

John 17:1–11 - Bible Study Handout

Big Idea

Jesus prays for His disciples before the cross. He knows they are confused, weak, and about to face a world that will not always welcome them. Yet He doesn't pray in panic. He prays with trust. Eternal life is knowing the Father through the Son, and Jesus asks the Father to protect His people, keep them united, and hold them in His name.

Context

- John 17 comes at the end of Jesus' farewell conversation with His disciples in John 13–16.
- Judas has already gone into the night, Peter's denial has been foretold, and the cross is close.
- Jesus has washed His disciples' feet, promised the Holy Spirit, warned them about trouble, and told them He has overcome the world.
- Now Jesus turns from teaching the disciples to praying for them.
- This prayer is often called the High Priestly Prayer because Jesus stands before the Father on behalf of His people (Brown).
- The passage shows the heart of Jesus before His suffering. He is not focused on saving Himself from pain, but on completing the Father's work and keeping His disciples in grace.

Key Themes

- Jesus' hour has come
- The cross as glory, not defeat
- Eternal life as knowing God through Jesus Christ
- The unity of the Father and the Son
- The disciples as people entrusted to Jesus
- Protection for believers who remain in the world
- Christian unity rooted in God's own life and love
- Grace that acts before the disciples fully understand

Passage Overview

Verses 1–2 - The Hour Has Come

- Jesus lifts His eyes to heaven and prays, "Father, the hour has come."
- In John, Jesus' "hour" points to His death, resurrection, and return to the Father.
- The cross does not catch Jesus by surprise. It is the moment when God's love will be revealed most clearly (Brown).
- Jesus asks the Father to glorify the Son so the Son may glorify the Father. Glory here means revelation. The cross shows us who God is.

Verse 3 - Eternal Life Defined

- Jesus defines eternal life as knowing "the only true God, and Jesus Christ" whom the Father sent.
- Eternal life is not only heaven after death, though it certainly includes that hope.
- Eternal life begins in relationship with God through Jesus. It is life with God now that death cannot destroy (Carson).

- Faith is more than knowing information about God. It is trusting, loving, and living in relationship with Him.

Verses 4–5 - The Work Completed

- Jesus says He has brought the Father glory by finishing the work He was given to do.
- The cross has not yet happened, but Jesus speaks with the certainty of obedience. He will not turn back.
- Jesus asks to be glorified with the glory He had with the Father before the world began.
- This points to Jesus' eternal relationship with the Father. He is not merely a prophet or teacher. He is the Son sent from the Father (Köstenberger).

Verses 6–8 - The Father Made Known

- Jesus says He has revealed the Father's name to the people the Father gave Him.
- In Scripture, God's name means His character, presence, and identity.
- Jesus reveals the Father through His words, His works, His compassion, His holiness, and His love.
- The disciples have received His words and believed that He came from the Father. Their faith is not perfect, but it is real (Keener).
- Jesus sees what grace has begun in them, even though they still have much to learn.

Verses 9–10 - Belonging to God

- Jesus prays specifically for His disciples. Later in the prayer, He will pray for all who will believe through their message.
- He says the disciples belong to the Father and have been given to the Son.
- This does not erase human response. It shows that salvation begins with God's initiative. Grace comes first.
- Jesus speaks of the disciples as gifts entrusted to Him. That is tender and reassuring. He knows their weakness, but He also knows they belong to God.

Verse 11 - Kept in the Father's Name

- Jesus says He will no longer remain in the world in the same way, but the disciples will remain in the world.
- He prays, "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name."
- Jesus does not pray that they will become famous, comfortable, or untouched by trouble. He prays that they will be kept.
- The goal is unity, "that they may be one as we are one."
- Christian unity is not shallow agreement. It grows from belonging to the same Lord, receiving the same grace, and sharing the same mission (Lincoln).

Important Observations

- Jesus prays before the disciples fail. His grace is already ahead of their weakness.
- Jesus does not define eternal life as religious activity. He defines it as knowing God.
- The cross is not treated as a tragic interruption. It is the place where divine love is revealed.
- Jesus reveals the Father. If we want to know what God is like, we look at Jesus.
- The disciples are not removed from the world. They are kept by God while they remain in it.
- Unity matters deeply to Jesus. He prays for it on the night before the cross.

Wesleyan Insights

- **Prevenient Grace:** Jesus prays for the disciples before they understand, before they stand firm, and before they know how much they will need grace. God's grace always moves first (Collins).
- **Saving Grace:** Eternal life comes through knowing the Father by faith in Jesus Christ, not through self-improvement or religious performance.
- **Assurance:** Jesus' prayer reminds believers that they belong to God and are held by divine love. Our confidence rests in Christ, not in our own strength (Maddox).
- **Sanctifying Grace:** Jesus prays for people who believe, but they still need to grow in holiness, unity, love, and faithful witness.
- **Holiness of Heart and Life:** Christian unity is part of holy living. Love for God should shape how we treat one another.

Life Application

- When life feels uncertain, Jesus teaches us to turn toward the Father instead of collapsing into fear.
- Eternal life begins now as we grow in relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
- We do not have to pretend our faith is flawless. Jesus prayed for disciples who were still unfinished.
- The Church should take unity seriously because Jesus took it seriously.
- Unity does not mean ignoring truth. It means practicing humility, forgiveness, patience, and love under the lordship of Christ.
- A church can face grief, transition, disagreement, and uncertainty without acting abandoned because Christ still intercedes for His people.

Apologetic Reflection

- John 17 gives a strong witness to Jesus' identity. He speaks of shared glory with the Father before the world began, authority to give eternal life, and the completion of the Father's saving work (Carson).
- Christianity is not merely a moral system. Jesus says eternal life is knowing God through the One He sent.
- The cross is not a split between an angry Father and a loving Son. Father and Son act together in holy love for the salvation of the world.
- The passage takes human weakness seriously. Jesus does not pretend the disciples are strong enough on their own. He prays because they need to be kept by God.
- The Christian hope is not that believers can hold everything together by grit. The hope is that Christ intercedes, the Father keeps, and grace sustains.

Details Worth Noticing

- Jesus prays out loud where His disciples can hear Him. His prayer teaches them even as He prays for them.
- "The hour" in John points to suffering and glory together. God's glory is revealed through self-giving love.
- Jesus defines eternal life in relational terms. Salvation is communion with God, not just escape from death.
- The disciples belong to the Father before they fully understand the Son's mission. Grace has been working all along.

- Jesus prays for protection, not escape. The disciples will stay in the world, but they will not be left alone.
- Unity is connected to witness. A divided Church struggles to show the love of the Father revealed in the Son.

Reflection Questions

1. What does Jesus' prayer teach us about facing hard seasons?
2. How does Jesus' definition of eternal life deepen your understanding of salvation?
3. Why does it matter that Jesus prayed for His disciples before they failed?
4. Where do you see the Church struggling with unity today?
5. What would it look like this week to live as someone kept by the Father's name?

Key Verse

"Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." - John 17:3

Cross References

Exodus 34:5–7 • Psalm 121:1–8 • John 1:14–18 • John 13:1–17 • John 14:6–7 • John 15:4–5 • Romans 8:34 • Hebrews 7:25 • 1 John 5:11–13

Takeaway

John 17:1–11 shows us the heart of Jesus before the cross. He glorifies the Father, gives eternal life, reveals God's name, and prays for His people. We are not kept by our own strength. We are held by the Father, prayed for by the Son, and sustained by grace.

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