

God's heart for the nations, Part I

by Jeff Lewis

Week one

This is an engaging Bible study and devotional series. Jeff does a great job of making it plain. He seeks to draw out one of the most ignored themes in the Bible, God's global purpose.

This study is an introduction to the more in-depth look at *God's passion for the nations* that Jeff has recently published. To receive a copy of the unabridged Bible study, please contact:

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Preface:

Before you start, remember, "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." John 14:26 (NASB)

"For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words." I Corinthians 2:10-13 (NASB)

"I have but one passion—it is He, it is He alone. The world is the field, and the field is the world; and henceforth that country shall be my home where I can be most used in winning souls for Christ." (Nicholus Ludwig Zinzendorf)

Start Pondering ... What is God's ultimate passion? Not His only passion, but what is His chief end? When everything is eliminated but one, what is His central motivation?

- **Genesis 12:1-3**

- **Matthew 28:18-20**

- **Revelation 7:9**

God's heart for the nations, Part II

by Jeff Lewis

Week two

What is God's ultimate passion? Not His only passion, but what is His chief end? When everything is eliminated but one, what is His central motivation?

READ: EZEKIEL 20:5-14

What was God's offer to Israel? What was Israel's response to His offer? Can you imagine choosing idols over God? But, we do! HOLY SPIRIT, open my eyes and reveal to me how I have chosen slavery over freedom and idols over the one true God. Why did God deliver Israel from captivity? (Also read: 2 Samuel 7:22-23)

READ: PSALM 106:7-12; ISAIAH 63:11-14

As the Egyptian chariots were attacking the Israelites trapped by the Red Sea, what was the people's reaction? Why did God rescue them?

Have you experienced attitudes and reactions toward God like the Israelites? How has God shown his love to you even during times of your apathy or rebellion? Why do you think He did this? (See Psalm 106:8 and Isaiah 63:14b) What would be an appropriate reaction to God's love?

For the sake of His name

by Jeff Lewis

Week three

RECORD WHAT GOD DOES FOR THE "SAKE OF HIS NAME":

- Isaiah 43:25; I John 2:12
- Psalm 143:11
- Psalm 31:3
- Daniel 9:17-19

What has God done in your life "for the sake of His name"?

How will you connect with God's purpose of glorifying His name among the nations?

"I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images." (Isaiah 42:8, NASB)

For the glory of God

by Jeff Lewis

Week four

Record how Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension relate to the glory of God. John 13:31-32; 17:4; John 12:27-28; Romans 6:4; Philippians 2:9-11.

I have already stated that we live to glorify God. Notice some of the different ways that followers of Jesus Christ are called to glorify God. I Corinthians 6:19-20, 10:31; I Peter 4:11,16.

Notice the prophetic declarations revealing God's global objective. Psalm 72:19; 86:9; Habakkuk 2:14.

God's passion for His name and His glory is the supreme reason for His actions in the world. This does not lessen the fact that He loves us; in fact, it strengthens the concept of His love for us. This Bible study is built on this foundation truth. God's passion for His name should be our central motivation for world evangelization.

MEDITATION: Write down what God has been teaching you through your meditation on Isaiah 48:9-11.

Blessings and responsibilities, Part I

by Jeff Lewis

Week five

During this, the second section of God's Heart for the Nations, we will investigate two dominant themes in the Bible. Rooted in Genesis 1:28, these themes are developed throughout the Scriptures.

Two basic themes are stated in this verse: First, God desires to bless His creation (blessing). Second, in the context of blessing, we discover God's purpose and man's responsibility (purpose and responsibility). Before we move on, let's summarize what happened in the introduction of Scripture.

God creates the heavens and the earth and all living things including the crown of His creation, Adam and Eve. They sin and lose fellowship with God, resulting in the need for a blood sacrifice. This reveals that the shedding of blood is necessary for the covering of sin. Mankind continues to multiply, continuing to rebel against God. God becomes so grieved that He had to judge man through the flood. God's redemptive character is revealed as He delivers Noah's family from the flood. People then decide to build a great tower that they might not be "scattered abroad over the face of the earth." Consequently, God confuses their languages and "scatters them over the face of the whole earth." This is the backdrop from which God calls Abram to leave his country and declares His covenant to him. Read Genesis 9:1.

Read Genesis 12:1-3. List the phrases that relate to the theme of blessing.

Have a good week! And remember, we are blessed to be a blessing.

God's covenant

by Jeff Lewis

Week six

Reread Genesis 12:1-3.

Write out the two purpose clauses found in verses 2 and 3 that relate to the theme of God's purpose and man's responsibility.

1. _____
2. _____

The two purpose clauses reveal why God has chosen to bless Abram and give further definition to the theme of purpose/responsibility.

Why has God blessed Abram?

To which families is Abram supposed to be a blessing?

God continues to confirm His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the restatements of the covenant God continues to clarify the theme of blessing and purpose/ responsibility. Read the following verses and write down your reflections. Notice how the analogies are used to communicate Israel's role in God's global purpose.

- Genesis 22:15-18

- Genesis 26:3-5

- Genesis 28:14-15

As a spiritual family, what can we do to reclaim the land and spread to the north, south, east and west?

Blessings and responsibilities, Part II

by Jeff Lewis

Week seven

God continually confirmed His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the restatements of the covenant God clarified the theme of blessing and purpose/responsibility. Read the following verses, and write down your reflections. Notice how the analogies are used to communicate Israel's role in God's global purpose.

- Genesis 22:15-18
- Genesis 26:3-5
- Genesis 28:14

As we journey through the Scripture we will discover the parallel nature of the two themes of blessing and God's purpose and man's responsibility. The danger is failing to keep these two themes in their parallel tension. Our tendency is to see God's blessings disconnected from His purpose. That perspective will create an egocentric faith.

To see this point, answer the following questions:

1. Why did God part the Red Sea? (Exodus 14:5-31)
2. Why did God give Solomon wisdom? (I Kings 3:1-15)
3. Why did God deliver Daniel from the lion's den? (Daniel 6)
4. Finish the following verse from memory. "Be still and know ..." (Psalm 46:10)

Reflect on your answers and determine which of the two themes your answers relates to. Put a "B" next to the answers that relate to the theme of blessing and a "P" next to the answers that relate to God's purpose.

Which theme did your answers most relate to?

Meditation: Write down what God has been teaching you through your meditation on Genesis 12:1-3.

Hold on light

by Jeff Lewis

Week eight

A time to reflect

What do you have to be thankful for? In the devotion, *God's Heart for the Nations* by Jeff Lewis, we have looked at the themes of blessing and responsibility. This week is a perfect opportunity to reflect on how God has blessed you. Don't forget that we are responsible for that which God has given us.

"Oh give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name;
Make known His deeds among the peoples.
Sing to Him, sing praises to Him;
Speak of all His wonders.
Glory in His holy name;
Let the heart of those who seek the Lord be glad.
Seek the Lord and His strength;
Seek His face continually.
Remember His wonderful deeds which He has done,
His marvels and the judgments from His mouth."
1 Chronicles 16:8-12 (NASB)

Here are a few quotes to remind us of what we have.

Food:

"Sometimes I think, 'If I die, I won't have to see my children suffering as they are.' Sometimes I even think of killing myself. So often I see them crying, hungry; and there I am, without a cent to buy them some bread. I think, 'My God, I can't face it! I'll end my life. I don't want to look any more!' (Iracema da Silva, Brazil—taken from Ronald J. Sider's *Rich Christians in Age of Hunger* 1997, 3)

"Lacking both food and medicine, poor nations have high infant mortality rates Permanent brain damage caused by protein deficiency is one of the most devastating aspects of world poverty. (Sider, 11)

"The developed nations, with one-quarter of the world's people, took about three-quarters of the year's fish catch. Peru has the largest anchovy fisheries in the world, but little of the anchovy protein goes to feed the millions of poor Peruvians; most of it fattens livestock in the United States and Europe. The story of tuna is similar ... at one point two-thirds of the total world tuna catch ended up in the United States. One-third of that tuna went for catfood! (Sider, 134)

"... In 1986 the developed nations exported \$27,367 million worth of food to poor nations; but they imported \$42,282 million worth of food. Poor nations sent rich nations \$14,915 million more food than they received!" (Sider, 133)

Buying power:

"*Newsweek* did a story on 'The Middle Class Poor,' calmly reporting that U.S. citizens earning \$30,693, \$36,832 or even \$51,155 a year (in 1989 dollars) felt they were at the edge of poverty. To the vast majority of the world's people, such statements would be unintelligible—or dishonest. To be sure, we do need \$30,000, \$50,000 or even more each year if we insist on two cars, an expensively furnished, sprawling suburban home, a \$100,000 life insurance policy, new clothes every time the fashions change, the most recent 'labor-saving devices' for home and garden, an annual three-week vacation to travel and so on. Many North Americans have come to expect precisely that. But that is hardly life at the edge of poverty. (Sider, 26)

Only 9.7 percent of disposable personal income in the United States, 1987, was used for food. (Sider, Table 10)

A beautiful world:

"Everywhere around the world, poverty forces many people to live dangerously close to smoke-belching factories and toxic wastes ... 'The rich get richer and the poor get poisoned.'" (Sider, 132)

"Economic life today, especially in industrialized societies, is producing such severe environmental pollution and degradation that the future for everyone—rich and poor alike—is dangerously threatened. We are destroying our air, forests, lands and water so rapidly that we face disaster in the next century unless we make major changes." (Sider, 132)

Knowledge of God's love through Jesus the Christ:

- Every hour more than 4,000 people die without Christ.
- One of every nine persons in the world is an evangelical Christian.
- One of every five persons in the world is a Muslim.
- 51 percent of the people in the world have never heard the gospel.

We have truly been blessed; there is no denying it. How do we respond?

Let us pray together:

Lord we thank You for the blessings You have so freely given us. Help us to recognize Your provision and to discern the difference between needs and wants. Father, let us not forget our brothers and sisters when we come to the table, that we may share and avoid waste. Draw our attention to the oppressed and poor. Let their cries be heard among the nations that we might be instruments of Your love, peace and provision to them. Anoint us that we might preach good news to the poor, bind up the broken hearted, proclaim freedom to the captives and release from darkness those in prison. Give us boldness to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of the vengeance of our God. Fill us with compassion so that we can comfort those who mourn and provide for those who grieve. Let all who hear and believe say, 'Send me' to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Scriptural Response:

Christ's Ministry

Isaiah 61:1-3

Truly this was Jesus' ministry, and the ministry to which we are also called

A warning

James 5:1-5

Where is your focus?

Mathew 6:16-34

Hold on light!

1 John 3:17-18

1 Timothy 6:17-19

Luke 12:16-21

not hold on tight

God continues to bless us. Material things can be a form of blessing. They can also become a curse. Remember that God blesses us so that we can bless others, bringing glory to Him. If we hoard the blessings of the Lord like the Rich Fool, the things that were intended to be blessings can harden our hearts towards God, making them a curse. Learning to be content with and thankful for what we have helps us to hear and obey the prompting of Christ. For even "a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23, NIV). When we trust God for our provision and direction, we are free of the worries of this world and are empowered to do His will. Therefore, be thankful, and hold on light!

- What do you have to be thankful for?
- How does God want to use the blessing?
- What hinders your ability to serve God?

God impacts the nations as He blesses His people

by Jeff Lewis

Week nine

As God blessed the people of Israel, He would reveal Himself to the nations and draw Gentiles to Himself. While working through the following Scriptures pay attention to how both themes are woven together in Bible stories that you probably know well. Notice how God's blessings are used to impact the nations and how individuals responded. Also, take some time to reflect on why you think the second theme of God's purpose and man's responsibility is usually ignored when these stories are discussed.

- The parting of the Red Sea—Joshua 4:23-24; 2:8-11
- The blessing of the commandments and statues that God gave Israel—Deuteronomy 4:5-8
- God blessing Solomon with wisdom—Kings 4:29-34; 10:1-9
- God's blessing Esther & Mordecai—Esther 8:15-18
- God delivering Daniel from the lions—Daniel 6:16-28

Selah—Take some time to reflect on what you have discovered in the Scripture you have studied today. What has the Holy Spirit revealed to you? Write those insights down and consider how you might apply them in your daily walk with Jesus Christ.

Understanding God's global purpose

by Jeff Lewis

Week ten

During the past several weeks we have focused on the interconnected themes of God's blessing and man's responsibility throughout the Bible. In the newsletter from week eight you looked at blessing and responsibility in the lives of key Old Testament figures such as Daniel, Esther and Solomon. One question that needs to be asked is whether any of the Old Testament characters understood both of these themes. Did their actions or prayers reveal their understanding of the connection between God's desire to bless His people and His purpose of declaring Himself to the nations? Did they understand their responsibility in God's global purpose? What is it in these verses that revealed to you they understood the two themes we are focusing on?

- Abraham—Genesis 18:16-33
- Moses—Numbers 14:11-19
- Solomon—I Kings 8:14-43

Selah—Take some time to reflect on what you have discovered in the Scripture you have studied today. What has the Holy Spirit revealed to you? Write those insights down and consider how you might apply them in your daily walk with Jesus Christ.

For the past three days you have been memorizing Isaiah 48:9-11. Write down what God has been teaching you in your meditation. If you haven't been working on it, you have missed inconceivable riches.

The Psalms reveal God's heart for the nations

by Jeff Lewis

Week eleven

Memorize: Psalm 67

We do not worship a tribal deity; we do not worship the God of a region, a people or a country. We worship the God of all nations.

This truth is reflected in the Psalms of Israel. The Psalms reveal God's heart for the nations, God's call for the nations to worship Him and for His people to declare His praise among the nations.

Take your time and meditate on the following Psalms and write down your reflections. Hint: when you see the word "peoples," the Psalm is referring to the nations.

- Psalm 2:1-12

- Psalm 57:7-11

- Psalm 66:1-8

- Psalm 67:1-7 Selah

- Psalm 87:1-7

- Psalm 96:1-13

Meditate on the truths about the nations you find in these passages.

Use these passages as the basis for your prayers as you intercede for the nations of the world before the throne of God.

The prophets reveal God's heart for the nations

by Jeff Lewis

Week twelve

The prophets were continually proclaiming God's desire to be manifested among the nations. They also revealed the future fulfillment of the nations coming to the Father. Dig for treasures about God's glory in the following verses.

- Isaiah 19:18-25
- Isaiah 42:6-13
(Who is Kedar and what is the significance of their glorifying God?)
- Isaiah 66:18-21 Selah
- Jeremiah 16:19-21
- Ezekiel 36:16-23
- Daniel 7:13-14
- Malachi 1:11

In the past few studies, we have only scratched the surface of Old Testament passages that connect with God's global purpose. Why do you think that most of Israel seemed to miss the connection between God's blessings and His purpose and their responsibility in that purpose?

Father, release me from the slavery of an egocentric faith, awaken me to the reality that Christ's death on the cross delivered me from the slavery of living for myself. (II Cor. 5:15) Selah

Next week as we begin to study the New Testament, the focus will be on how the themes of blessing and purpose are defined in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the incomparable blessing promised to Abram and his children, Israel, and to the nations through Abram. He also clarifies for us God's global purpose in His life, ministry and teachings.

Prophetic statements about the Messiah

by Jeff Lewis

Week thirteen

One of the greatest challenges Jesus faced in His earthly ministry was to break His disciples of their cultural biases. Even though the Old Testament clearly communicated God's heart for the nations and that the Messiah was also coming to be a light to the nations, most Jews were looking for a national savior that would establish their reign among the nations. The disciples were the first echelon in Jesus' strategy of taking the gospel to all nations. Yet His disciples were extremely nationalistic in their perspective of who the Messiah was and what He came to do. Through His teaching, His ministry to Gentiles, using non-Jews as spiritual object lessons and His mandates, Jesus was intentionally and systematically reshaping their worldview.

WARNING! You will be studying verses that you are familiar with. My natural tendency would be to quickly read over the verses I think I know and jot down a few thoughts. Resist the urge and take your time to discover some new insights.

Prophetic statements about the Messiah: What has He come to do and who has He come to service?

- Isaiah 42:5-7
- Isaiah 49:6
- Matthew 4:12-16
- Luke 2:25-32

Breaking a bias of the Messiah

by Jeff Lewis

Week fourteen

Last week you considered that Jesus' disciples wanted a Messiah for Israel alone. Jesus had to break the disciples of this cultural bias so that He could fulfill His destiny as Messiah for all nations, and they could fulfill their destiny as Christ's followers.

We will explore this concept further in the following verses:

Savior of the world, not the personal possession of Israel.

- Luke 4:14-30
- 14-15: What is the attitude of the people about Jesus' teaching?
- 16-19: Notice that they hand the book of Isaiah to Jesus, but He intentionally locates the scripture that He reads. What does this prophecy in Isaiah 61, relate to?

Observe what Jesus does after He reads. What kind of reaction did Jesus' silence produce?

- 21: What has Jesus just proclaimed?
- 22: What is the response of the people in the synagogue?

Is their response positive or negative? Be careful how you answer this. What you have heard in the past might not be accurate.

- 23-27: Why do you think Jesus made this statement? He had them in the palm of His hand, so to speak.

Jesus had just proclaimed that He was the Messiah, the One spoken of by the prophets, the One that generations of Jews had been praying for. He knew that they had a nationalistic perspective of the Messiah and that they believed the Messiah was coming to be their personal deliverer. Jesus had not come to be the personal possession of Israel; however, He had come to be Savior of the world. He states that, "no prophet is welcomed in his hometown," but it sure seems like they had welcomed Him. He then gives two illustrations to make His point. He uses two of their favorite prophets to reveal how God had ministered in a special way to Gentiles through them.

Jesus cut to the heart of their narrow, ethnocentric perspective of the promised Messiah. He opened their eyes to the fact that they were not the only ones who needed a Deliverer. His proclamation of release of the captive, recovery of sight and freedom was also a message of hope for the Gentiles.

- 28-29: What was their response to His clarification?

If Jesus is Savior of the world (John 4:42 and I John 4:14), that means that you are a disciple of the Savior of the world. How does that impact your daily walk with Christ? Selah · Example—It means that I must integrate a global perspective in my daily prayer time.

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Jesus' call to the nations, Part I

by Jeff Lewis

Week fifteen

Early in His ministry Jesus clearly communicated that He was the Messiah and that He had come to be the Savior of the World. Jesus had less than three years to liberate His Jewish disciples from their nationalistic cultural biases. It was vital for the disciples to realize that the gospel of the kingdom is for all peoples and that His mandate was to the nations, not to a nation. Today you will continue to observe how Jesus awakened His disciples to His global purpose.

What is the significance of these events and when it applies, what was Jesus trying to communicate?

Ministry to non-Jews

- Matthew 4:23-25
- Matthew 15:21-28—Be careful how you interpret this event. In Matthew 15:1-20, Jesus had just taught on the subject of what is clean and unclean. Notice where he took the disciples. Remember what Matthew 4:24 reveals about Jesus' ministry to Gentiles. In Matthew 15:24, who was Jesus speaking to when He made this statement? Selah
- John 4:5-42—Gentiles and Samaritans are used as object lessons to shake up the cultural bias of the Jews.
- Matthew 8:5-13
- Luke 10:30-36
- Luke 17:11-19

Meditate this week about what Jesus was trying to communicate to these two audiences. How does that message affect you today?

Jesus' call to the nations, Part II

by Jeff Lewis

Week sixteen

As Jesus approached the end of His earthly ministry and with more intensity after the resurrection, He made it clear that His purpose was global, and His mandate was to catapult His followers to the nations. The following Scriptures are restatements of the Great Commission that God gave to Abram found in the purpose clause of Genesis 12:3, "And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (NASB).

Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of God blessing the families of the earth through Abram. His mandate to His followers will never be understood if our only grasp of the "Great Commission" is obtained from Matthew 28:19-20. Full understanding is discovered when you study the five commission statements Jesus gave after the resurrection. As you study each statement notice the similarities and different emphasis.

- Matthew 28:18-20 (Two hints: The imperative verb is, "make disciples." Nations does not mean a political entity or geographical bound country. Nations comes from the Greek word "ethne," the basis for the English word "ethnic.")
- Mark 16:15-16
- Luke 24:44-49
- John 20:21-23 (This commission will take on new meaning if you take the time some day to read the Gospel of John and focus on Jesus' use of the words "sent" and "send.")
- Acts 1:3-8

Taking into consideration the Scriptures just read, write a summary statement that describes Jesus' global mandate. Selah

How does that message affect the way you witness about Jesus?

God's heart for the nations, conclusion

by Jeff Lewis

Week seventeen

Conclusion to this study ...

Earlier in this study I opened with the concept of studying the Bible as one book and searching for the major themes and tracking the development of those themes throughout Scripture. During the past weeks I have tried to guide you through the development of the theme that reveals God's global purpose and how it is connected with the theme of God blessing His people. Believe it or not this journey has been brief; I can hear the masses saying, "no more."

In Revelation (the conclusion of the book), the culmination of the theme of God's purpose is unveiled in passages like Revelation 7:9-10, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'" (NASB).

This passage indicates that God's promise to Abram is fulfilled. The question of the ages is not whether God's promise to Abram will be fulfilled or whether the making of disciples from all the nations will occur. The above passage reveals that God's global purpose is completed. The question is, what generation of the church will be obedient to the mandate of Jesus Christ and participate in completing the task? Or to personalize it, will I obey His mandate and be strategically involved in His global purpose as I daily walk with Him? The option of not connecting is not given in Scripture. He presumes obedience. The only unknowns are the details of our future involvement.

As you have moved through the study, list some of the things that you have learned and how you will apply what you have learned in your walk with Jesus. You may need to refer to previous studies as you pray through this exercise. In one sitting list as many items you've learned as possible. Then meditate on this question throughout the week and add other items to the list each day.

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Praying for the harvesters

Bible study by Felicity Burrow

Week eighteen

For the next few weeks we are going to focus on prayer for the nations. Prayer is the catalyst that drives everything that happens for God's glory. Certainly God is the One who acts to bring His glory to the nations, but frequently in Scripture God asks His people to pray before He will act.

In studying Jesus' prayers and teaching about prayer in the New Testament I find that my prayers often don't match up to his in content. For example, Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 9:37-38, "... the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the Harvest, therefore, to send out workers into the harvest field" (NIV). In contrast with Jesus' teaching, I find that I pray for the harvest (i.e. the unreached peoples) rather than praying for the Lord to send harvesters to the unreached.

I certainly think that God wants us to pray for the salvation of the millions of unreached peoples in the world—please don't misunderstand me! However, if Jesus specifically asked us to pray that God send laborers to the harvest, I know I need to turn my attention to this petition in my own prayers more than I do.

This week, pray Matthew 9:37-38 for the region of Huehuetenango and for all the unreached people groups we have featured in our previous newsletters. As you pray for the Lord to send laborers to these harvest fields, realize that He may turn your heart toward one of these people groups in order to reach them with saving faith in Jesus.

Next week we will look at another forgotten factor in prayer for the nations ... stay tuned.

Prayer

Bible study by Felicity Burrow

Week nineteen

Last week we took a quick look at Jesus' teachings about prayer. He told His followers to ask God to send laborers into the harvest fields because the fields were ready for harvesting. I hope you took the challenge to examine your prayer life to discover if you pray as much for harvesters to be sent as you pray for the harvest to be saved.

Jesus also taught His followers about unity and He modeled for us prayers for unity in John 17. Jesus consistently prayed for believers first, specifically for their unity, and for nonbelievers only afterward. In the terms I used above, Jesus prayed for the harvesters and for the harvest afterward.

Read through Jesus' prayer in John 17 several times this week. Before reading further in this study, write down your thoughts about Jesus' prayer. What truth does the Holy Spirit guide you to as you read and meditate on this prayer?

Who does Jesus pray for and in what order?

Who does Jesus say He is not praying for?

What is the significance of these two issues, if any?

Notice that Jesus begins by asking God to glorify Himself through his Son and by stating that he had brought glory to God by completing the responsibilities God had given him.

Throughout the Old Testament, God reminds his people that their responsibility is to conduct the blessing which God bestowed upon them to all the nations of the earth (See Genesis 12:3, 18:17-19, 22:16-18, 26:2-5, 28:13-15, Exodus 19:3-6). By shouldering this responsibility, all people on earth would come to know the glory of God. Jesus himself reiterates the responsibility of God's people in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8 when He tells His disciples to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth, making disciples of all the ethnic groups on earth.

In His prayer in John 17, then, Jesus iterates the theme of the entire Bible by asking God to glorify Himself in the prayers of His people and then working diligently to complete the task of taking the blessing of salvation through Jesus Christ to all peoples. These blessings and responsibilities belong to all followers of Jesus.

In your prayers, I encourage you to first pray for believers among the people group you for which you are praying—even if you are praying for the people on your campus and in your community. Pray for believers to bring glory to God despite their circumstances. Pray for protection and unity and for laborers to be sent to the field.

Out of your comfort zone

Bible Study by Felicity Burrow

Week twenty

Reading about Jesus' disciples we might wonder how Jesus chose those twelve men. What qualities or characteristics did Jesus look for in the people He wanted to take the message of salvation to the ends of the earth?

Look through the following passages and list some characteristics—both good and bad—that are evident in the disciples.

- Matthew 26:69-74
- Matthew 16:13-20
- Matthew 15:23
- Matthew 4:18-22
- Mark 2:13-16
- Mark 9:33-34
- John 1:43-51
- Luke 9:18-21
- Luke 9:37-40
- Luke 9:57-62

Jesus did, however, have a "screening process," if you will, for the people who would serve in ministry with Him. Look at Luke 9:57-62. Jesus screened these would-be disciples before sending them out to minister (see Luke 10:1-24).

First Jesus challenges an enthusiastic follower to get out of his comfort zone. The man said that he would follow Jesus anywhere. Jesus challenged him that to follow meant stepping out of the comforts of home and security. Another man hedged his bets when Jesus said, "Follow me." Very likely the man's father was not yet dead, so the man was indefinitely putting off the command to follow by hiding behind relationships. Jesus challenged him to be ready to follow NOW, not just sometime in the future at the man's discretion.

Another man wanted to say goodbye to his family, but Jesus challenged him to let go of those relationships if they kept the man from following Jesus. To be ministers of the message of salvation, we must be ready to relinquish relationships in our lives and follow as soon as Jesus calls us.

In verse 62 Jesus says, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (NIV). Many commentators interpret this verse in many ways. I understand it to set apart those who serve in the kingdom of God. Jesus did not say that anyone who looks back is not fit for the kingdom. He said that those who look back are not fit for service in the kingdom. To be fit for the kingdom of God we must simply believe that Jesus rose from the dead to forgive all our sins and follow Him. To be fit for service, there is a more in-depth screening process.

Are you willing to get out of your comfort zone to take the message of salvation where it has never before been heard? Are you willing to give up your time schedule and follow NOW when Jesus calls? Are you ready to relinquish relationships and anything else that keeps you from following Jesus wholeheartedly?

If so, there is a world waiting for you to bring to them the knowledge of God's glory through the message of Jesus. "Go and make disciples of all nations ..." Matthew 28:19 (NIV).