

Harvest

Evangelical Free Church

Praying Like Jesus
For Adult Bible Fellowships and Small Groups Meeting Feb. 21-27, 2010

Join us in being on mission with God!

OUR VISION

To continually mature and grow as a united body of Jesus-imitators who live out God's greatest commandment to "Love" by exalting God and serving one another, and His greatest commission to "Go" by reaching into and shaping our local, regional, and global communities.

"Christ's Prayer for the Church"

John 17:20-26

Getting Started

After an introductory time, discuss the following questions in your group or class.

When you travel from one church to another it's easy to draw the conclusion that many of us are going in different directions. Some prefer to sing hymns written generations ago. Others dislike any music that is more than three years old. Some congregations admire the dignity of liturgy or tradition. Others pride themselves in their push for innovation and change. Some fellowships put the Word on a pedestal and make it the center of their corporate lives. Others put it in the attic and shape their religious experiences around the wisdom of man.

Diversity creates sharp contrasts among evangelicals as well. One congregation seems to rotate around missions. Another stresses ministry to families. A third devotes the bulk of its resources to youth and college ministries. Yet another invests heavily in maturing families and in empowering seniors with the time and resources to engage in active ministry.

How can we tell when our emphases push us outside the parameters Jesus calls us to? Is there a baseline against which we can measure our collective pursuits? What does it mean to carry the mission forward in our setting in a way that glorifies Christ?

In the last segment of Jesus' prayer in John 17, our Lord prays for the believers who will be the spiritual descendants of the disciples. This prayer reflects his deepest desires for the church. It outlines some of the key components of the mission that must be at the center of our efforts here in our congregation.

Q: While various buildings have some similar features, they have a different primary function. Assume you were supposed to build a structure. The designer wanted an out-house, but gave you plans for a lighthouse instead. List some of the things you would spend time and energy on that would be wasted in the end.

Jesus final words in prayer

1. Who does Jesus pray for as he finishes his prayer in verse 20 and following? How is this change in the direction of Jesus' prayer unexpected?



John 17:20-26

²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that 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. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴ “Father, I want those you 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. ²⁵ “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

- 2. Count the number of times in verses 20-26 that Jesus speaks of a oneness between believers or between himself and the Father. Why do you think he repeats this ideas as frequently as he does in his prayer?

In early church history most Christians were part of one of two great church bodies. One was the Eastern Orthodox Church centered in Constantinople. The other was the Roman Catholic Church centered in Rome.

- 3. In what ways might the existence of one or two church bodies better reflect the spirit of Christ’s prayer than the current situation with several major churches and many Protestant bodies?

Why do you suppose the existence of one or two major spiritual bodies not result in a swelling of the ranks of true Christians?

Some would argue that Jesus is concerned about ecclesiastical unity. (That’s a fancy way of speaking about one big organized church.) They argue that every time people break away from an existing church or denomination—no matter what the reason they give for doing so—they are violating the spirit of this prayer.

- 4. How would you respond to someone who maintained that the creation of even one new independent church only contributes to the further fragmentation of Christianity and the defiance of the spirit of this prayer of Jesus?

In verse 21 Jesus describes the kind of unity he’s talking about. It’s not based so much on a common structure or set of by-laws as on something else.

- 5. What is the pattern for the unity in verse 21 that Jesus prays will be reflected in the church?

- 6. As you think about the dynamic between the Father and the Son, what characteristics about their union stand out to you. (Hint: you may want to look at John 8:28 or John 8:54.)

Christ Prayer and Today's Church

Jesus speaks about the dynamic relationship between the Father and the Son many times in these few verses.

7. Survey verses 20-26 and note the things the Father does with, to, or for the Son. Also note the things the Son does with, to or for the Father. The list is started for you:

<u>Things the Father Does</u>	<u>Things the Son Does</u>
<u>Gives the Son glory (22)</u> _____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Quotations are from THE HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Verse 20 and verse 23 remind us that Jesus does not see Christian harmony as an end in itself. He sees it as a means to something else.

8. What impact beyond the church does Jesus look for in his prayer in these two verses?

9. How does the diversity of the early church reflected in statements like 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 underscore the difficulty of the task of building oneness among believers?

10. How is the unity that Jesus speaks of different than the uniformity that some church bodies enforce through pressure and manipulation?

12. In the sidebar on page 2 of this worksheet, circle the word "love" [or its variants] each time it occurs in verses 20-26. How does biblical love build into the oneness that Jesus prays for?



Reaching Up and Reaching Out

HARVST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

524 River Hills Dr. P.O. Box 291

Phone: 515-733-5360 Web: www.harvestefree.org E-mail: office@harvestefree.org



13. How is Jesus emphasis on oneness in the church different from some today who argue, "We should all just decide to get along"? What is lacking if we make that desire the ground of our fellowship?

14. Some people view conflict in the church as a threat to the goal of Jesus' prayer. The apostles were constantly dealing with such things. What kind of issues were damaging the unity of the church in 1 Corinthians 1:10-12?

15. What are some areas where you have seen today's believers build unnecessary walls between one another?

16. What would you consider to be a legitimate division between believers?

17. Unity in itself is not everything. Some 'dead' congregations have great harmony, but no spiritual impact. What do you see in verses 20-26 that goes beyond ministry built around a general consensus or a willingness to live at peace with one another?
