

Session 5: John 17:1–26

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

When we are unified with God and others, we experience the joy that Jesus prayed for.

Head Change

To know that we, the church, should be unified in the shared purpose of glorifying God.

Heart Change

To feel motivated to build unity in the church.

Life Change

To heal the divisions in the church so that we might glorify God and experience more of his presence.

OPEN

Think of your best friend or spouse. In what ways are you completely different from one another? What do you appreciate about those differences? Why aren't those differences obstacles to your relationship?

Every person you know, no matter how close you are to them, is different from you. Their personalities, backgrounds, interests, and talents make them unique. Yet friendships and marriages still form and thrive between diverse individuals. Our distinctions are not divisive but enriching.

The church is supposed to act the same way, letting differences teach and inspire one another on to accomplish our purpose—to glorify Christ. When we are unified—living in community with one another—we will reflect his light to the world.

READ

John 17:1–26

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What is eternal life?

According to Dr. Evans, what is Satan's goal?

What is unity, and why is it important in the church?

Show Session 5: *John 17:1–26* (11 minutes).

DISCUSS

In John 17 Jesus prays specifically for his disciples both in the room with him and all his followers to come. He thanks the Father for them, prays for their unity, and that the Father would be glorified in them.

Read John 17:1–5.

Jesus opened by saying “the hour,” that is, his purpose for coming to earth, was upon him. His purpose was to give us eternal life (John 3:14–15; 20:31) which, in verse 3, he describes as knowing the Father. **How does Jesus’s description of eternal life—knowing God—compare to how you have typically understood it?**

Dr. Evans defined eternal life as “undisturbed, increasing knowledge of God.” **If eternal life starts now, as he noted, what are you currently doing to increase your knowledge of God?**

In what ways has your knowledge of God increased since you first believed in Christ?

Read John 17:6–19. Jesus asks the Father to protect his followers after he leaves so that they will be one. His primary hope is not that they would be successful, powerful, or have easy lives. Rather, he wanted them to be one. **Why was unity among the disciples so critical in the days and weeks surrounding Jesus’s death and resurrection? Do you think it is as important for the church to be unified as the disciples were unified? Why, or why not?**

In verse 14, Jesus predicted that the disciples would be hated because they were not “of the world.” Dr. Evans defined “the world” as any place where “God is not a part of the equation.” When we, Jesus’s disciples, involve God in our decisions and prioritize him above all else, we will very likely be rejected, misunderstood, and even hated. **What does your decision-making process look like? When have you been forced to balance living among worldly people yet maintaining a godly perspective?**

In verse 15, Jesus asked the Father to protect his friends from the evil one. He wasn’t asking God to take them out of the world—Jesus was sending them into the world, after all—but he knew they needed spiritual protection.

What kind of opposition have you encountered for being a Christian? Which truth affects you more—that you will face evil, or that God will protect you from it?

*Note: To learn more about the persecution the early church experienced, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

Despite the hate or rejection that comes our way, God will protect us. We can rest assured in his provision, even when the world turns against us. **What could it look like to confront the fear of being opposed or hated with the truth that the Father will protect you?**

Jesus described his followers as sanctified, or made holy, but not of the world. When we behave and think like the world more than we do for Jesus, we lose our effectiveness as a witness for Christ. **In what ways do you see worldly influences impacting your choices? What can you do to increase your focus on Christ, his Word, and the mission he has for you?**

Read John 17:20–26. Jesus prayed for both his present disciples and all those who were to come—people like us. His prayer was simple: that we would be one. **What do you think gets in the way of the church’s unity today? What do you think it would take for the church to be “one”?**

*Note: To learn more about the meaning of glory, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

Unity is not inconsequential. Jesus told the Father he wanted us to be one with him so the world might know Jesus (v. 23), so we would see his glory (v. 24), and so that God’s love would be in us (v. 26). The church’s unity is essential to our witness and experience of God. **What can we do to promote and create unity in the church?**

LAST WORD

God wants us to know him. And just as Jesus made the Father known to his disciples, we are commissioned to make God known to the world. But, to be successful, we must be unified, just as Jesus and the Father are unified. When the church is one, we reflect God's love to the world, and he is glorified. Let us continue to pursue oneness with other believers so that the world will be drawn to know our savior.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and deepen your study of the Gospel of John.

1. Persecution of the Early Church

In John 17:14, Jesus alludes to the rejection that his followers would inevitably face. In Luke 21, we get a clearer picture of the kind of persecution he was referring to.

Read Luke 21:12–17. **What kind of persecution did Jesus foretell? Why would his followers endure such violence?**

The Bible records many incidents that fulfilled Jesus's predictions. In Acts 7:54–60, Stephen is stoned to death for publicly proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. His death sparked "a great persecution" of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). **To what degree have you faced opposition for your faith? How have you reacted when being confronted or opposed to speaking about Jesus?**

As a result of the persecution, the church scattered throughout Judea. Those who left Jerusalem continued to preach the gospel (Acts 8:4). Persecution became a catalyst for the expansion of the church. **What does it say about the believers' faith that they willingly endured hardship and continued to preach about Jesus?**

Read Hebrews 10:32–34. The writer describes faithful believers who withstood public insult and suffering and stood by those enduring similar treatment because they had a "better and enduring possession." No violence or oppression could steal their hope and joy in Christ. Their loyalty to Jesus and one another should inspire us to endure in our faith. **How does the steadfast faith of the early church inspire your faith today?**

The people who walked through Jerusalem with Jesus were physically, economically, and socially oppressed. But

they chose Christ because Jesus was their ultimate treasure. **How could they deny their king in the face of temporary pain? In what situations, if any, are you tempted to deny or downplay your faith?**

Today, our persecution in the West rarely, if ever, is like that experienced by the early church. We might be opposed, laughed at, or dismissed, but not imprisoned, beaten, and executed. Read Hebrews 12:1–4. **What would it look like for you to follow the early church’s example, enduring all hardships for the sake of knowing Jesus and making him known?**

2. Peek at the Greek: What is “glory”?

Throughout his prayer in John 17, Jesus referred to glory. The Father glorified him and he glorified the Father (v. 1, 4). He gave his glory to his disciples and asked the Father to reveal his glory to all his present and future disciples (v. 22). But what is glory? It is a word we use in church a lot but may be a concept we cannot quite define.

How would you define “glory”?

The Greek word for glory is *doxa*. In the New Testament, *doxa* is used to give us a sense of majestic splendor or a high, honorable reputation. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for glory, *kabod*, carries the sense of a weighty reputation and a name that gives importance to a person or thing. Today, “to give glory” describes offering honor, adoration, worship, and thanksgiving to something or someone magnificent, honorable, or distinguished. We give our best attention and praise to whatever or whomever we see as “the best.”

When we fulfill God’s purpose for our lives—work with the gifts he has given us and reflect his character to the world—we make him the center of attention. Our actions point to his good reputation, importance, and splendor.

First Corinthians 10:31 commands us to focus on God’s glory: “. . . whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” In every situation, we should focus on honoring God and showing the world who he is. Consider your gifts and sphere of influence. **In what ways can you glorify God in your everyday life? In your relationships? With your abilities?**

As those who follow Jesus, we get to show the world what he is like by living in a way that accurately reflects his character. When we love well, do right, serve others, and submit to God and one another, we reveal a glorious God worthy of our praise and adoration. Consider how you will point others to Jesus today through your words and actions.