

# Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Community Group Material:

**Bible Reading:** John 17:20-26

“I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me.

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they will see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the world’s foundation. Righteous Father, the world has not known you. However, I have known you, and they have known that you sent me. I made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love you have loved me with may be in them and I may be in them.” (John 17:20-26 CSB)

### SUMMARY:

- Christ’s prayer climaxes with a plea for unity among believers – “that they all may be one as we are one.” This motivated the Ecumenical Movement. It inspired efforts to ‘restore’/‘recover’ the Church’s original unity. It is crucial to grasp that this is a prayer, not a command for our action. The oneness Jesus envisions transcends human achievement; it’s a divine creation untouched by doctrinal consensus, liturgical conformity, and institutional uniformity among churches or believers. Instead, Jesus’ prayer invites us into the Trinitarian unity, described as perichoresis – a ‘divine dance,’ the dynamic, loving interplay within the Godhead.
- ‘Unity’ has been misused to subjugate congregations & churches. But God’s oneness is not coercive. Christians are not clones; churches are not replicas. God’s oneness honors individuality and church diversity, as seen in the New Testament. The common focus of NT writings is Jesus Christ; its diversity is showcased via authors like John & Paul. Let’s reject

uniformity, eschew conformity, and abandon futile human efforts. Rather, let's participate in the 'divine dance,' & abide as branches in the Vine, so divine unity can be perfected among us.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Jesus' prayer to God the Father climaxes in a petition that 'all Christian believers would be one just as the Father is in the Son (& vice versa), so the believers would be in the Father & the Son' (17:21-22).
  - a. One preacher asserts that "This is a mandate from our Commander in Chief that we be one." Do you agree or disagree with this preacher's claim? Why or why not? Discuss.
  - b. One pastor responds by saying "If the Bible is our guide... let us at least give this thing... called unity a grand try." Do you agree (or disagree) with this response? Why or why not? Discuss.
  - c. Jesus' statement about believers 'being one' is made within a prayer to the Father. What difference does that fact make to how we view/respond to Jesus' petition? What action(s) should we take? Discuss.
  - d. AW Tozer said, "Unity in Christ is not something to be achieved; it is something to be recognized." What does he mean by this? What are the implications of his statement? Discuss.
2. C. S. Lewis said that, as the Trinity, God is not a static thing... but a pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost... a kind of dance." The early Greek church called this – perichoresis.
  - a. What are Bible scholars & teachers trying to convey with this term – perichoresis?
  - b. Some add, "God... created us to invite us into the dance" and "You were made to enter into the divine dance with the Trinity." (Tim. Keller). What do they mean by this? How do we "enter the dance"?
  - c. In Jn.17 Jesus did not direct his disciples, "OK, now go and work this out. Produce this unity/oneness!" Based on this whole section (Jn. 13-17) how does this unity/oneness come about?
3. In the context of John 17 Stephen Barton says, "The oneness of God... is not coercive." John Franke expands this to: "A unity based on power & coercion is not the oneness for which Jesus prays in John 17." How does this help us distinguish between the kind of oneness God wants and other kinds? Discuss.