

“The Keeper” (John 17:6–19)

Have you ever heard a spouse say, “She’s a keeper” or “He’s a keeper?” Of course you have. This is a common expression. Parents will say the same thing about a child, “He’s a keeper” or “She’s a keeper.” The idea behind this expression is: I really enjoy my spouse or child. I think I’ll keep him or her around. Often this idiom is used by a person who has trouble communicating his or her feelings. So by stating, “She’s a keeper” or “He’s a keeper,” such a person is able to communicate love without having to articulate the phrase, “I love you.”

One of the ways that Jesus communicates His love to you is by keeping you. Jesus says, “You’re a keeper, not because of anything you’ve done but simply because I love you.” Jesus keeps you and me through His life, death, resurrection, and intercession. The old adage, “*Finders keepers*” is really true when it comes to Jesus. He finds us and He keeps us. This is why we can say that Jesus is “The Keeper.” In John 17:6–19, Jesus prays to the Father that He will keep the disciples safe in a hostile world and guard them from Satan.¹ It is worth noting that Jesus prays for His disciples before He chose them (Luke 6:12), during His ministry (John 6:15), at the end of His ministry (Luke 22:32), and later in heaven (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).² Prayer was and is incredibly important to Jesus and should be to us as well. In these verses, Jesus makes three requests for His followers. First, He prays for security (17:11). Second, He prays for protection (17:15). Finally, He prays for sanctification (17:17).³

John records Jesus’ opening words in 17:6: **“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept⁴ Your word.”** Jesus manifested God’s name to His disciples. The word “manifest” (*phaneroo*) means “to make visible or clear.” In this particular context, the word means “to make known by word of mouth.”⁵ During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He manifested God’s name (i.e., His character) with His lips. The manifesting of the “name” of God is an Old Testament theme (Ps 113:3; Isa 59:19; 66:19). Malachi prophesied with the words of God Himself when He stated “My name shall be great among the Gentiles” (Mal 1:11). Have you sought to make God’s name great with your lips? While it’s important to manifest God with your life, it’s equally necessary to manifest God with your lips. Are you following in Jesus’ sandals? Do people in your neighborhood, work, and school know that you’re a Christian? Have you clearly communicated this so that there’s no doubt in anyone’s mind? Jesus made sure that His disciples understood how to have a relationship with God. He also emphasized how they could come to understand God’s character. Are you all about manifesting and revealing the Lord?

Jesus viewed the disciples as those whom God had given to Him out of the world (cf. 6:37; 15:19), not as those who had chosen to follow Him. Five times in His prayer (17:2, 6 [twice], 9, 24), Jesus refers to believers as those whom the Father has given Him.⁶ This viewpoint accounts for Jesus’ confidence as He anticipates their future. They belong to God, and therefore, God will protect them.⁷ Similarly, God will protect you if you belong to Him. It’s all made possible through God’s gracious gift. This is confirmed in the final phrase of 17:6: “they have kept Your word.” In John’s gospel, when Jesus refers to His “words” (plural), He is talking about His commands, but when He refers to His “word” (singular) He is talking about His gospel.⁸ Thus, Jesus is indicating that the disciples have responded to the gospel.⁹ While the disciples were often marked with selfishness and short-sightedness, they believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. While Jesus is certainly concerned about your obedience in response to the gospel, He is first and foremost interested in whether or not you have trusted in Him as your Savior. Today, have you believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin? If you were to die today, do you know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you would spend eternity with Christ? If there is any doubt in your mind, place your faith in Jesus Christ alone today. Remember Jesus’ words, “*Finders keepers*.” If you are found in Him, you will be kept for all of eternity.

Jesus continues His prayer in 17:7–8: **“Now they [the disciples] have come to know that everything You [the Father] have given Me is from You;¹⁰ for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.”** There was much that the eleven disciples didn’t yet understand, but they did believe that Jesus had come from God and that His words were God’s words. Commendably, they accepted Jesus’ teachings even though they didn’t understand them fully, and what they understood they believed. Like the disciples, do you and I “receive” and “believe” God’s Word?

In 17:9–10, Jesus now explicitly begins His prayer for the disciples: **“I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them.”** Jesus makes it clear that He is praying for His disciples, not for the world in general. On the last night of Jesus’ earthly life, He focuses on praying for those who are believers. Too often we pray for unbelievers until they accept Christ and then drop them from our prayer list. The point at which Christ and the disciples intensively begin prayer, we tend to stop.¹¹ Have you stopped praying for a believer you used to pray for? Is the Lord prompting you to pray for this person once again? If so, please respond to His prompting. There’s likely a reason that the Lord is bringing this person to your mind. He may choose to use your prayers to take this person to the next level of spiritual maturity.

Jesus also indicates in 17:10 that He has been “glorified” by His disciples. He is referring specifically to the disciples’ initial faith in Him (cf. 2:11) and additional baby steps they have taken. Do you consciously consider Jesus’ desire to be glorified by your life? How can you seek to glorify Him more in your life? As a church, how can we prioritize the glory of Jesus Christ above all else?

In 17:11 Jesus declares, **“I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are.”** In light of Jesus’ imminent departure, He prays for His disciples. The title “Holy Father” appears only here in the Bible and is a reminder that God is both pure and paternal.¹² Jesus prays that His disciples will be kept in God’s name. In ancient times a “name” represented one’s character or reputation. This has some carry-over into modern culture. Perhaps your father or mother used to admonish you to do nothing that would bring dishonor to the family name. Your parent’s concern was that your activities not detract from the family reputation. Likewise, God has entrusted His reputation to Christ, who revealed it to the disciples. Now Jesus prays that the disciples may be kept true to that revelation. The purpose of this prayer is that the disciples might share a unity of spirit modeled after the unity shared by the Father and the Son in the Trinity.¹³ How is God’s reputation and character doing at your school or work? Are you an answer to Jesus’ prayer? Do you represent God well or does your life send mixed messages?

Regardless, Jesus is committed to you. In 17:12 He prays, **“While I was with them [the disciples], I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.”** Jesus makes it clear that He kept and guarded His disciples’ salvation while He was on earth. The only exception was Judas, “the son of perdition,”¹⁴ who was an unbeliever. In 6:64 Jesus said, “‘But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.” This is made clear in 6:70 where Jesus declares, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?” Later in 13:10, Christ said that Judas was not among those who were clean. Again, in 18:9 He reiterates, “Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one.” Although Judas was certainly one of Jesus’ disciples, he never believed in Him as his Savior. Therefore, to read into this account a loss of salvation is fallacious. It also contradicts Jesus’ own words that He did not lose any whom the Father had given Him.

Salvation for those who believe is secure because it's a free gift. The Lord didn't make the down payment for salvation and then expect you to keep up with the installments. If you cannot be saved as a result of your good works, you cannot lose your salvation as a result of your bad works. Salvation is of God. He desires to save those whom He has given to Christ as a gift. It is inconceivable that any one of them will be lost. Today, if you have wrestled with the assurance of your salvation, put your fears to rest once and for all. Trust in the promises of God's Word. Jesus declares, "*Finders keepers.*"

In 17:13, Jesus gives the reason that He prays these great truths: **"But now I come to You [Father]; and these things¹⁵ I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves."** Jesus wants His disciples to experience full joy once He leaves. Just knowing that Jesus had kept them and will continue to keep them ought to facilitate joy. Does the promise of eternal life cause joy to well up within you? Despite the challenges in your life, are you filled with Jesus' joy?

Jennifer Rennie and Tasneem Torres are two ladies in our church who are filled with joy. Both of these ladies trusted in Christ as adults. Their lives were radically changed. Consequently, they have joy that is infectious. I suspect that those people who become Christians as adults (like the original disciples) have an easier time being on fire for Christ. Perhaps they are more aware of their sin since they lived without Christ throughout their teen and young adult years. Maybe they are more grateful for Christ's saving work because it is new and fresh to them. Whatever the reason, those of us with childhood conversions should let their joy rub off on us. We must seek to surround ourselves with baby Christians. Their joy will prove to be infectious and will spread to the rest of the church family.

Jesus continues His prayer in 17:14–16 where He says, **"I have given them [the disciples] Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."** Jesus gives the disciples God's Word, and the world hates them. The world hates Christians because we do not support their agenda. Instead, we follow Christ and His kingdom agenda. This quickly creates enemies! Yet, it is interesting to note that Jesus doesn't pray that disciples be exempted from evil. That prayer will not be answered until we receive glorified bodies and are in heaven. It's significant that Moses, Elijah, and Jonah all prayed to be taken out of the world, but in no case was the request granted.¹⁶ The goal is not isolation, but insulation. Jesus prays that His disciples may be kept from the influence of the evil one.¹⁷

In 17:17, Jesus utters a classic verse on the authority of the Scriptures: **"Sanctify¹⁸ them in the truth; Your word is truth."** In this context, "to sanctify" (*hagiazō*) means: "to set apart for God's service." The Word is the sphere by and in which believers are sanctified. With the mind we *learn* God's truth through the Word. With the heart, we *love* God's truth, His Son (14:6). With the will we yield to the Spirit (of truth, cf. 14:17; 16:13) and *live* God's truth day by day. It takes all three for a balanced experience of sanctification.¹⁹ The Bible is the truth—the whole truth and nothing but the truth! You cannot grow without a regular diet of Scripture. If the only biblical "meal," you get is on Sunday, you're not growing. Newborn babies don't take six-day breaks between meals. In fact most newborns don't even take three-hour breaks between meals. There are a lot of Christians who start off with a real growth spurt because they are so hungry for the Word. They can't get enough of it fast enough. But then as time goes on, their biblical "feeding schedule" gets off because the Word becomes a convenient extra in their lives. They begin to get spiritually weak because they aren't getting enough nourishment for their souls. So what do you do if you've lost your appetite for the Scripture? If you've lost your taste for the Word you need to force-feed yourself for a while. That's what the hospital does when, for whatever reason, you can't eat on your own. The doctors put a tube into you directly. In a sense, they force you to eat, because they know you won't get better without nutrition. God knows you won't grow or get better without the Word. Spiritually, many of us are losing weight that we can't afford to lose. We are spiritually emaciated, because we have not been feeding on the Word regularly.

We must never underestimate the value of simply reading our Bibles. Charles Spurgeon said, “I can find ten men who will die for the Bible for every one who will read it!”²⁰ Because the Bible is spiritual nutrition, we can be fed just by reading it, whether we think we’re getting anything or not. The Word is like taking vitamins. You may not feel an immediate benefit when you take a handful of vitamins; yet, when you take them consistently, the invisible work they do inside your body is staggering.²¹

Unfortunately, it’s all too easy to fill up on physical and spiritual “junk food.” I’m a cold cereal aficionado. I like cold cereal because it is quick, easy, and tasty. I will sometimes eat cold cereal three times a day! I typically crave sugar sweetened cereals (e.g., Cocoa Pebbles, Lucky Charms), but one bowl never satisfies me. I go after a second bowl, and sometimes even a third bowl. The reason is simple: There’s little or no lasting nutrition in the cereals I eat. Spiritually speaking, it’s all too easy to fill up on sports, television, music, social networking, hobbies, work, or maybe even pornography. Yet, God will not allow you to be satisfied with any of these substitutes. He has designed you to only be satisfied with His Word.

Today, will you become a student of the Word? I encourage you to read the Bible daily. Begin at the beginning of a book and read it all the way through. Start with the gospel of John or the book of Romans. Pray that the Lord reveals Himself to you in a powerful way. Read with a pencil and underline the things God will teach you. Then after you have underlined, be sure to obey. It’s really that simple. Don’t put off this discipline another day. Ask the Lord to change your life from the inside out today.

The mission aspect of Jesus’ words is clearly seen in 17:18–19: **“As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.”** The key phrase in these verses is: “into the world.” Sanctification in John’s gospel is always for a mission.²² Sanctification’s mission is to bring truth, light, and salvation to the world. In 3:17, the Father sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus now sends the disciples into the world to continue His mission after His departure. They are, in a sense, being commissioned. When Jesus speaks of sanctifying Himself on behalf of the disciples (17:19) the meaning is closer to the consecration of a sacrificial animal (Deut 15:19). Jesus is “setting Himself apart” (see NET) to do the Father’s will, that is, to go to the cross on the disciples’ behalf.²³ Jesus is the perfect example of a sanctified person. He devoted Himself completely and consistently to God’s will for Him. Throughout His entire life, in every attitude, culminating in His death, Jesus lived for God. Similarly, the disciples should see their purposes for living as not their own, but shaped by God’s mission for them.²⁴

The great evangelist D.L. Moody stopped a stranger one day on the street and asked him, “Are you a Christian?” The man was put off by the question, so he said, “Mind your own business!” Moody said, “This is my business!” The man looked to him and said, “Then you must be Moody.” Wouldn’t it be great to be known as “the person whose business is witnessing?” This is your business.²⁵

Are you accomplishing God’s mission for your life? Are you looking forward or looking back in your life? Are you focusing on your potential or your past failure? Perhaps you’re drowning in your past failures. Your divorce continues to haunt you. The lack of time you spent with your kids when they were growing up grieves you. Maybe you deeply regret your rebellious years away from the Lord. I encourage you to put a sign on your mirror that says: “God looks at where He wants to take you, not where you have already been.” Let go of the past and look ahead! Jesus says, “*Finders keepers.*” He has found you and will keep you.

Scripture References

John 17:6–19

1 Corinthians 9:24–27

2 Timothy 4:6–8

Hebrews 13:5–6

1 Peter 5:6–7

Hebrews 2:1–4

John 10:27–30

Study Questions

1. When did I first believe in Christ (17:6)? Since that time would Jesus characterize me as one who has kept His Word? If so, how have I specifically obeyed Him? When and where have I failed? What can I do about this? Who can help me grow spiritually?
2. How can I live in the world but not adopt the world's standards (17:11a, 13–16)? What does this specifically look like in my life? In what areas will this be particularly difficult? What can I do to ensure that I live for Christ at work, school, and in my neighborhood?
3. To what degree do I experience joy (17:13)? How would those who know me best characterize my life? Would they say I have full joy? Why or why not? This week, what can I do to exude Jesus' joy? Who do I know that serves as a wonderful example of joy? What can I learn from this person?
4. Am I sanctified in God's truth (17:17)? What evidence leads to this conclusion? How have I grown in God's Word in the last year? What can I do to grow further in this next year? Have I written down any specific goals related to Bible study?
5. What is my life mission (17:18)? How am I currently fulfilling it? What progress have I made in my personal mission? What goals have I achieved this year? Who has had the greatest impact in helping me fulfill these goals? Have I expressed gratitude to this person?

Notes

¹ The length of this section of Jesus' prayer suggests that He has greater concern for His disciples' welfare than for His own (cf. John 17:1–5).

² Edwin A. Blum, "John" in *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Scripture Press/Victor Books, 1983), 331.

³ This section of Jesus' prayer cannot be easily analyzed into sections. The different themes in these verses are constantly weaved together. Michael Eaton, *John*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, UK: Sovereign World Trust, 2009), 259. However, the most likely breakdown is as follows: Jesus spends the first half of this section (17:6–11a) describing the reason for His request on behalf of the disciples. The second half of this section (17:11b–19) is focused upon His request of the Father that He will enable their faith to survive in the midst of a hostile world.

⁴ Jesus uses the perfect tense which indicates a completed action with results that continue indefinitely into the future. More consistent with the meaning of the perfect tense, the disciples had believed (i.e. "kept" Jesus' word) with results that continue indefinitely into the future.

⁵ BDAG s.v. *phaneroo* 2aa.

⁶ Cf. John 17:6, 9, 12; 6:37, 39; Rom 8:29–30; Eph 1:3–14.

⁷ Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on John," 2008 ed.: www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/john.pdf, 245.

⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 559. It is also worth pointing out that the verb *tereo* ("keep") here has a variety of meanings including "to keep watch over, guard someone or something, to not lose, to protect, to observe, fulfill, pay attention to." Jesus' usage is more consistent with the last sense of the meaning of the word as is made clear in the following verses.

⁹ Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker* (Salem, OR: Charis, 2001), 271.

¹⁰ The portrayal of Jesus in the present passage is reminiscent of the description of a prophet, like Moses in Deut 18:18. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*. Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 490.

¹¹ Earl Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, H. Wayne House eds., *Nelson New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 1352.

¹² The word "Father" (*pater*) is used fifty-three times in this Upper Room discourse.

¹³ J. Carl Laney, *Marching Orders* (Wheaton: Victor, 1983), 146.

¹⁴ The term "son of perdition" (*ho huio tes apoleias*, NIV "the one doomed to destruction") could describe Judas' character (cf. Isa 57:4) or his destiny (Ps 35:4–8). He had a damnable character and would end in perdition, but the second idea seems to be stronger in the context. Perdition in the NT usually refers to eschatological damnation (cf. Matt 7:13; Acts 8:20; Rom 9:22; Phil 1:28; 3:19; 1 Tim 6:9; 2 Pet 2:1; 3:7; Rev 17:8, 11). Constable, "Notes on John," 247. The NET Study notes state: "A possible allusion to Ps 41:9 or Prov 24:22 LXX. The exact passage is not specified here, but in John 3:18, Ps 41:9 is explicitly quoted by Jesus with reference to the traitor, suggesting that this is the passage to which Jesus refers here. The previous mention of Ps 41:9 in John 13:18 probably explains why the author felt no need for an explanatory parenthetical note here. It is also possible that the passage referred to here is Prov 24:22 LXX, where in the Greek text the phrase 'son of destruction' appears."

¹⁵ The reference to "these things" that Jesus spoke while in the world is probably to the entire farewell discourse. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 564.

¹⁶ Num 11:15; 1 Kgs 19:4; and Jonah 4:3, 8.

¹⁷ The genitive noun *tou ponerou* is ambiguous with regard to gender: It may represent "that which is evil," or the "the evil one" (i.e., Satan). In view of the frequent use of the masculine in 1 John 2:13–14, 3:12; and 5:18–19 it seems much more probable that the masculine is to be understood here and that Jesus is praying for His disciples to be protected from Satan (cf. BDAG 851 s.v. *πονηρός* 1.b.β and 1.b.γ). See also the earlier references to the "ruler of this world" in John (12:31; 14:30; 16:11). See also NET Study notes.

¹⁸ *Hagiazō* ("sanctify") is rare in John (10:36; 17:17, 19), and its adjective refers to the Holy Spirit (1:33; 14:26; 20:22), the Father (17:11), or God (6:69).

¹⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton: Scripture Press/Victor, 1989), 1:370.

²⁰ Kent Crockett's Sermon Illustrations, www.kentcrockett.com.

²¹ Tony Evans, *What Matters Most* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 261–63.

²² Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 566.

²³ Jesus' willingness to give his life on behalf of others in obedience to the Father is frequently reiterated in John's gospel (John 10:17–18; 12:23–28; 18:11; 19:11, 17, 30) and not uncommonly involves the prepositions "for" or "in place of" (6:51; 10:11, 15; 11:50–52; 15:13; 18:14). Significantly, the purpose of Jesus' self-sacrifice is that the

disciples too may be truly sanctified, that is, set apart for their redemptive mission in the world. See Köstenberger, *John*, 495.

²⁴ Gary M. Burge, *The Gospel of John*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 467.

²⁵ Evans, *What Matters Most*, 293.