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Defining Purpose

John 17:1-19

To know that your adored leader prays for you can be an overwhelming discovery of committed love. Surely the Eleven were overwhelmed when their Master turned from talking to them at length and with feeling about the Father, to talking, still at length and with feeling, to the Father about them. Knowing he must leave them behind in a perverse and corrupt world, he asks for their continued protection from Satan, their sworn enemy for their ongoing holiness and sanctification; for lasting unity with each other, as proof of their new supernatural life; and for them finally to be with him in his glory beyond this world. Clearly, Jesus wants them to overhear his prayer so as to realize that his love for them is not going to fade but is an eternal reality.

Shouldn't we be equally overwhelmed to know that from this throne Jesus intercedes for us in exactly these terms? Discipleship takes wings when we constantly remind ourselves that at this moment Jesus, my Savior, Lord and Friend, is praying for me.

GROUP DISCUSSION. If you were setting out on a complex mission or task, what would be most important for you to know?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Suppose you were able to say to God at the end of your life, "I have completed the work you gave me to do." What would you want that to mean?

Four times during his goodbye conversation with his disciples, Jesus admonishes them to pray, and each time he makes powerful promises connected with prayer. Now at the end, Jesus prays in their presence: first for himself, then for his followers. *Read John 17:1-19*

1. Focus particularly on Jesus' prayer for himself in verses 1-5. What do you learn here about Christ and his purpose?

2. Several times in his prayer for himself, Jesus uses words and phrases that speak of time. What does his use of time language reveal to you about time and eternity, God and his people?

3. How can Jesus' prayer for himself contribute to your own worship of God as Trinity?

4. "I pray for them," says Jesus in verse 9. At this point in his ministry Jesus has eleven remaining disciples: Peter, James (son of Zebedee), John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon. Select one of these disciples as your own "stand-in," and for the moment give yourself one of these names. Read verses 6-19, listening to Jesus' prayer through the ears of this disciple with all that you

imagine him to be. What words and phrases are important to this disciple you have chosen to imitate? Why?

Which words and phrases are important to you in your own context? Why?

5. Review uses of the term world, which Jesus uses nearly a dozen times in this prayer. What good can Christ-followers accomplish because they are in the world, but not of the world?

6. Read again this petition in Jesus' prayer: "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name-the name you gave me-so that they may be one as we are one" (v. 11). In view of the task and the purpose that Jesus has given his followers, why is the kind of unity described here important?

7. When and how have you experienced this kind of kinship with other believers?

Prayerfully read the last three sentences of Jesus' prayer for his disciples (w. 17-19). What does this second part of Jesus' prayer in John 17 suggest about his purpose and its impact on his followers?

8. Jesus began this prayer for his disciples with a statement to his Father: "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world" (v. 6). As you think back over what you know of Jesus' life and teachings, when and how have you seen Jesus reveal the true nature of his Father?

9. When have you seen God revealed in or through someone?

10. Mentally picture a dozen people who follow you in one way or another. What would have to happen for you to be able to say at the end of your life, "Father, I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world"?

Spend some time in prayer thanking God for these early disciples and Jesus' ministry through them.

Now and Later

Select one of the eleven disciples who remained with Jesus at this point. Research how that person spent the remainder of his life. Consider ways that this disciple lived out the purposes expressed in Jesus' prayer for him.