

# Adult Teaching Resources

May 13, 2018



## Easter: Keeping Close (April 1-May 20)

John 15:9-17 – “Real Love”

### **John 17:6-19 – “Questions of Belonging”**

John 15:26-16:15 (RCL 15:26-27, 16:4b-15) – “Goodbye,  
and Hello”

## Season After Pentecost: The Perils of Pauline ... Thinking (May 27-July 8)

Romans 8:12-17 – “In the Flesh, of the Spirit”

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# Questions of Belonging

*John 17:6-19*

## FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Bible Background

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*“All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.” John 17:10*

Prayer is a regular action when believers gather for worship or study. We expect prayer in worship or in a class. We even expect prayer before a meal. How often, though, do we pray for those people sitting to our left and right? Do we not think about it or do we not want to make that person uncomfortable? Do we do it often and are thankful to have the opportunity to pray for others?

Prayer is powerful, especially when we are in the presence of someone praying for us. Today, we explore Jesus praying for his disciples.

### Opening

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Ask everyone to form small groups of 3-4. In those smaller groups, ask everyone to share a time someone or some group prayed for them.

Did they pray for you in front of you?

Did they pray for you in private and tell you about it later?

What was the situation that encouraged them to pray for you?

How did you react to their prayer or to the information they prayed for you?

How did their prayer affect the way you understand prayer?

How often do you now pray for others because someone prayed for you?

Before moving to the next section, ask for volunteers to share their experience with prayer and being prayed for. How many in your class have similar stories?

## Reading the Bible

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Who is speaking in this passage? (Jesus) Who is he speaking to? (God) Who is he speaking about? (the disciples, us)

According to Jesus, what do we now know? (that everything God gave to Jesus is from God, the words God gave to Jesus he gave to the disciples, the disciples received the words and know that Jesus came from God, and they believed that God sent Jesus)

On whose behalf does Jesus pray? (on the disciples' behalf) What reason does Jesus give? (they are God's)

What does Jesus specifically pray for? (to protect the disciples, that they may be one)

What did Jesus do while he was with the disciples? (he guarded them, protected them, fulfilled scripture)

What is the disciples relationship to the world? (the world hates them) What did Jesus give to them? (the word)

To whom do the disciples belong? (not the world) Who else does not belong to the world? (Jesus)

## Making Connections

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What is prayer for you?

Our Lesson Writer says that Jesus prays with “such confidence that it comes across as more of a proclamation than a petition.” How often are your prayers proclamation? How often are your prayers petition? How often do your prayers of petition come across as proclamation?

How do you pray? What words do you use? Do you follow a specific structure or form or pattern?

How would you describe your relationship with God? Do you feel a unity with God? What does that look like? How would you tell someone else about that?

As a Christian where and when do you face opposition in the world? How do you handle that opposition?

Our Lesson Writer unpacks the word “sanctify.” “The word ‘sanctify’ could also be rendered ‘consecrate’ or even ‘make holy,’ but what it really means is ‘to set apart.’” What does sanctify mean to you? How do you make sense of that theological term?

How are we to live in the world if we are not to live of the world?

Our Lesson Writer asks the question, “When has the church known its best days? When has it been least effective? What characterized the days of growth? Did the troubling days result from opposition coming from the inside the congregation, or from internal discord that sidetracked its mission?” What are your answers to those questions?

## So What?

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In the large group, like a group of disciples, state this truth: we who call ourselves “Christian” claim to be modern-day disciples.

Ask the group of disciples to consider these questions for large group discussion and conversation:

How seriously do we take Jesus’ teachings?

What evidence of that is apparent in the way we follow Jesus and his word in the way we live?

Does our living bring glory to God?

As a modern-day disciple, what prayer do you hope Jesus is praying for you?

## The Challenge

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Jesus desires that we become one. What can you do this week to move closer to other believers to achieve the unity Jesus desires? Make a list of three things you can do and commit to working on each one every day in the coming week.

## Prayer

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*Loving God, thank you for the gift of Jesus. Thank you for his life, his words, his witness, and his prayers for us. Help us to live in his way and follow his path. Amen.*

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**A long farewell**—Here’s a quick review of the final hours of fellowship between Jesus and his closest disciples, according to the Fourth Gospel. John 13 describes how Jesus washed his followers’ feet in a tender gesture, then began to explain that “the hour” marking the culmination of his work had come (cf. John 5:28; 12:23; 16:25, 32). Jesus told his followers to carry on his work by loving one another as he had loved them, so demonstrating his continued presence in the world.

Jesus made it clear that he was leaving, but not forever (chapter 14). He was going to prepare a place for them so that a day would come when they would all be together again. Even though he was departing physically, Jesus would not leave them orphaned, but would remain present in their hearts and minds through the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus went on (chapter 15) to speak about what it meant to live in connectedness – as a vine and its branches – even through dark days. As life-giving sap flows from the vine to the branches, so the Holy Spirit continues to connect disciples with Christ, who described the Spirit as the believers’ Advocate, Counselor, Teacher, and Comforter. Jesus spoke candidly in chapter 16 about the grief and mourning his friends might experience when he left, but also predicted a time of new joy and strength as they learned to depend on the Spirit and to look toward the future.

Finally, the author says, in the last moments of their time together, Jesus prayed for himself, for his disciples, and for all who would come to believe in him (chapter 17).

**A common approach**—Gail O’Day notes that farewell speeches, as a genre, typically ended with a prayer. Moses’ final speech to the Israelites, for example, concluded with a hymn of praise to God (Deut. 31:30-32:47, often called “The Song of Moses”) and a lengthy blessing of the people (Deuteronomy 33). In the apocryphal book of Jubilees, speeches attributed to Moses and Noah end with prayers (Jub. 1:19-21, 10:3-6). Jewish apocalyptic writings included multiple examples of farewell discourses that concluded with prayers. Thus, the convention would have been familiar to the author of Fourth Gospel as well as his readers. (See O’Day, “John,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 9 [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995], 787.

Whether Jesus actually prayed in this way, or whether the author imagined that this is how Jesus would have prayed, is an open question.

**Outlining the prayer**—John 17 is typically referred to as Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer,” but scholars have varying views on how the prayer is structured. Many suggest an outline in which Jesus prays for himself (vv. 1-5), his present disciples (vv. 6-19), and all future followers (vv. 20-26). Others see the first section as continuing into v. 8, while others divide the prayer into four or more parts, sometimes regarding vv. 6-8 as a separate section, or

## Digging Deeper *continued*

considering vv. 1-3 and vv. 4-8 as identifiable units. Some divide the final section into two parts in which vv. 20-23 is a prayer for all believers to be one, and vv. 24-26 is a concluding plea for the ultimate union of Father, Son and all believers.

Whatever structure we adopt, it is important to note that the entire prayer exudes dimensions of past, present, and future: there was a sense in which Jesus' "hour" had already commenced, was continuing, and would have eschatological significance. Intercessions that appear to address the present disciples in vv. 6-19 may also apply to all future followers. Despite its varied emphases, the prayer exhibits a repetitive theme: that the Father, the Son, and believers might live in unity.

**Why not pray for the world?**—In v. 9, Jesus said he was “not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.” Why, in that context, did Jesus focus on the disciples rather than the world? George R. Beasley-Murray explains it simply:

“The exclusion of the world from his prayer must be understood in its context; the disciples have been chosen to help the Church to fulfill its calling, which is none other than to reveal and to continue the mission of its Lord to the world (v 18); it is as the Church fulfills its calling in the unity of the divine love that the world will recognize that Jesus has been sent to them by God (vv. 21, 23). To this extent the prayer of Jesus for the disciples is indirectly prayer for the world also.”

(*John*, vol. 36 of Word Biblical Commentary. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987], 298.)

**The evil one**—Jesus' reference to “the evil one” in v. 15 should not necessarily be read as a divine endorsement of belief in a supernatural and personal embodiment of evil who consciously opposed God. The concept of a personal “Satan” became popular as Judaism emerged during the late postexilic period, when the Hebrews lived under the aegis of the Persian empire. The Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, featured a supreme being, Ahura Mazda, who was opposed by an evil force known as Angra Mainyu, who later came to be thought of as Ahriman, or the “devil.”

The idea that evil had its source in an evil supernatural power was so widespread in Jesus' day that it was a given, and Jesus used language that his followers would understand. The notion of a supernatural being who rivals God does nothing less than posit a polytheistic rival god, however. If we believe there is only one God – rather than a dualistic system in which a supreme “good” god is opposed by a bad one – there is no room for another deity, and Jesus' references to Satan or an “evil one” can be regarded as metaphorical.

# The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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## How could Jesus sanctify himself?

Toward the end of his prayer, as Jesus prayed for his disciples to be “sanctified” or “set apart,” he also said “I sanctify myself” (vv. 17-18). We are not the first to wonder what this means. J. Ramsey Michaels explores the question this way:

How does Jesus sanctify *himself*? Simply by making a strong commitment in his heart to fulfill his mission? In a sense, yes, but his mission on earth is already complete—except for his redemptive death. Therefore, “I sanctify myself” can only mean consecration *to death*. Jesus sanctifies or consecrates himself as a priest would consecrate a sacrifice! He is priest and sacrificial victim at the same time (cf. Heb. 9:12). It is solely on the basis of the one word sanctify or “consecrate” in verse 19 that the traditional designation of chapter 17 as Jesus’ “high-priestly prayer” is justified. His self-consecration to the Father benefits the disciples. It is for them (Gr.: *hyper autōn*, v. 19) just as the Good Shepherd’s death is “for the sheep” in 10:11, 15 or as Caiaphas prophesies Jesus’ death “for the Jewish nation” in 11:50–52, or as Jesus speaks of giving his life “for his friends” in 15:13.

(*John*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011], 297.)

It has often been observed that the “high priestly prayer” served not only as a petition, but as an exhortation or teaching moment for the disciples. Jesus’ willingness to consecrate himself for the task at hand was a model for the disciples. Though Jesus prayed for the Father to “Sanctify them in the truth,” he knew that they would also need to dedicate themselves to following the truth he had taught them: their sanctification came in conjunction with their being sent into the world (v. 18). Jesus’ commitment of himself to the coming passion was for the disciples’ benefit as well as the world’s: “And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth” (v. 19).

This is precisely what we do when churches ordain clergy, as a church we “sanctify” or “consecrate” or “set them apart” for the cause of the ministry – but the church’s action is really an endorsement of the candidate’s own decision to devote his or her life to serving Christ.

Though less formal, all believers may be “sanctified” or “set apart” as Christ followers, but such consecration goes hand in hand with our own commitment to follow Jesus and be “of Christ” rather than “of the world.”