

John 17 - The Lord's Prayer for Us ¹

Before the lesson: Have blank sheets of paper and pens/pencils for the Transformational Exercise.

Fellowship question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion and lead into the study):

When you pray, how do you address God? (For example, “Heavenly Father”, “O, God”, etc.)

Who first told you about Jesus?

Information

When we refer to “The Lord’s Prayer”, more than likely we are talking about the prayer that begins, “Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.” But we know that Jesus offered many prayers. The longest prayer that we have in the New Testament is that found in John 17. The entire chapter is Jesus’ prayer. And who does he pray for? You. And me. And all other believers who have followed the original disciples.

- Have a class member read John 17:1-6.

“Glory” is a key word in John’s gospel. Most often, it is used to point to the cross of Christ. The glory of God is demonstrated in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. What we see in Jesus is not a god who is obsessed with self-serving power, but the God who is the embodiment of self-sacrificing love – thus, is vulnerable. This vulnerability is part of the glory of God.

Jesus addressed God as Father. In his Aramaic language, this is the word Abba. It would be similar to the word our young children use to address their fathers, dada or daddy.

How does Jesus define “eternal life” in verse 3? Is this something that happens after death, or is it a present reality? (we do have eternal life after we die, but eternal life actually begins once we have trusted in Jesus Christ; we know some of who God and Jesus are now, but we will know much more after this life, etc.)

“John does not write that knowing God leads to eternal life, as if it were the reward for faith, but that knowing God, to be in communion with God, *is* life, because God is the source of all life. (cf. Col. 3:4).”²

¹ This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2024. More lessons may be found at greatbibleteachers.com.

² Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 349. Author’s emphasis.

Jesus' prayer in John 17 has three parts. In verses 1-6, Jesus prays about himself. In Verses 7-19, Jesus prays for his disciples. In verses 20-26, he prays for future believers.

- Have a class member read John 17:11-16.

Jesus prays for our protection. If we are saved, if we are beloved by God, if our Lord Jesus has overcome the world, from what do we need protecting?

“The disciples will carry on [Jesus’] mission in the world and need God’s protection as they do so. Because Jesus prays for them in their witness in the world, his prayer for them will affect the world as well. If Jesus’ own mission is the model for the disciples’ mission, then that mission will lead them into deep engagement with, not withdrawal from, the world.”³

- Have a class member read John 17:18.

What does it mean to be in the world but not of the world?

“Like Jesus, the disciples are not ‘of the world’ because the world, virtually by definition in John, stands opposed to Jesus and his followers. Jesus’ disciples are oriented in their commitments and conduct to God’s way, truth and life, and not to the world’s ways. Being ‘in the world’ and being ‘of God’ are not opposed to each other; but being ‘of the world’ and ‘of God’ are in opposition. In John, to be ‘of the world’ is to stand against God.”⁴

“Maybe it would serve us better — at least in light of John 17 — to revise the popular phrase “in, but not of” in this way: “not of, but sent into.” The beginning place is being “not of the world,” and the movement is toward being “sent into” the world. The accent falls on being sent, with a mission, to the world — not being mainly on a mission to disassociate from this world.”⁵

- Have a class member read John 17:20-21.

Let me ask you to think about something, then we’ll go around the room for you to give a short answer. And, as always, you may say “pass” if you don’t have an answer or don’t feel comfortable answering. Here is the question: Who first told you about Jesus?

[Give a moment for reflection, then ask class members to share briefly – just a name or a role (such as my preschool Sunday School teacher).]

Now, let me ask you this: Who told *them*? And, who told *them*?

We may not know the name of the person who shared the gospel with another person a generation or so ago, but if you were able to trace it back from generation to generation,

³ Thompson, 352.

⁴ Thompson, 354. Author’s emphasis.

⁵ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/lets-revise-the-popular-phrase-in-but-not-of> Accessed 11-21-2024.

eventually you would get back how far? (to people who walked with Jesus; to Paul or other early missionaries; to one of Jesus' disciples; to Jesus, etc.)

Think for a minute about that heritage. Think about the link from one generation to another. It has been said, "Christianity is one generation away from extinction." What do you think of that saying? (Yes, if we do not pass along the gospel, we will have a generation that does not know about Jesus; No, somehow the Holy Spirit seems to get the gospel to people even when it is illegal and/or dangerous to do so; etc.)

- Have a class member read John 17:20-21 (again).

Jesus' prayer is that his followers, present and future, will be one. We are to be united. Are we also to be uniform? Why or why not? What is the difference?

Jesus prays that his followers will be one as Jesus and the Father are one. There is a theological term for the unity of the Trinity: perichoresis [pronounced per-e-kor-e-sis]

"Perichoresis refers to the mutual interdependence, or further yet, the mutual interpenetration of the persons of the Trinity. Miroslav Volf...speaks of the perichoresis as the 'reciprocal interiority' of the persons of the Trinity...According to LeRon Shults, 'The point of the doctrine of perichoresis is that in the Trinity, personhood and relation-to-other are not separated as they are in us.' The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit retain genuine separable identities while at the same time they are so related to one another that one can't be known without the other."⁶

This may seem abstract and we may wonder what it has to do with us. But, this is something Jesus prayed for that involves you and me and all Christians from the time there were Christians. Jesus prays that we might be accepted into this perichoresis. "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us." This type of language is threaded throughout Jesus' prayer for us.

"And, if we are in the Son, we are in the Father, and if we are in the Son and the Father, then we are designed for mutual interiority to the degree that humans can participate in God."⁷

Obviously, we will never be an equal part of the Trinity. We will not become God. But Jesus does pray that there will be a true unity with God and with God's dream for this world. Thus, Paul will later urge "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). Further he will urge that we will be so enveloped in God's Spirit that we will demonstrate "fruit of the Spirit", concluding, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit." (Galatians 5:25)

Part of our being united to God and God's mission is being united by love.

⁶ Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon. 2007). 16.

⁷ McKnight, 17.

“Jesus ends his prayer by underscoring the point that God has sent his Son into the world out of love...Jesus’ mission to make God known is to make God’s love known.”⁸

- Have a class member read John 17:22-23.

We believe that God is a holy Trinity made up of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. They are united. But they are different “persons” and have different roles and characteristics. So, it seems natural that there would be a variety of churches and denominations and Christian organizations that have different roles and characteristics.

We are tempted to put our role or characteristic up against that of another group in an attempt to determine which is the most faithful to God’s plan for the world. Oddly enough, *our group* always seems to be the best! And, our group may be better in some ways, but *their group* may be better in other ways. The question is, can we unite to minister with one another in Christ-centered ministry? If we are “children of God”, will we work with our brothers and sisters to do our Father’s will?

How have you seen church members from different denominations work together?

If the Church is united, how does that affect evangelism? How is evangelism affected by a Church that is divided? Can you offer positive or negative examples? Our printed lesson writer notes: “There is no stronger witness than the godlike love we show to one another and to the world – and there is no greater detriment to the gospel than one who claims Christ but breathes hostility.”

Earlier in the gospel of John, Jesus gave the disciples what he called “a new commandment”. This was not a new suggestion, but a new commandment.

- Have a class member read John 13:34-35.

Jesus is consistent in these two passages – one a commandment and one a prayer. If we love one another, as we are commanded to do, the world will be interested in hearing about our God.

We sometimes hear stories of persons who do acts of kindness or service for others, who are then asked, “Why are you doing this for me?” It gives an opportunity to let persons know of God’s love for them. Does anyone have such a story you could share?

[Here is a story along this line, from Matt and Michelle Norman’s book, Pivot: “The suburban town of Barcelona, where we live, has a mayor who, like most Spaniards today, does not practice a religion. Once he commented to our Spanish Baptist pastor, ‘I am impressed with the work that you do with the impoverished in our community. You don’t just push your religion, you seem to care deeply for the people you serve.’ The pastor responded, ‘You don’t understand. That is our

⁸ Thompson, 357.

religion. Jesus cares more deeply for us than we can imagine. He calls us to do the same for our neighbors.’ Our work needs to reflect the God we serve.”⁹

Transformational Exercise

[Distribute blank paper and pencils/pens.]

Earlier I asked about who first told you about God’s love. For some of you, this may have been someone you’ve known all your life. For others, this may have been someone who is a vague memory, at best.

Either way, I’d like for us to conclude today’s lesson with an imaginary conversation with that person. What would you like to say to that person? What would they say in return? On your paper begin the conversation, maybe with something as simple as, “Thank you for telling me about God’s love for me.” You’ll have several minutes to reflect and write.

[After allowing some time to reflect and write, invite any class member who would like to share insights they gained from this exercise. Then close in a prayer something like this:]

You who are love created this world to be a world filled with love. It is far from that now. Still, we see your love through those who are selfless in their service for others. Help us to model that love with all of your children in this new week. Amen.

⁹ Matt and Michele Norman, *Pivot* (Decatur, GA: Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, 2016), 15.