

Session 5

March 29, 2020

Unit 1: Jesus Is . . .

The Loving Pray-er

Jesus' prayer reveals both His deepest desires for us and how we should care for others.

The Word

John 17:1-21

Session Outcome

To align our priorities with those revealed in Jesus' prayer.

Discover:

Illustrated Bible Life examines the elements of Jesus' farewell to His disciples, and gives verse-by-verse commentary on the Scripture passage.

Last Week:

We explored the ways Jesus is our model of humble service to others.

This Week:

We will explore the ways Jesus' prayer is a model for shaping our priorities.

Listen:

This week's Illustrated Bible Life podcast on FoundryLeader.com takes a look at the elements that make up a memorable farewell address.

Discover:

We know John 17 as Jesus' prayer for His disciples through the ages. Farewell addresses are found in the Bible as well as in the Greco-Roman world of first-century Judaism and the early

church. This week's Illustrated Bible Life article takes a look at "Farewell Addresses" in ancient times and examines Jesus' final words in light of those traditions.

Engage the Word

Final words are among the most significant words we speak. This is especially true when the speaker knows they are final words. Whether the speaker is moving away or nearing death, those final words attempt to pack all the love, all the hope, and all the desires one has for those to whom one speaks. John 13:31—17:26 contain Jesus' final words of love and teaching to His disciples. This "Farewell Discourse" culminates in a prayer found in John 17. In this prayer, Jesus packed all the love, hope, and desires He had for His disciples.

A Prayer of Praise that Glorifies God John 17:1-5

The most important truth about prayer is that it is directed toward God. The first subject of all prayer should be God, not our wants or needs. Jesus modeled that in His prayer for the disciples by first focusing on God and the glory God deserves. The mutual love and mission of Jesus and the Heavenly Father are clear in the opening verses of this prayer. The work of God had become the work of Jesus. So it is right that the Father would bring glory to Jesus as Jesus gave glory to the Father.

The work God had assigned Jesus was to bring eternal life to all who would come to know the Father and the Son. Though we often think of eternal life as life without end, that is a by-product of the real meaning. Eternal life is the life that is shared with us by the Eternal One. Eternal life is the life of the kingdom of God in which all reality is defined by God rather than by the things of this earth. The outcome of such eternal life is deep and abiding relationship with God the Father and God the Son.

A Prayer of Protection for Unity and Joy John 17:6-13

The second focus of Jesus' prayer is on His followers. Though it will be quite clear in the next chapter of John that those followers were not perfect, Jesus presents them to God as having received His words and believed that He (Jesus) had been sent by God. Jesus was able both to rejoice at the spiritual progress made by His followers and to rebuke them when their focus slipped from God and God's mission to their own agendas. This is a sign of authentic love.

Because He knew these were final words, Jesus prayed for protection for His followers. However, His prayer takes a different note from most of our prayers for protection. His prayer was that God protect His followers from abandoning the faith. He prayed for the unity and joy of His followers, knowing that their oneness with each other would strengthen them to remain

faithful in the face of opposition to them and their faith. Likewise, a shared joy strengthens God's people for faithfulness to God's mission.

A Prayer of Preparation for Fulfilling God's Mission

John 17:14-21

Jesus then tightened the focus on the faithfulness of His followers after He was gone. He recognized that they would have to live out that faithful commitment in a world that rejects such devotion. His prayer was not just that His followers survive in the world, but that they take up the mission of God for which Jesus had been sent as their purpose for living.

This kind of commitment to the mission of God requires transformation from our natural desires and motivations. For this reason, Jesus prayed that God would sanctify His followers. The setting apart of followers of Christ to the mission of God is not something we can do for ourselves. It requires the gracious action of God infusing truth and faithfulness into our very hearts. The result will be a union of Christ and His followers in holiness and mission. God had done a similar work of sanctifying when He sent Jesus into the world.

The missional focus of the prayer becomes clear in verse 20 when Jesus prays for all those who will believe in the future. This vast host of people, including us, become part of the people of God because of the faithfulness of Jesus' original followers to the mission He entrusted to them. The prayer climaxes with a vision of a mission equally shared by God the Father, Christ the Son, and all the followers of Christ.

Jesus' final prayer for His followers models for us a pattern of prayer in which we focus on God and His glory, then on the spiritual health of the church, and finally on the mission God gave us for the world that is yet to believe. His prayer calls us to lay aside our personal agendas and desires to unite with each other and with God in restoring all creation to God's creation purposes. Though the first disciples did not know John 17 was Jesus' final prayer for them, we do. This places greater responsibility on us to live in union with each other and with Christ.

Did You Know?

John 17 is often called Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" for His followers. That title was not commonly used for the prayer until the 16th century, but it perfectly captures the loving and intercessory nature of the prayer.

Think About It

Jesus' final prayer greatly emphasizes the unity of His followers. Given the developments of church history and the often fractured nature of the church today, how can we live in a way that answers Jesus' prayer for unity?

Reflect

Read Jesus' prayer in John 17:1-21 several times this week. As you do, allow time for reflection on the message of this prayer.

Roger Hahn

Discussion Guide

Insight

“Eternal life is the quality of life that God gives. Those who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation receive the gift of eternal life. People begin to enjoy eternal life when they become Christians. Eternal life is life with God, the Eternal One. Eternal life also means life after death for Christians. They will live with the Lord in heaven. Eternal life is sometimes called everlasting life. [A Dictionary of the Bible & Christian Doctrine in Everyday English (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2004), 91.]

Connect to My Experience

While it's never easy to imagine our own final days, doing so may provide some clarity about what we think is most important in life. Silently consider,

If you knew your life was coming to its end, what would the content be for your final prayer?

What would you ask God for as it relates to those closest to you?

Would your prayer be a departure from the way you have lived or would it be congruent with the many ways you have tried to embody faithfulness to Jesus?

Transition:

Our prayers reveal our priorities. Today, we will see how this prayer of Jesus recorded in John provides a window into which we can see the way prayer shapes our priorities.

Connect to the Word

Invite a group member to read John 17:1-5, then discuss the following,

The hour Jesus speaks about is His impending arrest, torture, and crucifixion. It's into this setting where God's glory will be revealed.

When you normally think about words like “glory” or “glorify,” what is the setting you imagine? Are you more likely to imagine royal palaces or city streets of gold? Why?

What does this tell us about the nature of the kingdom of God? If God may be glorified through something as horrific as death by crucifixion, how might God be glorified in our world today?

When we look at the life of Jesus, where did God's glory appear? Where did the "holy" show up?

For most, eternal life is the life that will occur after we die. Jesus says that eternal life is knowing God and knowing Him, whom God sent. (Consider sharing this week's Insight with the group.)

How does Jesus' understanding of eternal life in this prayer alter your current understanding of eternal life?

If we come to understand eternal life as something that is happening now in our relationship with God, how should that impact our daily lives?

How would you define "eternal life" as both a present and future reality?

Invite a group member to read John 17:6-13, then discuss the following,

In this part of the prayer, Jesus' attention moves to those who followed Him. Jesus tells the Father that His followers have believed in Him and they have been obedient. The followers have seen that there is a direct connection between Jesus and the Father. Jesus' whole life gave witness to this direct connection.

As you think back over Jesus' life, think of instances when you clearly saw a direct connection between Jesus and the Father. What stories come to mind?

Paul says, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Our lives impact the lives of those around us. Consider silently,

Would others testify that in following you they are following Christ?

Do others see a direct connection between you and the Father? Why or why not?

In the first part of His prayer Jesus defined eternal life. In this section, Jesus gives us a unique way of understanding protection.

When we ask God for protection for ourselves or for others, what do we usually have in mind? (keep us safe; that nothing bad will happen to us)

How does Jesus challenge our understanding of protection? (The exposition states, "His prayer was that God protect His followers from abandoning their faith." His desire was that "their oneness with each other would strengthen them to remain faithful in the face of opposition to them and their faith.")

In verse 13, Jesus prays that they would have the full measure of His joy within them.

What was Jesus saying in this part of His prayer?

What does it mean to have the joy of Jesus residing within us?

Invite a group member to read John 17:14-21, then discuss the following,

Jesus' prayer now focuses on the mission of God in the world. This is why He was sent and why His followers are set apart. Jesus says that His followers are not of the world any more than He is of the world (v.14). Yet, His prayer is not that they would be physically removed from the world either.

Why is it important that they be not of the world, but at the same time be sent into the world?

How can you not be of the world and sent into the world at the same time? How did this happen in the life of Jesus?

Jesus prays that God would sanctify His followers by God's truth (v. 17).

Why would Jesus ask the Father to do this? (The exposition states, "The setting apart of followers of Christ to the mission of God is not something we can do for ourselves. It requires the gracious action of God infusing truth and faithfulness into our very hearts.")

What is the message of verses 20-21?

Connect to My Life and the World

The Declaration of Independence states that the Creator has endowed every creature with certain inalienable rights including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Yet, in Jesus' final prayer, His desire for His followers is much bigger than that. His prayer was for His followers to be so united with God and each other that they would faithfully live out God's mission in the world.

What is God's mission in our world? How would you communicate this to a total stranger?

How do you see your life as participating in God's greater mission?

As you bring your session to a close, pray together using the pattern Jesus gave us:

Begin by focusing on God and God's glory.

Pray for the spiritual health of the church.

Close by focusing on the mission God has given us.