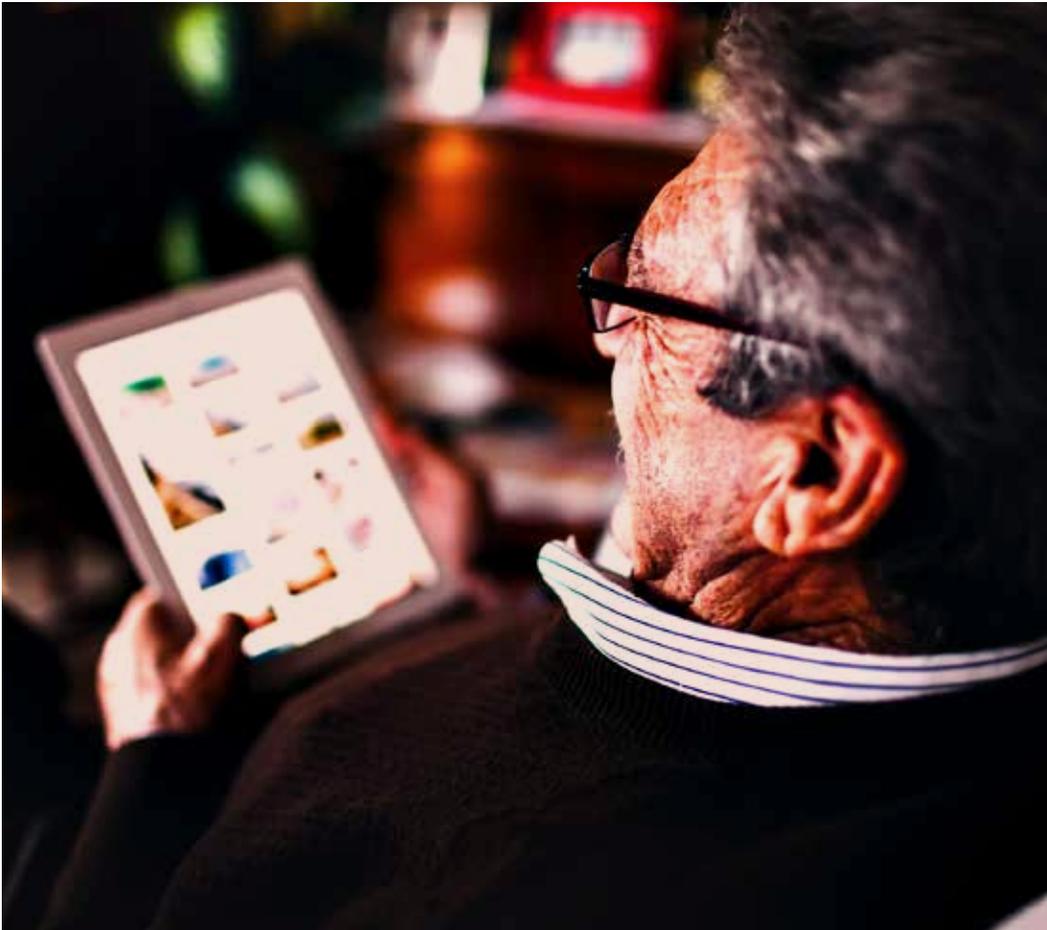


SESSION 3

Intimacy with Jesus



QUESTION 1:

What are some of the biggest ways electronic media has affected your life?

THE POINT

Prayer draws us closer to Jesus as our hearts align with His.

THE PASSAGES

John 17:1-5,21-26

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I have begun to wonder if we own our smartphones, or if they own us. We have come to depend on them for so many things, such as apps for purchases, maps to help us find our way, and endless games to play—not to mention making the occasional phone call. One of the most popular uses of smartphones is to access all the social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and text messaging. How big a part does social media play in our lives? On average, some 3.2 billion users spend two hours and twenty-two minutes per person on social media. *Every day.*¹

It can be difficult to resist the urge to check social media. Research shows that, when people give in to that compulsion, their anxiety level rises. Being connected constantly to social networks or answering texts endlessly makes it hard for them to log off. They felt obligated to keep checking in—just in case.²

Social media may build bridges between the world and us, but it also puts up walls. Too often we are consumed with our social media profiles and we miss the most important relationships we have. We miss the joy of spending uninterrupted face-to-face time with friends and family, and we squander the opportunity to really know God.

John 17:1-5

1 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:

2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

4 I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.

5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

Knowing God requires spending time with Him—both time in His Word and time in heartfelt prayer. Heartfelt praying is deep praying. It is going beyond the surface of merely “saying our prayers” or crying out for help during a crisis or tragedy. To really know God—to have an intimate relationship with the Lord—we must move beyond the rote and our request lists and really connect with our heavenly Father. We need to go deep.

When we take the time and make the effort to do this, not only will we get to know Him better, but we also will feel the calming touch of His unseen hand throughout our day. In both the anxious and the routine moments of life, we are able to experience Him more clearly. We experience His character. When we go deep, we encounter His glory.

Many of Jesus’ prayers mentioned in the Gospel of John are prayers for God’s glory. For example, when Jesus stood at Lazarus’s tomb, he told Mary she was about to see the glory of God if she believed. He followed that with a prayer that the crowd gathered there would believe that the Father had sent Him. What Jesus

expressed to Mary would apply to the crowd when they saw and believed: “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” (John 11:40). Jesus came; He listened; He wept; He prayed; and then He ushered in God’s glory by raising Lazarus from the dead.

Later, after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus confessed, “My soul [is] troubled.” He wondered if He should pray for His Father to save Him from “this hour,” a reference to His death, burial, and, resurrection, the very reason he came to earth (12:27). But then He exclaimed, “Father, glorify thy name” (v. 28). Jesus desired for the people to see God’s glory. As the events unfolded, people would see the depths of man’s depravity at the foot of the cross, but they would also see the grand display of God’s glory at the empty tomb and the ascension.

In John 17, Jesus’ “hour” had come. In the midst of the “hour,” He prayed that even as God was glorifying Him, He would glorify the Father. God’s *shekinah* [shuh KIGH nuh] glory that once resided in the temple, now rested in the incarnate Jesus who was dwelling among God’s people (1:14). Jesus prayed that those who had been given eternal life would see that glory. Those who have eternal life can know God intimately. Eternal life not only ensures that we will behold His glory face-to-face throughout eternity, but it makes an intimate relationship with God possible here and now.

Following Jesus’ example, we also are to pray for people to see God’s revealed glory. It’s important to note that the first thing Jesus prayed was for God to be glorified. Our desire to see God’s glory is to surpass all other desires, and our first request is to be for His glory. The Model Prayer Jesus gave us to pray begins with the request: “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name” (Matt. 6:9). We seek God’s glory and honor over all else.

When we follow Jesus’ example, we pray for the things He prayed for—and in the way He prayed for them. We must break free from only approaching God when we need *something from Him*; we

must learn to pray because we need *Him*. We are to seek Him and not just seek things from Him.

Even as we pray for His glory, we will encounter Him in His glory. As we deepen our prayer life, praying as Jesus prayed, we experience His glory—His holiness, His authority, and His reputation. Heartfelt prayer increases intimacy with God. As we come to know God intimately, He will reveal His glory.

QUESTION 2:

What does it look like to glorify God in our culture?

John 17:21-23

21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Jesus also prayed for unity. The believers needed unity then, and we desperately need it now. Is unity possible? Can people with different agendas, backgrounds, beliefs, interpretations, and points of view really be unified? Division and discord are everywhere. We encounter it in politics, at work, and even when we are trying to relax and enjoy a ballgame.

Major League Baseball (MLB) is working to reduce conflict by “getting it right.” In the 2008 season MLB introduced instant replay as a means of reviewing home run calls by the umpires. Over

the years, the replay system has been expanded multiple times to include many different plays. Under current rules, a crew of umpires in a New York studio views video feeds of contested plays and has the power to overturn mistakes made by the umpiring crew on the field. Instead of arguing with the umpire, managers can now appeal to a higher authority.³

Building on this successful innovation, in 2019 the MLB began experimenting with calling balls and strikes using a “robot umpire” called TrackMan in the Atlantic League All-Star independent minor league baseball game. However, just one inning into the “robot umpire” era, former Cy Young Award winner and High Point Rockers pitching Coach Frank Viola disagreed with a call and began shouting at the home plate umpire to overrule the robots. The umpires ejected Viola from the game for arguing balls and strikes.⁴

As long as opposing teams with differing agendas take the field, unity will be difficult to achieve. People tend to see what they want to see. This happens at sporting events; it happens in everyday life; and if we’re not Christ-focused, it can happen in the church.

While everyone wants unity, few are willing to make the necessary sacrifices to become and remain unified. Unity does not mean that others will agree with us, behave like we want them to act, adapt to our preferences, and give in to us. An insistence on *conformity* works against *unity*.

Jesus prayed for unity, not conformity. What does that unity look like? It looks like the Triune God: the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee.” While the Father is not the Son or the Spirit, and the Son is not the Father or the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son, the Father, Son, and Spirit are God. God is three Persons, but one Essence. Jesus prayed that His followers would be unified in like manner. Our personalities are not to be absorbed and lost by our unity, but our self-interests will.

They will have a unified purpose. Paul helped us understand what this looks like among believers:

“Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil. 2:2).

QUESTION 3:

What does unity look like in the church?

We can only achieve this unity when we are in God and He is in us. Jesus prayed, “That they also may be one in us.” When believers are connected to God—we are dwelling in Christ and He is dwelling in us—unity happens. We are in Him, and He is in us. We move beyond a surface relationship with God, into a deeper relationship in which we know Him intimately. There is no other path to unity.

The spiritual discipline of heartfelt prayer is not limited to a private quiet time. While Scripture certainly tells of many people praying in “prayer closets,” we also find numerous accounts describing believers who gathered together for prayer. With one mind, one heart, and one purpose, God’s people lifted their prayers up to God. This was not just to petition Him for their needs, but also to praise Him and to know Him. (For an example, see Acts 4:23-31.)

Jesus shares His glory with His people—“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them”—but this was not simply so that we would possess His glory. His glory is to lead to our unity: “That they may be one, even as we are one.” We are to join Him in praying for that unity. One of the key things that points others to God and brings Him glory is when we, His children, live together in unity. This is unity the world needs to see.

John 17:24-26

24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

25 O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.

26 And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

As we grow in our relationship with God, we will have an intimate relationship with Him. Our hearts will become one with His. As we see in verses 24-26, when we pray like Jesus, those prayers will also include a desire to make His love known to others, so that they can experience it as well. An eternal love exists between the Father and the Son, and Jesus' prayer was that "the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." We will care about what He cares about. We will care for the people He cares for. We will align our activities with what He is doing to reconcile the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

Knowing God and experiencing His love motivates us to pray for those who have not yet come to know Him and experience His love. When God's love runs through us, we will pray for people who need Him, but we will also tell them what He has done for us—we will let them see His glory. Because God loved the world, not just people in "our world," we pray for the nations, but we will also go where we are called and help others who are called to go and teach the nations.

While Christians fail to agree on many things, we all can agree that people need the Lord. To carry out our role in "the ministry of reconciliation" (v. 18), we must be unified in our purpose. We must be unified in sharing the gospel with the people in our neighborhoods and all around the world who are dying to hear about Jesus Christ.

QUESTION 4:

What's the relationship between our unity and our witness?

It is amazing what we can do when we set aside our differences and unify around the gospel. While social media might distract us from our relationship with God, we can—and should—harness it to spread God's love. Social media expands our reach beyond our neighborhood.

- ▶ 28 percent of believers share their faith via social media.
- ▶ 58 percent of non-believers have had someone share their faith with them through Facebook.⁵

We can and should use every means possible to share the love of Christ. And when we do, we receive the joy, but God gets all the glory!

QUESTION 5:

How has our group helped you experience the love of God?

ENGAGE

Circle the ways you will undertake this week to develop a more intimate communion with Jesus. Then list some other ways you could fellowship with Him.

Bible Study

Prayer

Witness

Giving

Helping Someone

Singing

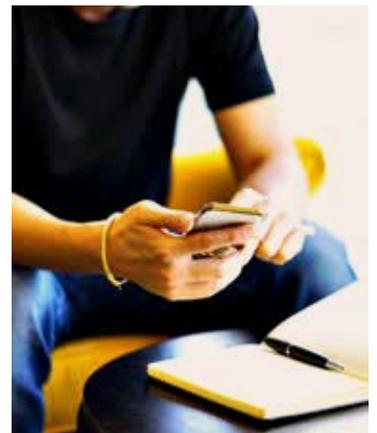
Other: _____

Spend some time right now in prayer, not asking for what God can do for you, but just having a conversation with Him.

LIVE IT OUT

How will you utilize the spiritual discipline of prayer to draw you closer to Jesus?

- ▶ **Pray for God's glory.** Replace at least five minutes of social media time (or TV watching) with additional time spent in prayer for God's glory.
- ▶ **Pray for unity.** Gather with others to spend time in concentrated prayer for unity among believers in your church and around the world.
- ▶ **Pray for God's love to be known.** Set an alarm on your smartphone for 3:16 every afternoon and pray John 3:16 over at least three people who need to know the Lord. Pray for the spread of the gospel around the world. Pray for opportunities to share Christ through your social media outlets.



END NOTES

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