

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?*

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

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

²⁰“My 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.”

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

²⁴Father, I want those you

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?*

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?*

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 Prophecy.