

A MODEL FOR UNITY

Lesson 1

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Ephesians 4:3

Imagine Jesus on His last evening on earth. It was Thursday, the day we now call Maundy Thursday. A sense of impending doom in His Spirit told Jesus that the time had come. Indeed, that for which He had come into the world was about to be accomplished. The bittersweet emotions of joy and sorrow filled Him. He felt like a woman about to go into labor, dreading the ordeal, yet joyfully anticipating the outcome.

Thinking back over the 33 years of His life on earth, His eyes welled with tears. “So this is human life,” He thought. “So much to experience, yet bound so inextricably by time.”

Time. Something that had never before confined Him. Time. Pictures of His short life on earth flooded His memory. Childhood with His family. Mary's gentle touch, her soft laugh. Joseph's strong hands, so able to craft almost anything from wood. His brothers and sisters—sharing times of rollicking play and times of quiet before the family fire. That day in Nazareth when He announced His ministry in the synagogue. Was that only three years ago?

THAT THE WORLD MAY KNOW...

Three short years, yet so much had happened. All the people, all their needs...The needs seemed so endless. How effective His enemy had been on the earth! The crowds always thronging around Him. “Teach us, Rabbi!” “Heal us, Rabbi!” “Rabbi, Rabbi!” How He loved each of them, so bound by their humanness.

And His disciples, those special men the Father had given Him. More tears filled His eyes, tears of love and pain, joy and concern. Had they learned enough? Could they carry on after He was gone?

What could He tell them this last evening together? How could He summarize their time together? How could He prepare them for the horrible reality of tomorrow? How could he give them the strength to remain faithful? What could He say to assure that all He had taught them would not die with Him? The Father's plan was to use these men to bring the whole world to Himself. These men—His friends. He had taught them well, but even today they **still** didn't seem to understand . . .

Rowdy joviality interrupted His thoughts. They were back with the Passover meal. Their last meal together...

Getting Started:

1. If you knew you had only 24 hours to live, what are the most important things you would do?

“The hour I have long wished for is now come.”

Teresa of Avila
Last Words (1582)

That last evening Jesus and His disciples shared was both a summary and a preface as He prepared them not only to accept the reality of His death, but also their roles on earth after He was gone. His comments to them are recorded in John 13 through 16 and Luke 22.

Read Luke 22:14-27 and John 13 - 16:

2. In the spaces provided below, briefly summarize those things Jesus felt were most important to share with His disciples during their last evening together.
- a) Luke 22:14-20
 - b) Luke 22:24-27, John 13:1-17
 - c) John 13:31-33, 36-38
 - d) John 13:34-35
 - e) John 14:15-27
 - f) John 15:1-8

“The choices of time are binding in eternity.”

Jack MacArthur

- 4a. How does Jesus say He has brought glory to the Father (verse 4)? By extension, how can you glorify the Father?
- b. Are you, in your present state of life, glorifying the Father through your obedience? If not, where are you falling short? Are you willing to ask for prayer in this?
- c. What do these verses confirm about the deity of Jesus? About His role on earth?

Our purpose both in prayer and in our lives must be to glorify the Father. If we do this, he will give us the strength He knows is sufficient for us. However, if we only seek to honor ourselves, our prayers and our activities will be useless.

THAT THE WORLD MAY KNOW...

LESSON 1—PART 2

Read John 17:6-26:

In verses 6-19, Jesus prays for His eleven faithful disciples. In verses 20 through 26, He prays for those who will believe in Him through the disciples' message—in other words, for each of us. Note how similar these prayers are. His primary prayer for us is in verses 20-23.

- 5a. Most of Jesus' prayer for His disciples is summary and statements of fact, but He makes three requests of the Father. What are they?
- 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
- 6a. The word translated “sanctify” is from a Greek word meaning “to make holy, purify or consecrate.” What does Jesus say will sanctify them? What does it mean to be holy?
- b. What do we know about the result of Jesus' prayer for these eleven Galilean peasants? What did they go on to do?

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- c. Why were they so effective in the task Jesus gave them?

“The great thing to be asked of God for gospel ministers is that they may be sanctified, entirely devoted to God, and experientially acquainted with the influence of that word upon their own hearts which they preach to others.”

Matthew Henry's Commentary, Page 1608

- 7a. How does Jesus suggest that the world was already reacting to the disciples?
- b. Contrast Jesus' prayer for our unity with what is typical in the world.
- c. Have you ever felt out of place because of your faith? If so, what was your reaction?

THAT THE WORLD MAY KNOW...

Jesus did not pray that his disciples would be taken out of the world nor that they would face no opposition or hardship. He simply prayed that the father would protect them so that they might be one.

- 8a. What word summarizes His prayer for all believers (verse 23)? What is the standard Jesus sets for this?
- b. What is the purpose for which we are to be sanctified and protected? Why is unity among believers essential to showing the world who Jesus is?
- 9a. How does this passage suggest that we should react to people who attend other churches or who may hold a slightly different theology from ours?

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- b. Which of the following is the primary doctrinal issue that identifies a person as a fellow believer with whom we should have unity?
- 1) The role of the Holy Spirit in the world today
 - 2) The deity and atoning work of Jesus Christ
 - 3) The size and design of the church building
 - 4) The style of worship (e.g., formal vs. informal)
 - 5) Similarities of race, income, or lifestyle
- c. What should we do about the rest of these and other issues that tend to separate believers from one another today?

“It is only when God's people stand as one body, one before God in the fellowship of love, one toward another in deep affection, one before the world in a love that the world can see—it is only then that they will have power to secure the blessing which they ask of God. Remember that if a vessel that ought to be one whole is cracked into many pieces, it cannot be filled. You can take one part of the vessel and dip out a little water into that, but if you want the vessel full, the vessel must be whole. That is literally true of Christ's Church. And if there is one thing we must pray for still, it is this, ‘Lord, melt us together into one by the power of the Holy Spirit’.”

Andrew Murray, Page 24
Absolute Surrender

- 10a. Think about your relationship with other believers. Are there areas where you fall short of the unity Jesus sought for us? Describe those.

THAT THE WORLD MAY KNOW...

- b. What steps can you take this week to seek greater unity among your fellow believers?
Why is this important?

The fruit of unity, indeed the very purpose of unity, is to let the world know that God sent Jesus Christ and that He loves them.

Jesus had a specific purpose in mind for His disciples and, indeed, for His entire church. He prayed that we might be one just as He and His Father are one, so that the world will know who He is and why He came. That is our charge. That is our commission. That is our purpose, as believers, for living in this world. Throughout the next eleven lessons, we will learn just what this unity and this commission really mean.

Memory Verse: John 17:23

“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.”