it sometimes. **Philippians 2:6-7** says, "Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men." Jesus came to this fallen world as a servant in every aspect of His life. In **Mark 10:45** He declared, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." He did not come to this earth as a consumer with a "what's-in-it-for-me?" attitude, as a spectator with an "entertain-me-now" attitude, or as a Sunday morning seat warmer, with a "make-me-feel-good" attitude. Jesus came as a servant to give His life for others.

The profound nature of Jesus' service is not fully realized until we understand the emphasis of these verses. John indicates the fact that Jesus was in a place of knowing several things when He did this. Like so many of us, the disciples did not fully understand what was going on, but Jesus was fully aware of everything. Yes, He is 100% man, but He's also 100% God. The Scripture first says Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart from this world. It is clear throughout the Scriptures that Jesus came to earth with a heavenly **purpose**: He came to lay down His life for the sins of the world. He knew that He was born to die as a substitute for us. **John 3:17** clarifies, "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." Even as Jesus talks about His death in **John 12:27b** He explains, "But for this purpose I came to this hour." In other words, as Jesus is in the upper room He knows that the time of death is near. Jesus also knew the **person** who would betray him. **Verse 2** tells us that He was aware that the devil had already put it into Judas' heart to betray Him. Can you imagine the feelings and emotions of Jesus there in the upper room as He knew that His death was near and that one of His own was already set on betraying Him? And if that were not enough, please understand that Jesus also knew His **power** and authority. He knew that the Father had given all things into His

hands, yet when He came to this earth, He emptied Himself for the glory of the Father and the good of man. Though He was rich, He became poor. Though He was strong, He became meek. Though He had all power and authority, He came in great humility. What grace He was showing in this upper room! Think about it, “What would you do today if you knew you were going to die tomorrow? How would you respond today if you knew that your betrayer was in front of you? If you knew your time was limited, how would you invest it?” I imagine that many of us would probably live that final day very selfishly. Like the country song says, perhaps we’d go “skydiving, rocky mountain climbing, bull riding,” etc. We tend to think in those moments about all the exciting things that we want to pack in, but Jesus was focused not on self but on service to others. The Scripture says it plainly, “Jesus got up from supper, laid aside His garments, took a towel, and girded Himself.” Every man in that room would have been stunned by what was unfolding. Jesus, the very Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Savior of the world was doing for them what they had been unwilling to do for Him. As we consider Jesus’ example, notice two important facts:

A. His Actions Were Motivated by Love

It is easy for us to question, “Why would Jesus do this? Why would He lay aside His outer coat, and take a towel to wash the feet of the very ones that He knew were going to soon abandon Him?” The simple answer is, “LOVE.” His love for the Father and His love for them led Him to pay the greatest costs to serve them. Jesus did not see His disciples as pawns to use or manipulate for His own benefit, but saw them as friends and brothers. The Scripture says, “He loved them to the end.” Some think of this in terms of time since Jesus was about to die, but His love for them did not merely end in death. He continued to show His love for them after He rose again from the grave. The Greek word is a reference to depth. The Scripture is saying that Jesus loved them “to the furthest extent, to the uttermost.” In other words, there is no limit to which Christ would go to show His love for mankind. However big you think His love is, your vision of it is still too small. ****ILL:** A little boy asked how much he loved his mother. He stretched out his arms as wide as they could go and said, “This much.” His mother teasingly asked, “Is that all?” He then walked over to his daddy and got him to stand up and then he spread out his great big daddy arms, and looked back at his mama and said, “No mommy, this much.” That was the biggest measurement the little boy could think of, but that is how much he loved his mother. If you hear nothing else in this message, take great encouragement to be reminded that Jesus loves you to the end, to the furthest extent, even to the point that He would not only wash the disciples’ feet, but that He would also die on the cross for your sins and mine. This is true love. In our culture, we tend to measure love by feelings and emotions that come and go. We even measure love by lust and desire, but true “agape” love is pure, selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional. **John 3:16** assures us that, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” **Romans 5:8** affirms this declaring that, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” As we consider the example of Jesus in this moment, let us first recognize that it was motivated by love.

B. His Actions Were Modeled in Humility

While it is true that Jesus’ crucifixion on the cross was public for all to see, we need to understand that Jesus was not seeking attention. In fact, if you study the book of John in detail

the first 11 chapters largely describe the public ministry of Jesus, and chapters 13-17 describe privately what was happening as Jesus prepared for His death. In other words, He is not seeking attention in this moment but simply humbling Himself and taking the form of a servant to wash the disciples' feet. In that culture, the act of foot washing was usually reserved for slaves in the home. In Jewish culture, this task was reserved for Gentile slaves. Apparently, when the disciples arrived in the upper room, there was no servant there to wash their feet. Assuming that it was no big deal, everyone gathered around the table and began to participate in the supper without anyone washing their feet. You can imagine the shock of the disciples when Jesus got up from the table, laid aside His outer coat, which was common when someone was working, and then girded Himself with the servants' towel. Can you imagine the thoughts of each one, "What's Jesus doing? Why is He grabbing the servants' towel?" All of their attention, curiosity, and intense focus was on Jesus. He then poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet. I love the practical nature of this act. This beautiful act of service was not something that was complicated. Sure, there are some tasks of service that might be very challenging, but Jesus simply had a basin, water, a towel, and most importantly, He had a heart of love for the Father and for others. He showed a humble spirit and willingness to do anything for the glory of the Father and the good of others. So, with these simple objects, He took this moment of opportunity to model one of the most incredible acts of service ever recorded.

As Jesus made His way around the table and began to wash their feet can you imagine Jesus' thoughts as He came to Thomas, knowing that he would doubt Him, to Judas, knowing that he would betray Him, to Peter, knowing that he would deny Him? Yet person after person, foot after foot, Jesus humbly washed the disciples' feet. He truly loved them to the end, but He was also providing an incredible example of humble service that was completely contrary to their own fleshly ways. In fact, just a few short moments later according to **Luke 22:24, 26b-27**, "There arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest." Jesus corrected them and explained, "The one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves." They were more concerned about who was greater and worthy of being served while Jesus was only focused on serving them. And, of course, the greatest evidence of this would occur the very next day, when according to **Philippians 2:8**, "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." There is no greater picture of humility than laying down your own will, your own rights, and your own wants to give your life for another, and Jesus did this for all to see!

II. Receive the Service from the Lord (vs. 6-11)

It is certainly humbling to serve others, but it is also a humbling thing to receive from others. Many of us find great joy in serving and blessing others, but we also find it very difficult when someone is seeking to bless us. ****ILL:** As a pastor, there have been many times that I have visited someone in the hospital or prayed with them over the phone. While I consider it an honor to minister to someone in that way, I will never forget several years ago, as an adult, having my tonsils and adenoids removed. Of course, it was a simple outpatient procedure, but as soon as I came out of the procedure I will never forget a lady named Stacy Muncy who came to bring me a gift basket and pray for me. To be clear, I didn't care to see Stacy at that point and frankly, I didn't want to see anybody because I felt nauseous, but Heather graciously reminded me that Stacy was

there to pray for me. I found it very difficult to receive what I often enjoyed giving to others. Why is that? Why is it so difficult to receive what we often find great joy in giving? The truth is that the same things that often prevent some from serving also prevent some from receiving, the biggest of which is our pride. We see that clearly with Peter. As Jesus makes His way to Peter, apparently Peter speaks up and articulates the thoughts of the whole group. “Lord, do you wash *my* feet?” He’s asking, “Lord, what are You doing? It should be me washing Your feet, and You are going to try to wash mine?” Do you see the irony in Peter’s question? He calls Jesus “Lord” but still questions His plan? Jesus then explains, “Peter, you don’t realize right now what I am doing, but later on you will.” We can hear the implication, “Peter, trust Me. I know what I am doing. I see the big picture. I know what’s coming and I know what you need to learn.” A humble, submissive spirit is both able to give and receive, but Peter is proving that he is not ready for either. He likely thinks that he is ready to lead and perhaps already sees himself as the leader among the disciples, but his lack of reception from the Lord proves that he wasn’t near as ready as he thought. **Warren Wiersbe** said it well, “We can learn an important lesson from Peter: don’t question the Lord’s will or work, and don’t try to change it. He knows what He is doing. Peter had a difficult time accepting Christ’s ministry to him because Peter was not yet ready to minister to the other disciples.”

I don’t know about you, but I find great encouragement when I look at the illustration of Peter. We often think of Peter as a strong leader in the Early Church, but we must remember that this is the evidence and fruit of what God can do in a man who believes in Jesus and is filled with the Holy Spirit. In his flesh, Peter got a lot wrong. He was a very impulsive man who regularly said the first thing that came to his mind and often stuck his foot in his mouth. I am greatly encouraged that if God could powerfully use someone like Peter, then surely He can use us as well. We see his flesh on display as Jesus approaches Peter with the towel and basin of water. Even though Jesus has answered Peter’s question, Peter still does not accept the answer. He responds strongly, “Lord never shall you wash my feet.” This is another double negative in Greek. Peter is saying, “Lord, You should not be washing my feet, and I absolutely won’t allow it.” If I were Jesus, I would probably shake my head in disgust and move on, while thinking in my head, “You big dummy,” but Jesus was patient and compassionate. He actually used Peter’s foolishness and impulsiveness to draw him closer and take him deeper in his understanding of truth. And as was often the case, Jesus uses the practical illustration to teach a much deeper spiritual truth. Jesus gives two simple words of explanation that are important for us to know:

A. **A Word of Caution**

We need to know that the issue Jesus is primarily discussing is not about relationship with Him but about fellowship with Him. Peter has clearly already believed in Jesus and has confessed Him as Lord. Jesus is not saying, “Peter if I don’t wash your feet, then you no longer belong to Me.” He is saying, “Peter if I don’t wash your feet, if you don’t submit to My cleansing, then you are rebelling against Me and going your own direction.” In other words, if Peter did not trust Jesus and submit to Him, then his rebellious spirit would cause a wedge in His fellowship with the Lord whom he loved. To help us better understand this, it is helpful to know that there are two different Greek words that are used to describe the washing that occurs in these verses. The first word is “nipto” which means “to wash a part or portion,” and the second found in verse 10 is “louo” which means “to wash or bathe all over.” This contrast of words is very important for understanding what Jesus is saying. As Jesus makes His way to Peter’s feet with the basin of water Peter would certainly recognize that his feet needed

cleansing. Everyone in that culture wore sandals or went barefoot and their feet were regularly filthy. There was no denying his need for cleansing, what he was denying was the simple fact of submitting to Jesus for this cleansing. As Jesus approaches this specific part of Peter and says, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me,” Peter is so full of faith and devotion to Jesus that he impulsively goes in the extreme opposite direction, “Then Lord, don’t just wash my feet but also my hands and my head.” Peter clearly does not want to be distant in fellowship with Jesus, and he now understands that in order for this fellowship to be strong he must receive from the Lord.

We’ll talk more about the cleansing aspect in a moment, but for now we must recognize that Jesus is showing us plainly that we can’t be in close fellowship with Him, or have “part” with Him, without receiving from Him. The word for “part” is a reference to “portion” and Jesus is showing that if we are unwilling to receive *from* Him, then there are things *of* Him we will not receive either. Though the Lord is not physically here with us as He was with the disciples that night, the truth is that in order for us to be in close fellowship with Him we, too, must still receive from Him. We must be willing to spend time with Him in prayer, willing to celebrate Him in praise, willing to submit ourselves to His Word. We must be willing to trust what He has said and obey. Even for those of us who are faithfully serving the Lord, it is no substitute for sitting at His feet to receive from Him. Remember what Jesus told busy Martha in **Luke 10:41b-42**, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” What was that good part? It was sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to and learning from Him. The simple point is that we will not be in close fellowship if we are not humbling ourselves and receiving from the Lord.

B. A Word of Cleansing

As we get back to Jesus’ response to Peter, He makes a clear contrast between those who are fully bathed, or completely clean, and those who simply need to have their feet washed. Jesus was not saying that you need to repeatedly be saved. He is teaching the importance of a holy walk. The Bible makes it clear that without Christ we are all dead in our trespasses and sins. Without Christ our deeds are evil and we are filled with darkness, but when a person trusts in Jesus as Lord and Savior we are forgiven and our sins are washed away. God declared in **Isaiah 1:18**, “ ‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.’ ” This was true of God’s cleansing of sin in the Old Testament but it is also true in the New Testament. Paul told the Corinthian believers in **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” God is showing us clearly that those who believe in Jesus are fully forgiven and fully cleansed. The reason that Jesus says, “You are clean, but not all of you,” is because Jesus knew exactly at the table who had not believed in Him. He knew that Judas was simply going through the outward motions, but his heart was not right with God. Even as Jesus knew that then, He knows the same today. He knows those who

is merely going through the motions, and if that is you I beg you today to repent of your sins and trust in Jesus to be your Lord and Savior.

For all who are saved, we have already been bathed, our sins are washed clean by the blood that He shed on the cross, and we need now only to wash our feet. Why? Because as we live our lives walking throughout this world it is very easy for us to become defiled and dirtied by the influences around us. We can imagine the disciples looking down at their feet at this moment and quickly recognizing their need for cleansing. Today, we need not look at our feet but simply to look at our hearts and thoughts. We live in a fallen, filthy world, and in our struggle with the old flesh – our eyes, thoughts, hearts, and affections can be easily and regularly tainted. In fact, the closer we get to Jesus the more clearly we see the evidence and impact of this fallen world on us. It should bring us incredible encouragement and gratitude to know that Jesus wants us to be in close relationship with Him, but to continue closely, we must be clean. Which means we have a responsibility. **2 Corinthians 7:1** says it well, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” How do we get clean? **1 John 1:7-9** explains, “But if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

If we are going to fulfill the conduct of a disciple, we must first recognize the example of Jesus, but we must secondly receive from Him. Without these first two vital steps our outward service will be lacking and limited, but if we are following His example and regularly receiving from Him there is no limit to what God can do.

III. Respond in Obedience to the Lord (vs. 12-17)

We can almost feel the silence in the room as Jesus finishes the task, puts away the basin of water, puts His coat back on, and goes back to His place at the table. They are all a bit stunned, probably embarrassed, maybe ashamed that they hadn't thought to serve Him first. The mood is quiet and even a bit somber. What was there to say for their lack of service? How were they to respond in the moment? Jesus then breaks the silence with a word of explanation. In this moment He began to give clear instruction on what He had done and what He was calling them and us to do.

A. The Basis for Obedience

Jesus hadn't served simply to get their attention and impress them, nor had He served simply so that they would have clean feet. He tells them plainly, “As your Lord and Teacher, I have given you an example, that even as I washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet.” It is vitally important that we don't just observe Jesus' actions with amazement and gratitude. It is easy to be wowed by what He did, but this wasn't the point. His desire is for us to follow His example, so He exhorts us to go and do likewise. The basis for this call to obedience is our relationship with Jesus. Is He your Teacher? Is He your Lord? Many can claim it and call Him those things, but the evidence of that is ultimately seen in whether or not we are living for Him. Jesus isn't simply calling us to outward works, just as we have seen in this whole series, He calls us first to relationship and this relationship transforms us and puts us on a mission to do

His work. Remember Jesus' call in **Mark 1:17b**, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Jesus' call was first to personal relationship that transformed them and then gave them new purpose and focus for life. Here in John 13 Jesus says, "You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right. Now look around you. What have I modeled for you? What have I taught you? As I have served you, you are to serve one another." This reference to foot washing is a representation of all the ways that we might serve one another in the body of Christ. It is a call to lovingly care for others while recognizing that no task is too small, and no need is too great. Nothing should stand in our way of ministering humbly to all just as Jesus did. Just as He left His moment of comfort, so too should we leave our places of comfort so that we can serve others. Just as Jesus humbled Himself and became the servant of others, so too should we. Just as Jesus removed the outer garment that might hinder His ability to serve, we must remove those things that are hindering us from serving. Just as He showed love towards the disciples, even to the uttermost where He was willing to give His life for their sake, so too should we. Just as Jesus showed mercy to those who would do Him wrong and bring hurt and pain, so too should we be quick to show mercy to those in need. Jesus' example is powerful, but it leads us to a clear instruction, "Do as I did to you."

B. The Blessings of Obedience

As we close this passage and this message, Jesus gives us a word of promise, "You are blessed if you do them." The word for "blessed" literally means "to be enlarged, to be filled." We often think of being blessed in terms of happiness. This feeds right into our cultural lie that you should live for your happiness. Many people are talking today about their happiness, "Do whatever makes you happy, you deserve to be happy, etc." The problem is that this often feeds our selfish nature. There are many things that you can pursue that might make you temporarily happy, but it will not leave you fulfilled and satisfied. The world says, "Live for yourself. Others should serve you. Do whatever you want, and you will be happy." Jesus says, "Lay down your life for the glory of God and the good of others, follow My example and serve others, and you will be fulfilled." But do we really believe that? Do we truly believe that Jesus' words are true - that we will be blessed and fulfilled when we follow His example and serve others? If we do, then why are so many "Christians" so content to sit and be served, instead of following the example of the One who came to serve and give His life for others? In serving, we see a great contrast between those who are fans of Jesus and those who are truly followers of Jesus. Fans of Jesus come to consume, but a follower of Jesus comes to contribute. Fans of Jesus come to listen, but followers of Jesus look for ways to labor. Fans of Jesus come to see what they can get, but followers of Jesus consider what they should give. Fans of Jesus simply want to observe, but followers of Jesus want to offer their best. Fans of Jesus want to take in, but followers of Jesus want to be poured out. Fans of Jesus come to be filled up, but followers of Jesus have already been filled up at His feet so they come together to build up others. There is great blessing and joy for those who truly hear His words and obey them.

What is God calling you to do today? Perhaps you are one going through the motions and today's message is calling you to believe in Jesus and trust Him as Lord and Savior. Perhaps you are already saved and God is calling you to repent of a specific sin and be cleansed. Perhaps, though, the Lord is calling you to quit sitting at the table. It's time for you to follow Jesus' example and serve others. There is no shortage of opportunities or needs, but there is a great lack of people today who are willing to heed Jesus' invitation - "Do as I did to you." Are you willing to be one?

Are you willing to do your part? Are you willing to fulfill the conduct of a disciple? For the glory of the Lord and the good of others, I pray so!