Jesus' Prayer for His Disciples
John 17:1-26
SS Lesson for 01/11/2015

Devotional Scripture: Matt 6:1-14

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews Jesus’ Prayer for His Disciples. The study’s aim is to understand the Lord Jesus’ desires for His disciples. The study’s application is to make the Lord Jesus’ desires our desires and to carry out them out in our lives. (Adapted from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary).

Key Verse: John 17:20-21

20 I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Jesus had ended His teaching of the disciples with a shout of victory: “I have overcome the world” (16:33). This was in anticipation of His work on the cross. Throughout His ministry Jesus’ work was done in obedience to the Father’s will (cf. Luke 4:42; 6:12; 11:1; Matt. 26:36). As He turned again to His Father, He prayed first for Himself (John 17:1-5), then for His apostles (vv. 6-19), and finally for future believers (vv. 20-26).

Jesus could approach God in prayer because of Their Father-Son relationship. He began His prayer with the word Father (cf. Matt. 6:9) and used that word three other times in this prayer (John 17:5, 21, 24) as well as “Holy Father” (v. 11) and “Righteous Father” (v. 25). The time, Jesus said, has come. The divine plan of redemption was at God’s appointment. Several times before this Jesus’ time had not come (2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). But now it had arrived (cf. 12:23; 13:1). Jesus then prayed, Glorify Your Son (cf. 17:5). This request for glorification included sustaining Jesus in suffering, accepting His sacrifice, resurrecting Him, and restoring Him to His pristine glory. The purpose of the request was that the Father would be glorified by the Son, that God’s wisdom, power, and love might be known through Jesus. Believers too are to glorify God (v. 10); in fact, this is the chief end of man (Rom. 11:36; 16:27; 1 Cor. 10:31; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14; cf. Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 1). The words, You granted Him authority over all people, indicate that Jesus’ prayer request was in accordance with the Father’s plan. The Father has ordained the rule of the Son over the earth (cf. Ps. 2). So the Son has the authority to judge (John 5:27), to take up His life (10:18), and to give eternal life to all those whom the Father gave Him. Five times in this prayer Jesus referred to His own as those the Father gave Him (17:2, 6 [twice], 9, 24). Eternal life, as defined here by Jesus, involves the experience of knowing the only true God through His Son (cf. Matt. 11:27). It is a personal relationship of intimacy which is continuous and dynamic. The word know here in the present tense, is often used in the Septuagint and sometimes in the Greek New Testament to describe the intimacy of a sexual relationship (e.g., Gen 4:1, “lay”; Matt. 1:25, “had... union”). Thus a person who knows God has an intimate personal relationship with Him. And that relationship is eternal, not temporal. Eternal life is not simply endless existence. Everyone will exist somewhere forever (cf. Matt. 25:46), but the question is, In what condition or in what relationship will they spend eternity? Jesus’ prayer for Himself was based on His completed work (cf. 4:34)—I have brought You glory (cf. 17:1)—which assumed His obedience to death (Phil. 2:8). Even though the Cross was future, it was a certainty. He repeated His request for a return to His pristine glory with the Father (cf. John 17:1) based on the certainty of the finished work on the cross. This “work” the Father gave Him to do is one of five things in Jesus’ prayer which the Father “gave” the Son: (a) work (v. 4), (b) believers (vv. 2, 6, 9, 24), (c) glory (vv. 5, 24), (d) words (v. 8), and (e) a name (vv. 11-12). The Son, in turn, gave believers God’s words (vv. 8, 14) and God’s glory (vv. 22, 24).

Jesus prayed 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), here (John 17:6-19), and later in heaven (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). This prayer of intercession reveals Jesus’ concern and love for His apostles. The little flock of disciples was given by the Father to the Son (cf. vv. 2, 9, 24). They had been separated out of the world (“world” occurs 18 times in this chap.: vv. 5-6, 9, 11 [twice], 13, 14 [thrice], 15, 16 [twice in the Gr.], 18 [twice], 21, 23-25). This separation was by the electing work of the Father, in which the apostles had been given as a gift to Jesus Christ (cf. 6:37). With the words, They have obeyed Your Word, Jesus praised His disciples for responding to the message of God in Jesus Christ.
disciples were not perfect, but they had the right commitment. Their faith in Jesus was a trust in His union with the Father (17:8). This faith in Jesus was manifested in their obedience to His words because they believed in His divine mission (cf. 16:27). Christ’s prayer (in vv. 6-19) was particularly for the Eleven, though it applies to all believers (cf. v. 20). At this point He was not praying for the world in its hostility and unbelief. This prayer is for two things: (a) the disciples’ preservation (“protect them,” v. 11) and (b) their sanctification (“sanctify them,” v. 17). The world is not to be preserved in its rebellion or sanctified in its unbelief. Jesus prayed this request because of God’s ownership of them by creation and election (they are Yours). Jesus’ words, All I have is Yours, and all You have is Mine, reveal His claim to unity, intimacy, and equality with the Father.

In the old economy, God dwelt among people and showed His glory. In Jesus, God’s glory was displayed (cf. 1:14). Then Christ’s disciples glorified Him: Glory has come to Me through them. And now in the Church Age the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son (16:14) and believers are also to glorify the Son (Eph. 1:12). Jesus would soon depart to the Father and leave His disciples in the world. They had to stay in the world to carry out God’s plan in spreading the good news of redemption and in planting the church. With the formation of the church, the history of the world has become, in a sense, “a tale of two cities”: the city of God and the city of man. Since the disciples would be in the world, Jesus prayed for their protection. The hostility against God which fell on Jesus would now fall on the tiny band of apostles, and subsequently on many of Jesus’ followers. Jesus, in calling on His Holy Father, pointed out God’s distinction from sinful creatures. This holiness is the basis for believers’ separation from the world. He would protect them from the sin and enmity of the world by the power of His name (cf. Prov. 18:10). In Bible times a person’s name stood for the person. (In John 17:6, 26 the NIV translates the Gr. “Your name” by the word “You.”) Why did Jesus pray for their preservation? It was to promote the unity of the believers, patterned after the unity of the Father and the Son: so that they may be one as We are One (cf. vv. 21-22). The unity here seems to be that of will and purpose. By being protected from the world they would be unified in their desires to serve and glorify the Son. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus took care of the flock entrusted to Him by the Father. But Judas was an exception. He is here called the one doomed to destruction (lit., “the son of perdition”). Judas was never a sheep and his true character was finally manifested (cf. 13:11; 1 John 2:19). He was a “dead branch” (cf. comments on John 15:2, 6). Judas did what he wanted (he sold Jesus). Yet he was an unwitting tool of Satan (13:2, 27). Even people’s volitionally free acts fit into God’s sovereign plan (cf. Acts 2:23; 4:28). Thus Judas’ betrayal of Jesus fulfilled (i.e., filled up in a larger sense) the words in Psalm 41:9 about David’s betrayal by his friend. The words of comfort spoken by Jesus (I say these things) to His disciples were of great benefit to them. Following His Passion, they would recall His words and experience the full measure of His joy. Joy came to them because they knew from His words that He had conquered the evil one and brought eternal life to them. Jesus’ intercession for the disciples continued with a reminder of (a) their value and (b) their coming danger. They were valuable because they had received the Word of God: I have given them Your Word (cf. “I gave them the words You gave Me,” v. 8). They were in danger because the satanic world system hated them. It hated them because they are not a part of it. As believers share Jesus Christ, “Everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does” (1 John 2:16) loses its attractiveness. A believer’s commitment shows the world’s values to be trash or dung (cf. Phil. 3:8). Therefore the world hates the exposure of its sham values (cf. John 3:20). God’s plan was not to remove the disciples from danger and opposition (take them out of the world) but to preserve them in the midst of conflict. Though Jesus would soon be taken out of the world (v. 11), His followers are to remain in it. Like Daniel in Babylon (Dan. 1-2; 4-6) and the saints in Caesar’s household (Phil. 4:22), God intends for His followers to be witnesses to truth in the midst of satanic falsehood. Satan, the evil one (cf. Matt. 5:37; 1 John 5:19), as head of the world system, seeks to do everything possible to destroy believers (cf. Rev. 2:10; 12:10) but God’s plan will prevail. Christians must not take themselves out of the world but remain in meaningful contact with it, trusting in God’s protection while they witness for Jesus. Just as Jesus did not belong to the satanic world system (I am not of it; cf. v. 14), so believers do not. They belong to the heavenly kingdom (Col. 1:13) because of their new births (cf. John 3:3). Jesus had prayed for protection for His disciples (17:11). Now His second petition for them was for their sanctification. Sanctify means “set apart for special use.” A believer is to be distinct from the world’s sin, its values, and its goals. The means of this sanctifying work is God’s truth. The truth is communicated in the Word, which is both personal and propositional. As the message about Jesus was heard, believed, and understood, the disciples’ hearts and minds were captured. This change in their thinking resulted in changes in their living. The same is true of believers today. As they appropriate God’s Word to their lives, they are sanctified—set apart for God and changed in their living in order to honor God (cf. 15:3). God’s message set the apostles apart from the world so that they would do His will, not Satan’s. Jesus is the model for every believer. He was in the world but He was not of the world (vv. 14b, 16b). He was sent... into the world on a mission by His Father. So believers are sent... into the world on a
mission by the Son, to make the Father known (cf. 20:21). Inasmuch as Jesus’ prayer for the disciples was not limited to the immediate apostles (cf. 17:20), this passage is similar to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). Each Christian should view himself as a missionary whose task is to communicate God’s truth to others. For the benefit of the disciples, Jesus sanctified Himself. In what sense did Jesus need to sanctify Himself? Was He not already set apart to God and distinct from the world? Yes, but this sanctification refers to His being separated and dedicated to His death. And the purpose of His death was that they too may be truly sanctified. The words “truly sanctified” are literally “sanctified in truth.” This probably means that God’s truth is the means of sanctification (cf. comments on v. 17). The purpose of the death of Christ is to deduce or separate believers to God and His program.

The final portion of Jesus’ prayer (vv. 20-26) was for future believers who would come to Him through the message of the apostles. In the Church Age all Christians have come to Christ directly or indirectly through the apostles’ witness. Jesus knew His mission would succeed. He would die and be raised, He would send forth the Spirit, the apostles would preach, people would be converted, and the church would be formed. As each high priest of Israel bore the names of the tribes before the presence of God in the tabernacle and the temple (cf. Ex. 28:9-12, 21-29), so now Jesus, the great High Priest, carried future believers into the holy presence of His heavenly Father (cf. Heb. 4:14-5:12; 7:24-8:2). Jesus requested unity for future believers (cf. vv. 11, 22). This verse is a favorite of promoters of the present ecumenical movement. Admittedly the divided church is in many ways a scandal. The cure, however, is not institutional union. Jesus was not praying for the unity of a single, worldwide, ecumenical church in which doctrinal heresy would be maintained along with orthodoxy. Instead, He was praying for a unity of love, a unity of obedience to God and His Word, and a united commitment to His will. There are great differences between uniformity, union, and unity. All believers belong to the one body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13) and their spiritual unity is to be manifest in the way they live. The unity Christ desires for His church is the same kind of unity the Son has with the Father: just as You are in Me and I am in You (cf. John 10:38; 17:11, 23). The Father did His works through the Son and the Son always did what pleased the Father (5:30; 8:29). This spiritual unity is to be patterned in the church. Without union with Jesus and the Father (they... in Us), Christians can do nothing (15:5). The goal of their lives is to do the Father’s will. The disciples’ union with Jesus as His body will result in people in the world believing in the Father: that You have sent Me (cf. 17:23). The glory which Christ gave the church may refer to the glory of the Cross (cf. vv. 1-5). As the church received and pondered the significance of Jesus’ atoning work, it would be united in God’s purposes and redemptive plan. Again the union of Christians (that they may be one) is likened to the unity the Son has with the Father (as We are One; cf. vv. 11, 21). This union is further linked by Christ’s indwelling of believers (I in them). The goal of the unity of believers with each other and with God is twofold: (a) that the world will believe in the Son’s divine mission (know that You sent Me), and (b) that the world will sense that God’s love for believers is deep, intimate, and lasting as is His love for His unique Son (cf. v. 26). The communion and fellowship which disciples have with Jesus in this life will increase in eternity. The goal of a believer’s salvation is future glorification which includes being with Jesus (cf. 14:3; Col. 3:4; 1 Thes. 4:17). Jesus’ last testament and will (I want, is that His disciples enter into (see) His glory (Heb. 2:10). This glory was what Jesus had from the Father and would again have (John 17:5). His testament was sealed by His death and resurrection. Since His will is identical to the Father’s (4:34; 5:30; 6:38), it will certainly come to pass. Jesus’ prayer for believers ends with a call to the Righteous Father. The word translated “righteous” here does not occur often in John’s Gospel (cf. 5:30; 7:24). Its significance here seems to be in Jesus’ praise of the Father for His work of revelation (cf. Matt. 11:25-26). The Father is right (righteous) and the world is in the wrong (the world does not know You). Jesus has known, revealed (John 17:6), and glorified (v. 4) the Father, and so should Christians. The essence of God is love (1 John 4:8). Jesus made the Father and His love known to the world by His death. And the Father made known His love for the Son by raising Him to glory. Jesus’ purpose in revealing the Father was that Christians would continue to grow in that love (that the Father’s love for the Son may be in them) and to enjoy the personal presence of Jesus in their lives (that I Myself may be in them).

Jesus’ petitions for believers are four: preservation (John 17:11), sanctification (v. 17), unity (vv. 11, 21-22), and participation in Jesus’ glory (v. 24). This prayer is sure to be answered (cf. 11:42; 1 John 5:14).
Lesson Introduction and Background
From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

While ministering in Los Angeles, I was invited to participate in a community service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, to be held in January. This was organized by the Roman Catholic congregation in our neighborhood, and other participants included ministers from Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches. Including my own, there were seven Christian traditions represented. The result was a very impressive service that included the formalities of robes, processions, etc. I was asked to be the Scripture reader. Much to my surprise, the text chosen to be read was from John 17. I was startled to discover that Jesus’ prayer for unity was not just the possession of my own church tradition; the others all cared about church unity too! Today’s lesson will look at this important prayer, offered up by Jesus on his last night before his death. It is a prayer that reveals his earnest desire that his followers be one.

All four Gospels have an account of Jesus’ dining with his disciples on the night before his crucifixion. We traditionally call this meal the last supper. It was held in “a large room upstairs” (Mark 14:15; Luke 22:12), probably an enclosed rooftop space of a borrowed house. The synoptic Gospels (that is, Matthew, Mark, and Luke) give us few details about the last supper beyond that of the group eating from a common loaf and drinking from a common cup. Those three accounts focus on Jesus’ teaching regarding the great abiding symbolism in those two elements: remembrance of his body and blood given as a sacrifice for sin. The Gospel of John, written after the other three Gospels, does not cover the loaf and cup teaching, presumably because the author had nothing to add to the accounts of the others. Instead, John provides details of the last supper that the other three Gospel writers do not. These additional details fall into two broad groupings. One is what we call the upper room discourse of John 13–16; the other broad grouping is what is called the high priestly prayer of Jesus of John 17. Today’s lesson comes from this section. In the opening section of the prayer in John 17:1-5 (not in today’s text), Jesus mentioned things that had been themes up to that point: his completion of the work the Father had given him (compare 5:36); his mission of bringing eternal life to the world (compare 6:40); and that the time for him to be glorified had come (compare 12:23).

Major Theme Analysis
(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Prayer for Glorification (17:1-5)

1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: 'Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,
2 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.
3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.
4 I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.
5 And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Glorification through authority (2)

Authority to rule His dominion (Dan 7:13-14)
13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Authority to reveal the Father (Matt 11:27)
"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."
Authority to be Lord (Phil 2:9-11)

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Glorification through the giving of eternal life (3)

Giving through spiritual food (John 6:27)

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

Giving through guidance and protection (John 10:27-28)

27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

Giving through resurrection (John 11:25-26)

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Giving as a gift (Rom 6:23)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Giving through intimacy that leads to glory (Col 3:3-4)

3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Giving through understanding and truth (I Jn 5:20)

We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true— even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

Glorification through completion of work (4)

By doing the will of God (John 6:38-39)

38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

By making the finish of God's work as essential as food (John 4:34)

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

By making God's work a testimony (John 5:36)

"I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.

By knowing at death that the work was finished (John 19:30)

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

By being the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2)

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
Prayer for the Disciples (17:6-19)

6 "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.
7 Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You.
8 For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.
9 I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.
10 And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them.
11 Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.
12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.
13 But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.
14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.
15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.
16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.
17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.
18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.
19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

Prayer for revelation of knowledge (6-8)

Through the light of the knowledge of the glory of God (2 Cor 4:6)
For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Through the Church (Eph 4:11-13)
11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Through all spiritual wisdom and understanding (Col 1:9)
For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Through the renewal of rebirth (Col 3:10)
and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Through God's divine power (2 Pet 1:3)
His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Prayer for ownership by God (9-12)

Owned because of the fear of the Lord (Mal 3:16-18)
16 Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. 17 "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. 18 And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.
Owned because we are controlled by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9-14)

9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. 12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation -- but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Owned because we are one in Christ (Gal 3:28-29)

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Owned because we were bought with a price (1 Cor 6:19-20)

19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

Prayer for separation from world (13-16)

Separation from intimate relationships with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14-18)

14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Separation from the counsel of the wicked (Ps 1:1-2)

1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Separation from corrupt practices of society (Acts 2:40-42)

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Separation from everything that contaminates our body and spirit (2 Cor 7:1)

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Prayer for sanctification (17-19)

Through living God's Word (Ps 119:9)

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.

Through faith (Acts 15:8-9)

8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.
Through the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Thess 2:13)

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

Through obedience to the truth (1 Pet 1:22)

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

Prayer for Future Believers (17:20-26)

20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. 24 Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

Prayer for unification (20-23)

“That All of Them May Be One” (From NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

One of Jesus’ most earnest petitions in his beautiful prayer was that those who would believe in him in the future would be united — “that all of them may be one” (v. 21). One of the major tragedies in the history of the church is the division among Jesus’ followers and the sheer hatred that they at times have shown to one another. An example of this may be seen in the reactions many church authorities had to the first complete translation of the Bible into English in the late 1300s under the influence of John Wycliffe. Wycliffe was viciously castigated by these leaders, being called (in the spelling of that era) “the Devils Instrument … Peoples Confusion, Hereticks Idoll.” How terrible that someone who was trying to put the Word of God into peoples’ hands and in a language they could understand was considered an enemy of the God he loved and served. Several years after his death, Wycliffe was publicly condemned as a heretic, and his bones were dug up and burned. The ashes were then scattered in a nearby river. Today the animosity between Christians is usually not as intense as that between Wycliffe and his critics. However, it does not have to be to have the effect of alienating a lost world that desperately needs Jesus.

Through God’s initiation (Jer 32:38-39)

38 They will be my people, and I will be their God. 39 I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them.

Through fellowship with other believers (Acts 2:46-47)

46 And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Through sharing with others (Acts 4:32)

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.
Through the body of Christ (Rom 12:5)
so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Through unity of mind and thought (1 Cor 1:10)
I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Through the equal concern for the Church body (1 Cor 12:25-27)
25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Through the unity of the Spirit (Eph 4:3)
being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Through being united with Jesus Christ (Phil 2:1-5)
1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,  2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.  3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.  4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.  5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Two ways unity is achieved (From Bible Expositor and Illuminator)
Jesus then summed up the results of the unique unity He spoke of -- "I in them, and thou in me" (John 17:23). First, it means "that they may be made perfect (complete) in one". Christians can enjoy full unity among themselves because they share in the larger unity of the Father and the Son. Second, it means that the world will know two things. One is that the Father had sent Jesus that He was all He said He was. The second is that the Father loves believers even as He loves Jesus. Unbelievers will be drawn to this love.

Prayer for salvation (24-26)

Awaiting salvation by continuing in service and discipleship (John 12:26)
Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Awaiting salvation by continuing to believe in the promise of Jesus (John 14:3)
And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Awaiting salvation by continuing to be encouraged because of the coming of the Rapture (1Thes 4:14-17)
14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Awaiting salvation by continuing to overcome the world (Rev 3:21)
To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.
Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Our text contains the last public prayer of our Lord before His arrest, trial, and crucifixion on the cross of Calvary. I find that this prayer becomes much more meaningful to me when I consider it in the light of two other events which are recorded for us in the New Testament. The first (and closest in time) is the prayer of our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane, recorded in the Synoptic Gospels. It takes place only moments after the high priestly prayer is concluded. In His prayer in Gethsemane, we see the depth of our Lord’s agony, knowing that He is to “become sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21), to suffer the wrath of God for our sins, and not for His own. The second event is that of our Lord arranging for someone to assume the responsibility of caring for His mother (John 19:25-27). I see from these two events that even in the midst of great personal agony, our Lord does not let His suffering keep Him from attending to the needs of those whom He loves. Thus, Jesus prays for His disciples and for those who will believe through them, before He prays that agonizing prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. And on the cross, Jesus sees to it that His mother is cared for. In both cases, Jesus is taking care of those He will leave behind. We can go even further with this, because our Lord’s agony itself is for the sake of others. It is by means of His death that Satan is defeated and the penalty for our sins is paid. Therefore our Lord’s high priestly prayer is typical of His love and concern for His own. In the light of this, how dare we ever question God’s love and care for us. How many times have we found ourselves in some kind of pain or discomfort and cried out to God in our distress, thinking that He does not care (cf. Mark 4:38)? He cares enough to endure the agony of the cross. And even when the horrors of the cross are immediately before Him, Jesus cares enough to pray this prayer for His disciples. No wonder the writer to the Hebrews and the Apostle Peter can write,

5 Your conduct must be free from the love of money and you must be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you and I will never abandon you.” 6 So we can say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:5-6)

6 Humble yourselves then under the mighty hand of God and he will exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care on him, because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:6-7).

We would do well to ponder these words by D. A. Carson: Would to God that the truths of these verses might burn themselves into our memories. It is a rare and holy privilege to observe the divine Son of God not only formulating his prayers but formulating the grounds for his petitions. These grounds reflect the essential unity of Father and Son, and reveal that Jesus’ prayers for his people trace their argument back to the inscrutable purposes of Deity. When the Son of God himself has offered prayers for his followers like these prayers, and when the prayers have been grounded as these prayers have been grounded, it is horrifying to remember that, in moments of weakness and doubt, we still rebelliously question the love of God for his own people. This passage ought rather to engender the deepest and most stable faith, the most adoring gratitude. The disciples of Jesus Christ are loved with a special love … which distinguishes them from the world. I am deeply indebted to D. A. Carson for reminding us that this prayer of our Lord teaches us what we should pray for: The spiritual dimensions to this prayer are consistent and overwhelming. By contrast, we spend much more time today praying about our health, our projects, our decisions, our finances, our family, and even our games than we do praying about the danger of the evil one. Materialists at heart, we often discern only very, very dimly the spiritual struggle of which Paul (for instance) was so deeply aware (Eph. 6:10ff.). The Lord’s (model) prayer likewise teaches us to pray, ‘Deliver us from the evil one’ (most likely the correct rendering). Certainly the church will not produce many spiritual giants when it fails to discern its chief enemy. At the outset of this lesson, I pointed out that our text divides into two major sections: verses 6-10, which focus on the time our Lord has spent with the disciples up till the present moment, and verses 11-19, which address the disciples’ needs because of His departure. If you broaden the scope of your thinking to include verses 1-5 and 20-26, then you find that this prayer of our Lord covers every period of time, from eternity past to eternity future. Verses 1-5 look back in time, to the glory which our Lord had with His Father from eternity past. Verses 20-26 look forward in time, down through the ages of church history to the present moment for us. And, this last part of His prayer includes all those yet to be saved, until the time of His return. Thus the prayer encompasses all of time. I would suggest to you that this is really the only vantage point from which we can rightly appraise our circumstances at the moment. Jesus could pray as He did because He knew not only the past, but the future. It goes far beyond this, as you know. He not only knows what the future holds, He controls the future. Our Lord manifests the calm certainty that only God can exhibit, because He is God, and because He sees the trials and tribulations of the moment from an eternal perspective. I could not help but recall Psalm 73, in which Asaph complains to God about the prosperity of the wicked, and the suffering of the righteous. To Asaph, it looked like God had lost...
control, and as though God was not living up to His promise to prosper the righteous. It was only when the psalmist began to view his circumstances from a divine and eternal perspective that he saw things clearly, and began to think and to respond rightly to God. I was struck by the structure of our Lord’s prayer in John 17. Jesus clearly separates and distinguishes between those who were our Lord’s disciples at the time (verses 6-19), and those who would later come to believe in Him through the witness of the disciples or others (verses 20-26). I take this distinction to imply that there is a substantial difference between His disciples (or apostles) and other Christians, who are saved at a later time. There are those who would teach that there are apostles today, just as much as there were apostles in New Testament times. At least some would maintain that these contemporary “apostles” speak for God, with greater authority than others. Jesus speaks of His disciples as a distinct group, a very restrictive group. The disciples themselves seem to concur with this, as can be seen by their insistence in Acts 1:12-26 that one who would replace Judas must have been present with Jesus. It would seem as though only two men met the requirements set down by the disciples for Judas’ replacement. We need to be careful about calling men apostles today, when Jesus seems to have restricted them to His day. The apostles of the first century church seem to be in a class of their own. Our Lord’s prayer appears to assume this distinction. I am reminded of the writer to the Hebrews, who also distinguishes the apostles from those who will believe because of the gospel that they proclaimed: 1 Therefore we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. 2 For if the message spoken through angels proved to be so firm that every violation or disobedience received its just penalty, 3 how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was first communicated through the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard him, 4 while God confirmed their witness with signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will (Hebrews 2:1-4). The “us” of verse 3 seems to be synonymous with the “those who believe in me through their testimony” of John 17:20. The “those who heard him” of verse 3 seems to be synonymous with “the disciples” for whom Jesus prays in verses 6-19. Safe. What a wonderful assurance. Earlier in John, Jesus said, 27 “My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; no one will snatch them from my hand. 29 My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one can snatch them from my Father’s hand. 30 The Father and I are one” (John 10:27-30). Do you remember that song, “Safe am I”? “Safe am I; Safe am I, in the hollow of His hand.” And notice that the safety of the sheep is linked to the unity of the Father and the Son (10:30). Safety is His work. We are to abide, but He keeps us safe. This safety that our Lord prays for is linked to the work He has given us to do. Do you remember how many times in John’s Gospel the Jews sought to kill Him? They could not lay a hand on Him until it was His time. He was “safe” from the opposition of the devil and from men. It did not keep Him from suffering, and from death. But it did keep Him from being prevented from fulfilling His mission. I would suggest to you that no one is ever more safe than the one who is pursuing God’s will, who is fulfilling their God-given mission. Blessed assurance! This text weaves together two themes which might be considered antithetical. On the one hand, we find very clear indications that the outcome of the disciples’ lives is certain and secure. Jesus speaks of their future growth and assurance! One is ever more safe than the one who is pursuing God’s will, who is fulfilling their God

Christian unity is a very difficult issue. We should certainly say that there should never be division over matters like race or economic status (cf. Galatians 2:11-21; Ephesians 2:11-22; James 2:1-13). Neither should there be divisions over matters of personal conviction (Romans 14:1–15:6; esp. 15:6), or over material gain (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, esp. v. 7). We should, however, divide over immorality and open sin (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-15; Titus 3:10-11) and doctrinal heresy (Galatians 1:6-10; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2 John 1:7-11). It is actually those who
Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

In the early 1800s, a transplanted Scotch-Irish clergyman on the American frontier of western Pennsylvania was disciplined for extending Christian fellowship to believers who were not part of the sectarian heritage of his group. He was confronted by the harsh reality of European divisions of the church that were retained by some immigrants in their new homeland. This man, Thomas Campbell (1763–1854), had been studying the issue of division of the church from the perspective of the Bible. He concluded that passages such as John 17 taught that Christ desired unity for his followers. If this was so, reasoned Campbell, then dividing the church was contrary to the will of its Lord and therefore a sinful act. To participate knowingly in things that caused division in the church was to commit sin. Campbell expressed his convictions when he wrote that the church on earth was “essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.” By this he meant that there was unity in the essence of the church, in its commitment to Jesus Christ of those saved by faith in him. There was unity in the intentionality of Christ, who intended his church to be one as evidenced by his prayer in John 17. Further, there was a constitutional unity of the church, as Campbell thought in terms of the U.S. Constitution, a written document that unified the many states and peoples of America. For the church, Campbell’s idea of a constitution was the Bible, particularly the New Testament. Campbell believed the church could be united if it recognized its essential oneness in Christ, if it recognized that division in the church was a sinful violation of Christ’s intention, and if it recognized the New Testament as the authoritative guide for all matters of Christian faith and practice. In the 205 years since Campbell wrote his thoughts, we have seen some steps toward Christian unity, but other developments have worked against unity even more so. Those who love Christ and his words are (or should be) deeply troubled by this disunity, especially when it resorts to name-calling or elitist dismissal of those with whom we disagree. May we never be satisfied with a divided church, whether that be disunity within a congregation or the divisions we see between congregations. May we long for and work toward a united church, unified under the lordship of Jesus Christ in adherence to his Word. Such a church can then produce a unified witness to an unbelieving world.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Jesus' action toward us displays God and His glory to the world (John 17:6-10)
2. We should seek unity with one another that would in some sense reflect the unity within the Trinity (vs. 11)
3. We do not have to worry about an evil power being stronger than Jesus (vs. 12)
4. Knowledge of God's truth will sanctify us as we live in the world (vss. 13-19)
5. Jesus prayed for all His followers in the future to be unified, including you and me (vss. 20-21)