

CALLED FOR THE WORLD'S BELIEF
DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Timothy 2:1-7a
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: John 17:14-24

JOHN 17:14-24

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.

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.

24 Father, I will that they also, 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.



Illustration © Getty Images

KEY VERSE

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

CALL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Unit 2: Jesus and Calls in His Ministry LESSONS 5–8

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List Jesus' desires as expressed in His prayer.
2. Explain the intersection of the themes of suffering, unity, and witness in Jesus' final prayer.
3. Commit to adopting Jesus' prayer priorities as his or her own.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Why Don't They Come?
 - B. Lesson Context
- I. Different like Jesus (John 17:14–19)
- A. Kept from Evil (vv. 14–16) *Stay in the Game*
 - B. Sent to the World (vv. 17–19)

II. United as One (John 17:20–24)

A. With One Another (vv. 20–23) *Unify to Multiply*

B. With Christ (v. 24)

Conclusion

A. The Streisand Effect

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember **HOW TO SAY IT**

Gethsemane Geth-*sem*-uh-nee (*G* as in *get*).

Pharisees *Fair*-ih-seez.

sanctification *sank*-tuh-fuh-*kay*-shun.

Tertullian Tur-*tull*-yun.

Introduction

A. Why Don't They Come?

In August 2018, the Pew Research Center published results of a survey on religious behaviors. The study had polled more than 1,300 individuals who identified their religious preference as “nothing in particular.” Fiftyone percent of respondents explained their preference by saying, “I question a lot of religious teachings.” In two separate questions, 47 percent said they were not involved because “I don’t like the positions churches take on social/political issues,” and 34 percent said, “I don’t like religious organizations.”

The survey results suggest that individuals who choose not to affiliate with any religious group do not view such gatherings as safe and welcoming places to explore personal religious beliefs and lifestyle choices.

While the results of this survey may not be surprising, they are nevertheless tragic. The church is the body of Christ and the vehicle through which God is working to reach a lost world. It can be discouraging to realize that many choose to avoid the church because they view it as irrelevant, or even as hostile, to their well-being. Yet this is not what Christ intended the church to be. Today’s lesson explains why.

B. Lesson Context

[Matthew 26:36–44](#); [Mark 14:32–40](#); and [Luke 22:39–46](#) give brief accounts of Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Their focus is on His agonized petition that He might be spared the crucifixion. John’s Gospel, by contrast, doesn’t include that prayer. Instead, it features Jesus’ lengthy and detailed prayer for His disciples.

That prayer comes at the end of a lengthy section known as the Farewell Address ([John 13–17](#)), the longest recorded speech by Jesus. After washing the disciples’ feet and dismissing Judas into the night ([13:1–30](#)), Jesus told His confused followers that He would not be with them much longer ([13:33](#)). He gave them a “new commandment” to be followed after His departure from the world: “As I have loved you, ... also love one another” ([13:34](#)).

The remainder of Jesus’ goodbye speech builds on this theme by explaining how God would express His love for the disciples (examples: [John 14:8–21](#); [15:26–27](#); [16:5–15](#)), why “the world” would hate them

(example: [15:18–25](#)), what it means for Christians to love one another, and why it was essential to do so ([17:20–24](#); see commentary below).

In the opening section of the prayer ([John 17:1–13](#)), Jesus reflected on His pending death and reminded the Father that the Son’s mission would continue through the disciples. Therefore Jesus asked His heavenly Father to equip the disciples in certain ways so they could continue His work. The form and content of that equipping is the subject of today’s text.

I. Different like Jesus
(JOHN 17:14–19) A. Kept from Evil (vv.
14–16)

14a. I have given them thy word.

This phrase summarizes Jesus’ ministry to this point. God’s *word* is the truth that Jesus has been teaching. In John’s Gospel, this message focused particularly on God’s revelation in Christ ([John 1:14](#)). He is superior to any other revelation, including the teachings of Moses (example: [1:17–18](#)) and John the Baptist (example: [3:27–30](#)).

14b. And the world hath hated them.

God loves *the world*—so much so that He gave His only Son so that believers could receive eternal life ([John 3:15–16](#)). Yet this love was and is largely unrequited, as the majority of people *hated* Jesus and those who believe in Him ([3:17–21](#)). All people are called to make a decision about Christ. Those who do not accept Him place themselves in the same category as the Pharisees, chief priests, and others who actively persecuted Jesus. There is no middle ground.

Knowing the truth about God is a great blessing, but it comes with a cost. Although the disciples had not been persecuted directly thus far, they were with Jesus on several occasions when His life was in peril (see [John 7:1, 30; 8:58–59; 11:45–54](#)). The story of the man born blind reveals that at least some people who associated with Jesus were threatened with, or may have actually experienced, excommunication from the synagogue ([9:1–41](#)). As the church was established ([Acts 2](#)) and Christianity began to spread throughout the Roman world, persecution became a universal experience ([Acts 8:1](#); etc.).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you prepare yourself for times of discrimination against Christians?

Digging Deeper

What situations call for passive acceptance (example: [Matthew 27:14](#))? for self-defense or explanation (example: [Acts 25:8](#))? for pushing back (example: [Acts 16:37](#))? Explain.

14c. Because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

The cause of the world’s hatred for Jesus and His followers is stated in terms of group membership or identification: it is *because they are not of this world*. Their whole set of values was different ([Ephesians 2:1–10](#)).

Jesus had come down from the Father ([John 3:13, 31–36](#)) and was about to return to Heaven ([13:33; 16:28](#)). Unlike Christ, the disciples were natural human beings, made up of both human flesh and human spirit as all of this world are. But the disciples had been “born again” ([3:3](#)). Therefore, they were no longer recognized as family by the disbelieving world. The disciples had made themselves outsiders, citizens of Heaven who temporarily resided in a foreign land as unwelcome noncitizens ([1 Peter 2:11](#)).

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

The disciples wanted to be wherever Jesus was ([John 14](#)). But they could not accompany Jesus in leaving *the world*, no matter how bad things became. They needed to remain because they would be the vehicle through which others could hear the good news and receive salvation ([15:26; 17:18, 20](#)).

Jesus did ask, however, that they be kept *from the evil*—that is, the devil. He works through worldly people to intensify persecution and suffering in an effort to silence godly witnesses ([John 15:20; 16:1–4; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 2:9–10](#); etc.). This divine protection did indeed come, but not in the form of stopping the sources of pain. Rather, it came by the strength of the Holy Spirit to endure ([John 14:16, 25–27](#)).

STAY IN THE GAME

As a young man, I joined a recreational basketball league. One night, only five players showed up—the minimum needed to play. Near the end of the first half, I leaped for a rebound, got tangled with another player, and landed hard on the back of my head.

Today we understand the dangers of concussions, and we pull players off the court for their own safety. But every successful athlete understands that there are times to stay in the game when injured. I was groggy, but I didn’t want to let my teammates down. I played the entire second half, and my team won a narrow victory.

Jesus knew His disciples would face hatred and pain, but it wasn’t time to remove them from the world. They needed to keep serving Him and helping others. Do you ever feel like imploring the Lord to let you “sit this one out”? Are you willing to “stay in the game” anyway? See [1 Corinthians 4:11–13; 2 Corinthians 1:8–10](#).

—D. F.

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

The language of [John 17:14c](#) (above) is repeated for emphasis. Taken as something of a unit, [17:14–16](#) explains why Christians suffer, sometimes even to the point of death. In the early centuries of the church, passages such as this were used to support the argument that people who experience martyrdom receive special eternal blessings.

Today, these verses are sometimes cited as evidence that believers who are not experiencing suffering must be deficient in their faith in light of Jesus’ comment that the world loves its own ([15:19](#)). The logic is that if you experience love from worldly people, then you must be one of them.

Jesus’ statements should be taken not as abstract principles but rather as prophecies of realities. The original readers of this Gospel came to know persecution firsthand. Many believers today live in cultures where their faith is not legally protected; they experience persecution as a result. But we should not conclude from these verses either that (1) true believers will *only* experience persecution or that (2) *only* true believers will experience persecution. Jesus’ larger point is that we should be prepared to continue to witness, no matter what. And the key to being able to do so is to focus on the fact that we *are not of the world*.

What Do You Think?

What personal deficiencies will you address to be better equipped to be *in* the world but not *of* the world?

Digging Deeper

Which of [John 1:10; 15:19](#); [1 Corinthians 1:12; 5:9–11](#); [2 Corinthians 10:3–4](#); [James 4:4](#); [2 Peter 1:4; 2:20](#); and [1 John 2:15–16](#) speak to you most clearly in this regard? Why?

B. Sent to the World (vv. 17–19)

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

The Greek verb translated *sanctify* means “to make holy or set apart.” Things in the ancient world that were set apart were often found in temples or other sacred places. Jesus, however, asked God to sanctify the disciples themselves (compare [1 Corinthians 6:19–20](#)). It was through their knowledge of *truth* that this sanctification would come. Such knowledge concerned faith in Jesus — faith that is based on evidence ([John 14:11](#); [1 John 1:1–2](#); etc.). Jesus himself was and is both the *truth* ([John 14:6](#)) and the one who proclaimed the *word* of truth about God to the world ([8:31–32](#)). Jesus’ life and words revealed God perfectly ([14:9](#)). Those who abandon falsehood to accept Christ and His words are set apart by their faith.

We can note in passing that sanctification has two aspects or phases. The first is the onetime event when an unbeliever joins the ranks of the saved (see [1 Corinthians 6:11](#)); this may be called *initial sanctification*. The second phase can be termed *progressive sanctification* since it is a continuing transformation ([2 Peter 3:18](#); [1 John 3:3](#); etc.).

What Do You Think?

How can you better demonstrate that God’s truth has set you apart while avoiding giving an off-putting “holier than thou” impression in the process? *Digging Deeper*

How do [John 13:15](#); [1 Corinthians 11:1](#); [Ephesians 5:1](#); [Philippians 2:1–11](#); [3:17](#); [Titus 2:6–8](#); and [1 Peter 2:21](#); [3:15](#) help you frame your answer?

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

These words, spoken before the Great Commission ([Matthew 28:18–20](#)), shed further light on the mission of the disciples and the church. Jesus had been *sent* from Heaven to testify about God to a hostile world ([John 1:10–11](#); [5:23–24, 36–38](#); [8:42–47](#); etc.). Jesus handed this mission on to His apostles, who were then *sent* in turn *into the world* to testify. The fact that the apostles were sent by Jesus provided them with a unique authority. For this reason, rejecting what the apostles say about God is equivalent to rejecting what Jesus says (compare [Luke 9:1–6](#); [2 Corinthians 1:1](#); [5:20](#); [Ephesians 1:1](#); [6:20](#); etc.).

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

This verse reemphasizes [John 17:17](#), above. Because Christ is God incarnate, in one sense He is sanctified just by definition. Jesus, however, was likely referring to the example of holy living that He set before the disciples throughout His ministry. Jesus is consistently portrayed as consumed by a desire to do

anything and everything that God has called Him to do (2:17; etc.). Indeed, Jesus' very sustenance was "to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (4:34).

II. United as One

(JOHN 17:20–24)

A. With One Another (vv. 20–23)

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

This verse extends the scope of Jesus' commission to include all believers in all times and places.

21a. That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.

Unity is essential to Jesus' vision for the church (compare 1 Corinthians 12:12–13; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 4:11–13; etc.). His prayer for future followers is tied to a statement about His own identity: Christ and the *Father* are *one*, and therefore believers should be united as *one*.

The focus here is less on Christ's identity with the Father as members of the Trinity and more on the notion that Jesus always acts in a way that shows that He is united with God in essence and purpose. Seeing Jesus is equivalent to seeing the Father (John 14:9–12).

UNIFY TO MULTIPLY

It was a beautiful day, and I wanted to be outdoors, not painting the basement. My wife and I had moved into the house a few weeks before. Now that the boxes were unloaded, this job remained.

I had figured it would take several days to paint the ceiling, walls, and trim. We had bought the paint, readied our drop cloths and paintbrushes, and prepared to tackle the task ourselves.

Then our friends showed up. Not just a few friends — nine of them, including people we had never met. These unified coworkers dove enthusiastically into the work, all of us talking and laughing as we went. By late afternoon, the entire basement was painted, and the supplies were cleaned up. My wife and I had time to enjoy a walk.

What happens when Jesus' disciples serve in unity? Work gets done. Friendships are forged. God is honored. Blessings are multiplied. Do your relationships with others demonstrate God's call to multiply, not divide?

—D. F.

What Do You Think?

What three specific things can you begin doing to foster the kind of unity among believers that Christ desires?

Digging Deeper

Frame your three responses in terms of what you can do locally within your church and how you can contribute nationally and internationally, one each.

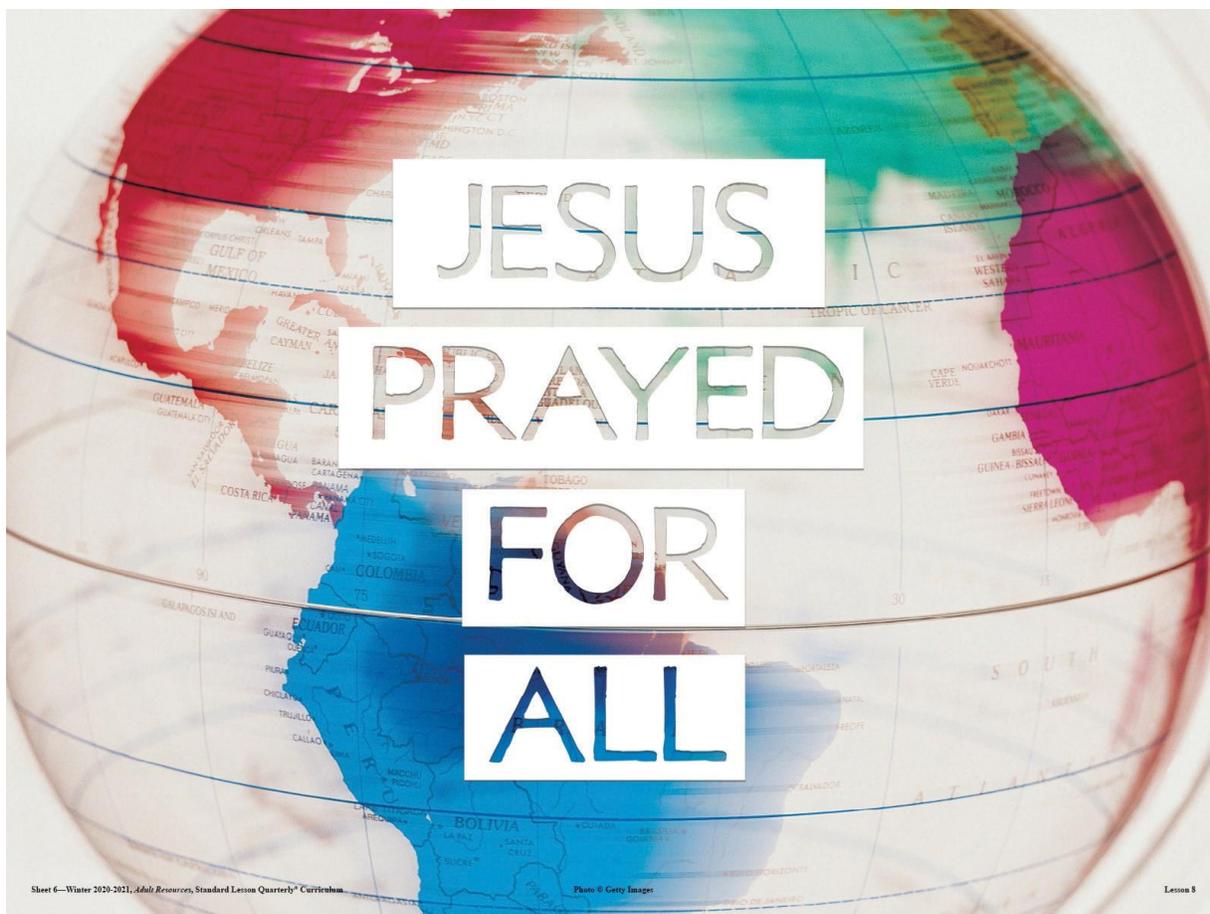
21b. That the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

The goal of the disciples' unity is effective witness, the result of which will be others drawn to Christ. Christ intends that the disciples obey His command to set themselves apart from the world in their unity in this regard.

22a. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them.

Glory here refers to God's divine nature and attributes. Christ and the Father are one by their very nature ([Hebrews 1:3](#)). The human Jesus has illustrated this by doing and saying exactly what God the Father desired. Now He passes that glory along to all present and future disciples (*them*).

The glory that Jesus passes along does not, of course, include what are called God's incommunicable attributes—things of His nature that belong to Him and Him alone (example: self-existence, [John 8:58](#)).



Visual for Lesson 8. Ask learners to hold up smartphones as you point to this visual and ask, “Should I just pray for everyone in your contact lists?”

22b. That they may be one, even as we are one.

Unity is described here as a result of the gift of [John 17:21a](#), above. Elsewhere, unity is a command (example: [Ephesians 4:3](#)). The Farewell Address began with Jesus’ washing the disciples’ feet and telling them to follow His example in serving one another ([John 13:2–17](#)). Jesus also commanded three times that believers love one another as Jesus himself loved them ([13:14](#); [15:12](#), [17](#)). The love command is so significant that people can recognize us as disciples by observing whether we show love for other believers ([13:35](#)).

In Jesus’ view, even the most hostile opponents of the faith should be struck by the love and unity that prevails among His followers. The love of the disciples is to continue as a sign to an unbelieving world about the good news of Jesus Christ.

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.

The church’s unity must be *perfect* in the sense that it lacks nothing. But we know that unbreakable unity is not typically experienced anywhere. Yet this is the very reason why it can serve as supernatural evidence of the nature of Jesus.

Unity can only attract *the world* if it is more than superficial. It must go beyond the camaraderie that worldly people experience. It must rise to the level of an unwavering commitment to God and His church.

When broken people are redeemed, brought together by God, and united in a common purpose, unbelievers must conclude that something special is happening!

B. With Christ (v. 24)

24. Father, I will that they also, 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.

Jesus has already told His disciples that He was returning to Heaven and that He would prepare a place for them there ([John 14:1–3](#)). He wanted them to leave the fallen world eventually in order to be in that place of peace with Him. Once we arrive there, we will *behold* Christ’s *glory* in the sense that we ourselves will witness what Jesus has been claiming to be true about His relationship with the Father (compare [1 John 3:2](#)). The full extent the Father’s love for the Son will then be clearest.

Conclusion

A. The Streisand Effect

Marketing companies are becoming increasingly interested in a phenomenon known as the Streisand Effect. This term is based on the name of singer/actress Barbra Streisand, and it refers to an episode in which she was involved in 2003.

A photographer was contracted to take a series of photographs that would document patterns of coastline erosion throughout the state. When Streisand learned that these included one picture of her seaside Malibu mansion, she sued the photographer to have its posting removed. Before the lawsuit was filed, the photo in question had been downloaded only six times, including two downloads by Streisand’s own attorneys; but when the story hit the media, the picture was viewed by 420,000 curious web surfers within 30 days! This incident is now cited as a classic illustration of the principle of “psychological reactance,” which means that an attempt to suppress information tends to increase people’s desire to access and share it.

While the internet is a relatively new phenomenon on the time line of history, the Streisand Effect is not—people have always been curious to learn new information, especially when it seems to be available only to a small number of people.

The Christian apologist Tertullian (AD 160–220) realized something of a parallel to this principle in his famous observation that “the blood of the martyrs is [the] seed [of the church]” (*Apology* 50). Tertullian observed that public persecutions against the church by the Roman government had led even more people to become curious about the faith. Rome actually made the world aware of Christianity and thereby encouraged people to explore this new and emerging religion. Those who looked into the church’s beliefs and practices were impressed by the conviction and unity demonstrated by believers. The result was that the church grew during periods of persecution.

Against this backdrop, Jesus’ prayer raises important questions for the church today: In a world where many people do not participate in church because they think there is nothing of value there, what would happen if they actually “looked under the hood”? Would they discover that, contrary to what they have been told, the church is a place of remarkable unity and love? Would they be forced to abandon their beliefs that Christians are legalistic and thereby be drawn to the spirit of love that exists among us? Or would encounters with Christians reinforce their belief that the church is not a safe place?

Our passage for today highlights several key themes that run through John’s Gospel, two of which are particularly significant. First, Jesus stresses His own oneness with the Father. Christ demonstrated this unity

through absolute obedience to God the Father in His resolve to fulfill the Father's mission of offering salvation. Second, Jesus presented His relationship with the Father as a model for the way His disciples should relate to one another. Christians are to be completely united with both Christ and one another so that Christ's mission can continue through the work of the church. It can't happen any other way.

What Do You Think?

What's the first thing you should do were you to find yourself in a situation where Christians are disunited, at odds with one another?

Digging Deeper

How should your reaction differ in situations that involve doctrinal essentials versus those that don't? Why?

B. Prayer

Father, help us to love one another the way You love us so that the world can see You at work through us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Christians are one in Christ Jesus.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Place four chairs in the front of the classroom, facing the front of the room, and ask a volunteer to come sit in each one. Attach one each of the following labels to the backs of the chairs so that the class can see them but the volunteers can't:

Attorney / Elected Official / Union Negotiator / Real Estate Agent

Have the four volunteers take turns asking questions of the class in order to determine what their labels say.

After several minutes, reveal answers to the volunteers and ask the class what these professions have in common. If no one gets the answer, say, "Although they are much different from one another, each of these acts on behalf of someone else to achieve something for them—an intercessor. Today we're going to look at the greatest intercessor of all."

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "What I Pray for Most" exercise on the activity page, which can be downloaded. Allow one minute to complete; then call for volunteers to share the entries on their lists. Make a transition by saying, "Today as we look at a prayer priority of Jesus, it will be interesting to compare and contrast it with our typical prayers."

Into the Word

Distribute handouts (you prepare) featuring five blank rows intersected by two blank columns, one column headed *Verse Reference* and the other headed *What Jesus Prayed For*. Ask a volunteer to read the lesson text out loud slowly while class members listen for answers to the blanks on their charts. Divide the class into groups to compare and complete their charts as necessary.

Verse references (which you may decide to include on the chart) and answers (which you will not include) are as follows:

- Verse 15: Protect my disciples from the evil one.
- Verse 17: Sanctify them (set them apart) by the knowledge of Your truth.
- Verses 20–23: Create unity among my believers so that the world will know I was sent by You, Father.
- Verse 21: May my believers be unified with You and me, Father, as well as with each other.
- Verse 24: I want my believers to join us someday for eternity.

Ask the groups to report what they've written, making sure all the blanks are completed correctly. Then point to a list of adjectives you've written on the board while groups worked:

surprising / inspiring / comforting / challenging / unattainable / difficult

Ask which of these adjectives the class members would choose to describe the prayer of Jesus and what adjectives might they add.

Option 1. If you used the “What I Pray for Most” exercise on the activity page, distribute copies of the “The Prayer Requests of Jesus” exercise from that same page for learners to complete as indicated in study pairs. After three minutes, compare and contrast the results of the two exercises.

Option 2. Form study pairs to look at Jesus' prayer another way by completing the “Three Important Themes” exercise on the activity page. Correct omissions in the ensuing whole-class discussion.

Into Life

Ask, “What can we include in our prayers to make them more like today's prayer of Jesus?” Write answers on the board as learners suggest them. Then send members back to their original groups. Ask each group to compose a prayer that includes some of these elements. Close with a prayer time in which a representative from each group prays the prayer their group has written.

ACTIVITY PAGE

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