

Sunday 18th January 2026

John 17: 20-23

Unity Sunday

Welcome

- Is there something different or unique about you? Have you ever done anything or been anywhere, that is quite different or unique?

Word

Read John 17: 20-23

*Jesus has just shared with his disciples in the Last Supper. He knows he is about to be arrested and then suffer an agonising death, whilst nearly all of his closest friends and followers abandon him. At this point, takes his focus away from his disciples, turns to God and allows them to hear him praying to his Father. The whole of Chapter 17 is this prayer. He begins by praying for **himself** and then prays for his **disciples** and in the third part of the prayer which we have just read, he prays for **all believers** even those in the future, that includes us. This is Jesus praying for us!*

1. How does it make you feel, knowing Jesus is praying for you?
2. We sometimes use the word 'intercession' or 'to intercede' – what do you think this means? Once you have thought about this, have a look in a dictionary or google the definition. Now what do you think intercession is?
3. In John 17, Jesus spends a lot of time stating what the situation is. Why do we need to do that if God already knows everything?
4. Have you ever gone through a time when lots of people were praying for you? What difference did it make to you?

5. When you are asked to pray for someone, how do you decide what to ask for? What does Romans 8:26 tell us and how does this work in practice?

This Chapter 17 gives us a wonderful example of how we should intercede for others in prayer. Here are some pointers:

- a. Set out the situation, what is the need?*
 - b. Include what we know about God's character and purpose – a bit of positivity – God can make a difference!*
 - c. Make the request*
6. What does verse 10 tell us about what Jesus thinks his disciples are capable of? (them=disciples)
 7. Is this surprising? Think about what his disciples were just about to do in the next few hours.
 8. What is Jesus' prayer for us (see verse 21)?
 9. What do verses 20-23 reveal about the *oneness* of the Father and Son, and what does this model for our unity?
 10. What does it mean for believers to be "one in us," as described in verse 21?
 11. How is the unity Jesus prays for different from mere agreement or uniformity (e.g., political alignment)?
 12. What do you think about the phrase that is sometimes used: "unity in diversity"? What does this mean in the church?
 13. What affect does this unity have on the "world"? Why is unity so important?
 14. Do you think unity is more attractive to those looking in? Why?
 15. How does unity affect the effectiveness of the church?
 16. There needs to be unity within a church and between different churches – what can you do to improve both of these?
 17. What are the biggest obstacles to unity (e.g., differing doctrines, politics, personal pride) in the church today, and how do we overcome them?

18. How does this passage challenge us to interact with fellow believers when we disagree on important, but non-essential, matters?
19. How does understanding Jesus' prayer change your view of your own identity as a believer and your relationship with other Christians?

Optional Extra questions about intercession:

20. Paul urges Timothy to pray for those in authority (read 1 Timothy 2:1-2). How do we pray for those we don't know personally?
21. Read James 5: 16. It says here that the prayer of a 'righteous person' is powerful and effective. How can we pray for others when we ourselves are sinful?

Worship & Witness

- Spend some time praying for the other churches in our area – this would include those involved in the exchange on Sunday:
 - Badminton Road Methodists
 - Mangotsfield URC
 - Emersons Green Baptist Church
 - Downend Baptist Church
 - Christ Church
 - Resound
 - St Augustine's
- Spend some time praying for the other local Salvation Army expressions:
 - Bristol Citadel Corps
 - Bristol South Corps
 - Easton Corps
 - Kingwood Corps
 - Logos House
 - Pill Corps

Individual action points:

- How many people do you know – hundreds? It can be daunting to think of praying for that many people. Why not start a notebook or note on your phone where you can keep a record of prayer. Ask God to guide you about who to pray for.
- Think about sending a card or a text to someone this week to let them know you have prayed for them
- Sign up to the prayer network if you aren't already – just send an email to staplehillprayers@gmail.com and ask to be added and then you will receive a message every time a prayer is needed – or you can request prayers yourself using the same email address.