



Lesson Overview

Week of January 24

1 Life Need:

Note what is required for a team to succeed.

2 Bible Learning:

Learn what Jesus prayed for in His final hours.

Suggested Material

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit: Poster and Reproducible Sheet—Called into His Light*

3 Bible Application:

Discuss ways we can show what Jesus is like.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit: Reproducible sheet—Some Causes of Divisiveness*
■ Two sheets of newsprint, marking pens, tape

4 Life Response:

Show what Jesus is like.

Church/Home Theme:
Christ Jesus Is Our Savior

Lesson Focus:
Show Jesus through unity and love.

Lesson Scripture:
John 17:14-24

Called for the World's Belief

Jesus spent time in fellowship with His disciples in the upper room before His crucifixion. He also spent time praying for them and future believers. John recorded Jesus' intercession, which centered around the unity of believers and their display of God's love to the world.

Jesus, God's Spokesman—Jesus told all people precisely what the Father wanted to communicate about Himself. Now this task belongs to Christ's followers. Jesus prayed for His disciples not to isolate themselves as they faced difficult challenges. God's children are His lights in society, being used by God to shine His light into utter darkness and chaos. Believers represent His wisdom, truth, and love. Jesus also prayed for their protection from the evil one, Satan. Many temptations lure Christians, and they are in danger of being overcome by them, but Jesus prayed for their strength and for their pattern of behavior to be like His—walk in obedience to the Father, rely upon His authority, and reflect His character. God does not just say to Christians, "Get the job done, however you can." Instead, He lovingly invites His children into the vineyard to work for and with Him, holding up Jesus as an example, and with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Unity and Love—Jesus prayed for future believers to worship together as one family. The foundation of this unity is in the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Each Person in the Trinity is completely unified with the other. With unity comes love. God sent His Son to die for us, and Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross proclaimed to the world, "God loves you!" (John 3:16).

The Mandate Today—Loving one another and standing together in unity is often difficult for Christians. Students of the Bible, even scholars, interpret specific biblical passages differently. Sometimes, the intensity of the arguments causes church splits and denominational discord. When opposing parties can come together, forgive, and be loving toward one another, in Christ's name and for His sake, this sends a strong message to the world that we are one as God in the Trinity is one.

As Your Students Arrive

Ask students to share things that can only be accomplished successfully as a team. Summarize their answers on a board or sheet of newsprint. Their answers may include having or raising a child; performing surgery; winning in a team-oriented sport like baseball, football, or soccer; building a house; or

helping those who have been affected by a natural disaster. Then note that nearly all the things we want to achieve require the efforts or input of others—they require a team—including what is accomplished in and through our churches.

Link to Last Week

Ask students to share what happened last week when they considered the ways Jesus wants to make them whole and trusted that He has the desire and authority to do so.

1 Life Need

Note what is required for a team to succeed.

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Called for the World's Belief

Amen's conference? Will women be there?" asked J.T. Forest hesitated, and then smiled. J.T. was ribbing him. The two men were in the men's locker room of the local fitness center.

"No," Nathan added as he walked up to the two men. "That's why it's called a 'men's conference.' Hope you can come, man."

Nathan hugged Forest and grabbed his duffle bag. "See you a little later, right? It should not take us long. Some other brothers will be there to help."

As Nathan walked away, J.T. raised his eyebrows at Forest. "What's up with you and that white boy?"

"Nathan's my brother in Christ," Forest said.

Nearby, a young white man was listening to the exchange. "I just thought you were a true brother. That's all," J.T. said.

"I am. I'm down with Jesus, and anyone else who loves God!"

Forest was a little nervous. He had accepted Christ three months ago. He sometimes wondered if he seemed like a "sellout" or worse—weak. Nathan and other brothers in Christ were discipling him. Mainly, Forest trusted the Lord with his new life.

"Hmm. OK," J.T. said. "I'll catch you later."

After J.T. left, the young white man came over to Forest. "Can I have one of those flyers for the men's conference? I think I'd like to go."

- 1. What is required if a team hopes to successfully accomplish the purpose for which it was organized?**
- 2. What mission has the Church been called to fulfill?**
- 3. Why are demonstrating unity and love essential if a church is to successfully accomplish its mission?**

LESSON FOCUS: Show Jesus through unity and love.

Read the opening story aloud. Then divide students into small groups and ask them to discuss their responses to **Question 1, 2, and 3.**

Regarding Question 1, for a team to successfully accomplish its mission, it needs to clearly identify what that mission is; it requires a commitment from all members of the team to do their part in helping that mission to be achieved; and individuals on the team sometimes have to set aside their personal desire for the sake of the group.

For Question 2, our churches are supposed to reflect Jesus' character; they have been called to be light and salt in the communities in which they are placed; they are tasked with sharing the Gospel message with people in their communities and to be involved in communicating this message to the world at large.

Question 3 reminds us if a church is not unified, it will be difficult for it to clearly communicate the Gospel message or to show what Jesus is like. This could result in it being unattractive to outsiders. Churches also need to encourage individuals and groups within it to be involved with members of their community and to be "in the world" even though not "of the world."

2 Bible Learning

Learn what Jesus prayed for in His final hours.



On the poster sheet, read the last two paragraphs, then note on the poster the photo of the ancient olive trees in the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed.

JESUS PRAYED FOR HIS DISCIPLES

Read John 17:14-19, then highlight these important points:

- On the night before He was crucified, Jesus prayed for those He'd chosen to carry on His work.

BIBLE EXTRA

Unity in the Church

There is no doubt that many churches today are characterized more by being divided than by being unified. We frequently argue about things that are not essential in God's eyes and in the process lose focus on what is; we compare ourselves to others and sometimes conclude that our pastor, style of worship, or theology is somehow more "spiritual" than others; we frequently fail to realize that there is only one Church and that our individual assemblies are simply part of a greater Body whose mission is to represent what Jesus is like.

Jesus understood even before the Church was established how easy it would be for it to be known for traits that could hamper its ability to accomplish its mission to share the Gospel to a world in dire need of it. And so, on the night before He was to be crucified, Jesus prayed for the Church. He prayed that it would be committed to the task it had been set aside for; He prayed for the spiritual protection of those called to complete that task; and He prayed that those who followed Him would show what He is like through their unity and love for one another.

- Jesus first prayed for Himself, demonstrating His determination to complete the mission He'd been given: to die so that others could have eternal life (vss. 1-5).

- Jesus then prayed for the His disciples then and in the future. He prayed not for them to be taken away from the difficulties ahead but for their protection in the midst of them (vss. 6-16).

- Jesus prayed for their sanctification. He wanted them to live according His Word and to remain

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Jesus Prayed for His disciples

John 17:14-19, KJV

14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

John 17:14-19, NIV

¹⁴"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."

On the night before He was crucified, after His last supper with the Twelve, Jesus prayed for those He had chosen to carry on the work of proclaiming the Gospel message to the world. But Jesus first prayed for Himself (vss. 1-5). He had come into the world to accomplish a mission—He came to die so that others could live. In less than 24 hours He would do what was required to complete that mission. His prayer showed He was determined to fulfill that mission.

Second, Jesus prayed for His disciples (vss. 6-19). Jesus knew that things were going to be tough for them. He'd warned them earlier that they would be hated by the world just as He was (John 15:18-27). Jesus prayed that they would not be taken out of the world so they could escape from it but that they would be protected in the midst of it. Their enemy in this respect was the evil one—Satan—and they would not be able to avoid the difficulties that arise from the control he has over the world (1 John 5:18-19). Jesus' prayer was not for



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 825-827 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*.

committed to the proclamation of it (vss. 17-19).

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 4

Jesus first prayed for Himself. He knew that His mission and purpose for coming to earth was to die so that others could live. He demonstrated in His prayer His determination to complete this mission so that God's purpose for Him could be fulfilled.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 5

Jesus then prayed for His disciples. Jesus knew

what lay ahead for them would be difficult. He didn't pray that they would be removed from the world so they could escape these difficulties, however, but that they would be protected from spiritual harm in the midst of them. Jesus also prayed for their sanctification, that they would live according to His Word, and they would remain committed to the proclamation of it.

JESUS PRAYED FOR THE CHURCH

Read John 17:20-23, then highlight the following key ideas:

- The third thing Jesus prayed for was those who would come to believe in Him. He prayed for the Church, the mechanism He'd chosen to show what

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their physical protection from these difficulties. It was more likely that He was praying that they would not be discouraged or spiritually harmed by the ways the evil one would attempt to keep them from proclaiming the Gospel message.

Jesus also prayed for their sanctification. This is best understood in context as being set aside for a task rather than being morally purified. Jesus was sent into the world to accomplish a mission. He sanctified Himself for this by doing what was required to complete that mission. Jesus prayed that His disciples would be similarly sanctified for what He was asking them to do by living according to the truth they had heard and remaining committed to the proclamation of it.

4. *What was the first thing Jesus prayed for at the end of the last supper He shared with His disciples?*

5. *What was the second thing He prayed for?*

Jesus Prayed for the Church

John 17:20-23, KJV

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

John 17:20-23, NIV

²⁰My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

BIBLE EXTRA

Sanctification

Sanctification in some biblical contexts is the process of a person being made holy or morally purified. It is something that results in a believer in Jesus being different than unbelievers by being committed to living in ways that honor God and represent what He is like. Sanctification can also mean to be consecrated for a purpose or to be set aside for a task or mission.

Moral sanctification is a work of the Holy Spirit accomplished in partnership with a believer's desire to live a pure life. It is this partnership that changes the heart of a believer so that he can become a "new creature" where the old has passed away and all things become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

Being sanctified for a purpose—being set aside for a mission—is also a work of the Holy Spirit. It is God who defines our purpose and enables us to fulfill it; and it is God who consecrates us. Like moral sanctification, successfully fulfilling the purpose for which we've been sanctified cannot be accomplished without a living and ongoing partnership between the One doing the calling and the one being called.

He is like after His return to the Father.

- Jesus undoubtedly understood how easy it would be for churches to be characterized by divisiveness, competition, and exclusiveness.

- Jesus didn't want believers to be known by these traits. Instead, He wanted them to be characterized by unity and by love.

- Jesus provided an example of what this looks like by comparing Himself to the Father. With regard to this, there is no "He and "Me." There is just "We."

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 6

Jesus prayed for those who were going to follow Him. He was in fact praying for the Church, the instrument He chose to represent what He is like and

BIBLE EXTRA

Seeing God's Glory

No one is capable of seeing the full glory of God in this life (1 Tim. 6:15-16). But at one time Moses demanded to see it, perhaps because of uncertainties about the future of the Israelites who'd just escaped from slavery in Egypt and if God would continue to guide them in the days that lay ahead (Exod. 33:18-23). God responded, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence...But you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." Although Scripture doesn't record the actual fulfillment of this, it does note that afterward Moses' face was so radiant that the other Israelites "were afraid to come near him" (Exod. 34:29-30).

Although God's full glory cannot be seen in this life, we see glimpses of it in nature (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20), in God's relationship with the Israelites (Isa. 49:3), in Jesus (John 1:14; Heb 1:3), and hopefully in our churches (1 Cor. 12:27).

to communicate the Gospel message to others. Jesus may have understood how easy it would be for churches to be characterized by divisiveness, competition, or exclusiveness and didn't want these to be the traits believers in Him are known by.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 7

Jesus understood that the world would know what He is like by observing what the Church is like. If churches are not unified in both their character and message, the world will have a faulty understanding of what Jesus is like.

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The third thing Jesus prayed for was for those who would come to believe in Him. Jesus prayed that they would be united—that they would be one—knowing that it would be through this that others would see what He is like. Jesus was in fact praying for the Church, the instrument He chose to represent His character to the world and demonstrate His love for it. Jesus did not want Christians to be characterized by divisiveness and bickering; He wanted those who followed Him to be characterized by their unity and love for one another.

Jesus provided an example of what this type of unity looks like when He said that the Father is in Him and He is in the Father. This is best represented perhaps by a single circle with two Names, "Father" and "Jesus," not two circles with one labeled "Father" and the other "Jesus." There is no "He" and "Me" when it comes to the Father and Jesus. There is just "We." This unity is to be pictured in the Church, which Paul said is to represent Jesus and His body (1 Cor. 12:27). The Church, as a whole nor individuals, should not be characterized by an attitude of "us and them"—or worse, "us vs. them"—but rather by unified "us" or "we" attitudes.

Jesus understood that the world would learn what He is like by observing what His disciples are like. Jesus told His disciples earlier that evening that the world would know that they were His followers by seeing the ways they demonstrated their love for each other (John 13:35). He emphasized in this final prayer how important it was to be unified as well.

6. What was the third thing Jesus prayed for?

7. Why was it critical that those following Him be unified?

8. What example did Jesus provide?

Jesus Expressed His Will

John 17:24, KJV
24 Father, I will that they also,

John 17:24, NIV
24 "Father, I want those you

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 8

Jesus noted that He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. This is perhaps best represented by one circle with two names rather than two with different names. There is in a sense no “He and Me” when it comes to the Father and Jesus; there is just “We.” Churches are to exemplify this same type of oneness.

JESUS EXPRESSED HIS WILL

Read John 17:24, then note the following important points:

- Jesus didn’t just want His disciples to see His glory; He promised that they would someday fully

see who He is and what He is like.

- Though they did not know what the Father is like, they knew Jesus was sent by the Father and what Jesus is like. By this, they could see what the Father is like.

- Others would know what Jesus is like through their words and how they lived, and by their unity and their love.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 9

Jesus prayed that His disciples would someday see the full extent of who He is, something that would not occur until they joined Him in eternity. Jesus was not merely asking for this to happen, however. His prayer is perhaps best understood as Jesus willing or promising for this to be done.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 10

Jesus wanted them to demonstrate His character and communicate the path to eternity through their words and lives; He wanted them to show what He is like through their unity and love.

WINDOW ON THE WORD

The Unified Early Church

Acts 2:42-46 records how the early church was characterized: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.” This apparently resulted in the early church being attractive to outsiders, for “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (vs. 47).

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KJV
whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

NIV
have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

The last thing Jesus prayed for was for His disciples to see His full glory. The KJV translation of this begins with, “I will.” This may reflect a more accurate understanding of Jesus’ intent than the NIV version which begins with, “I want.” For though Jesus was expressing His desire for them to see His glory, He was also exercising His will for this to be so. He was in essence saying, “I will for you to see My glory,” or perhaps more so, “I promise you will see it.”

What Jesus was willing was for His disciples to see the full extent of who He is. So far, they had only seen a glimpse of who He was; His glory had been revealed to them only in part. Jesus was promising that someday they would fully see and understand who He is.

Jesus concluded by once again noting His purpose (vss. 25-26). Although the world did not know what the Father is like, they knew that Jesus came from the Father and what He, Jesus, was like. And because of His words and life, others could understand a bit what the Father is like.

It would now be through the words Jesus’ disciples shared and how they lived that others would come to know what He is like and could come to an understanding of the path He’d provided to eternal life. But this would occur only if those who followed Him sanctified themselves for the mission they’d been called to complete and were committed to showing what Jesus is like through their unity and love.

9. What was the last thing Jesus prayed for?

10. What was required if His followers were to fulfill the purpose for which they had been called?

3 Bible Application

Discuss ways we can show what Jesus is like.

This step will give students an opportunity to discuss ways they can show what Jesus is like through their unity and love. You may want to photocopy this page so that each group has its own set of instructions. Give two sheets of newsprint, marking pens, and tape to the group doing the listing. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit for the group using it.



Handout:

'Some Causes of Divisiveness'

Read the handout and respond to the questions at the end.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read "What Is Essential to God" in the student book and respond to **Questions 11, 12, 13, and 14**. God wants us and our churches to accurately reflect what Jesus is like and to clearly articulate the Gospel message. This can be accomplished only if we are unified in spirit, purpose, and message, however, and if we are demonstrating Jesus love in visible and practical ways.

Listings: 'Do' and 'Don't'

On a sheet of newsprint labeled "Do This," write out some things you can do to show what Jesus is like including ways unity and love can be demonstrated. On a second sheet labeled "Don't Do This," list things that can undermine your efforts to do so. Then discuss some practical steps you can take so that you are doing more of what's on the first list and less of what's on the second.

Personal Accountability

Share with your group some things you are doing that could result in undermining your church's ability to show what Jesus is like though its unity and love for others. Then share some things you can do to help your church be more effective in doing so.

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What Is Essential to God

We've all heard stories of churches being split by disputes over the color of the carpet in the aisles or the style of worship in the sanctuary. What these stories reflect is the tendency of some congregations to get caught up by what is not essential in God's eyes and in the process to lose focus on what is.

One of my pastors had a sign on his desk that said, "Is this worth splitting the church over?" When I asked him why he displayed this, he replied that though he was open to hearing complaints from church members, this question would help his members gauge the significance of their statements. He was reinforcing the importance of being unified in what is essential to God and allowing for differences in what is not.

In addressing some issues that were creating divisions in the church in Corinth, the apostle Paul said, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). This summarizes best what ought to be the central focus of the message and character of all churches; it ought to be all about Jesus and the path He provided for our redemption. Unfortunately, many churches are known more by how they worship than Who they worship or by the quantity of their attendees rather than the quality of their character.

Jesus wants our churches to represent what He is like. He also wants us to clearly communicate why people need to be saved and what He did so they could. What's required for this to be successfully accomplished is for us to be unified in spirit, purpose, and message, and to demonstrate Christ's love.

- 11.** What are some positive ways your church already demonstrates what Jesus is like?
- 12.** What are some areas where you struggle in this regard?
- 13.** Why are unity and love essential for showing what Jesus is like?
- 14.** In what additional ways can you demonstrate unity and love?

4 Life Response

Show what Jesus is like.

Few of us intentionally want to undermine the efforts of our churches to accomplish the mission Jesus has called us to pursue. But sometimes our passion for a particular belief or process can get in the way of focusing on what is essential in God's eyes. Jesus wants us to show what He is like through our unity and love for one another. When we fail to do this or don't do our part in contributing to the whole, we may affect the ability of our churches to show what Jesus is like or to

communicate the Gospel message.

Read "Contribute to the Team" in the student book. Then divide students back into the groups they formed in Step 1 and ask them to discuss their responses to the question at the end. One thing we can do to help our churches be more unified is to quit complaining about non-essentials—to "stop making mountains out of molehills." We can also be committed to exercising our spiritual gifts in ways that enhance the efforts of our churches to fulfill the purpose for which they've been called.

End the class by thanking Jesus for His willingness to work in us and through us so that we can accomplish the mission He's set us aside for. Pray that each student will do their part to contribute to your church's efforts to show what Jesus is like through its unity and love.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Luke 2:36-38; Acts 2:16-21; 21:8-9. Ask your students to think of women from the Old Testament who spoke for God in some way.

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Contribute to the Team

The ultimate team-oriented mission may be the one Jesus has chosen for the Church. His mission is to show what He is like and to communicate the path He's provided so people can be saved. Each individual church contributes to the whole, and as Paul noted in 1 Corinthians 12, every one of us has a part in the process.

Our churches will not be able to effectively do their part in achieving this mission unless they are united in their purpose and message and are demonstrating Jesus' love for others in real and tangible ways. And they will not be able to do this unless each of us is willing to contribute to the team.

► *What can you do to help your church be more effective in showing what Jesus is like through unity and love?*

KEY VERSE

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word. —John 17:20, KJV

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." —John 17:20, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of January 25 through January 31

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Luke 10:38-42—Jesus Supports Mary's Choice.

Tues. John 11:1-11—Jesus Responds to Sisters' Call.

Wed. John 11:38-45—Jesus Raises Lazarus; Mary Believes.

Thurs. Luke 24:5-10—Women Carry Resurrection Message to Apostles.

Fri. Luke 24:44-53—Jesus' Final Words and Ascension.

Sat. Luke 2:28-35—Simeon Sees Impact of Jesus' Ministry.

Sun. Luke 2:36-38; Acts 2:16-21; 21:8-9—The Spirit Empowers Daughters to Prophesy.