

Setting the Heart

Scholars and theologians use a lot of lofty words to describe biblical unity. But in today's language, there's not a better way to sum it up than a little word we use every day. Us.

***26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."
27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.***

—Genesis 1:26–27

From the looks of this passage, unity has been on God's mind from day one (actually, day six). The "us" in Genesis 1:26 is the Bible's first mention of the Trinity (*tri-unity*)—God the Father, His Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Mankind was originally made in the image of that "us." Operative word: *originally*.

Digging In

With Adam's and Eve's fateful bite of the fruit came a heart-wrenching separation between God and mankind. This universal separation between God and man has shown up in the spiritual DNA of every person born from that point forward. And therein lies the redemptive story that runs throughout the Bible—God's mission to reunite what was separated.

Read Colossians 1:17–23 from your leader Scripture sheet. In this letter to believers, we learn Jesus' role in God's mission to reunite what was separated through sin. As you read this passage:

1. Mark every mention of Jesus with a cross †. (By the way, the first "He" refers to Jesus.)
2. Circle every reference to the readers of this letter.

After you've read and marked the verses, note below anything from the passage that supports Genesis 1:26–27 ("Setting the Heart") above.

How does Genesis 1 (above) describe us at creation?

Personal Prep Session 1

Now jot down a few things from Colossians 1:17–23 that describe us *before* a relationship with Christ.

How are we described *after* Christ in Colossians 1?

Taking It Inward

Your soul, built for communion with God, is reaching to bridge the gap created by Adam's sin. It's literally straining to connect with what it hungers and thirsts for: *God*. This straining creates an inner turmoil, which the Bible describes as a war in which the human soul becomes the very enemy of what it longs for. But Colossians 1 tells us that the blood of Christ bridged the gap and brought peace to replace the turmoil, making it possible for our souls to receive what they were designed to have.

Quick question: Looking at Colossians 1:21–22, who was reconciled?

Can you tell what was reconciled or to whom you were reconciled?

This next point is tricky. Going by this passage, you were reconciled to...*you!* Have you ever thought of salvation like that? By becoming reconciled to God, you have been *personally unified!* The two enemies inside you were brought together in peace. But not only that. The gaping chasm between you and God was closed. Spend some time thinking about this miracle and praying about what it means in your life. Journal below anything the Lord brings to mind. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 5:17–21 from your Bible as you pray.

5. Based on this passage, what questions do you have? What would you like to explore in more detail?

Digging Deeper—Part 2

Be sure to keep track of the questions you noted, and watch how the Lord answers them as you search His Word in the next few weeks.

Under question 3, you noted the model for unity given in Jesus’ prayer—that believers may be one “just as you are in me and I am in you.” Today’s quest is to examine the relationship between Jesus and His Father in order to better understand the unity He desires in us.

Jesus had much to say about His relationship with the Father, as did several other New Testament writers. As you read the following verses, underline anything that describes the relationship between Jesus and His Father. Then take another lap through the passages, and jot in the right-hand column a one-word trait or short phrase that describes the relationship. (A heads-up: You won’t be covering all of these passage with your students, so be sure to compare this chart with the one given in the Session 1 Group Guide.)

Passage	One-word trait or short phrase
<p>[The apostle John is writing about Jesus.] John 1:1–5 ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.</p>	
<p>[John the Baptist is speaking.] John 3:34–36 ³⁴ “For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”</p>	
<p>John 5:19–23 ¹⁹ Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. ²¹ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. ²² Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.”</p>	

Passage	One-word trait or short phrase
<p>[Jesus is speaking.] John 6:54–58 ⁵⁴ “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”</p>	
<p>[Jesus is speaking.] John 8:26–30 ²⁶ “I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.” ²⁷ They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. ²⁹ The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” ³⁰ Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.</p>	
<p>[Jesus is speaking.] John 12:49–50 ⁴⁹ “For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. ⁵⁰ I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”</p>	
<p>John 14:6–13 ⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” ⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. ¹² I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.”</p>	
<p>[Jesus is speaking.] John 14:19–21 ¹⁹ “Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”</p>	

Taking It Inward

By now the right column in the chart should have several words and phrases that describe the special relationship between Jesus and His Father. More specifically, these words and phrases describe what it means for the Father to be *in* the Son and the Son *in* the Father, as Jesus described in John 17:21. On a personal level, these words and phrases describe the unique relationship believers should have with each other.

Take a minute or two to meditate on your descriptions, and write below any new insights on Jesus' request in John 17:21.

This is the type of relationship that Jesus prays we will have with each other and with Him. Think of the different categories of believers you typically interact with, and in each space below, write the name of someone who represents the category. Imagine Jesus praying this prayer for you and each person you list.

Students in your student ministry:

Fellow staff (volunteer or paid) in your church or ministry:

Fellow youth workers in your city:

Family members:

Other:

Other:

To help you personalize Jesus' prayer, take a name from your list and insert it with your name into John 17:20–23. Use the tool below to help with this exercise.

John 17:20–23 ²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for _____ & _____, who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that _____ & _____ may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May _____ & _____ also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given _____ & _____ the glory that you gave me, that _____ & _____ may be one as we are one: ²³ I in _____ & _____ and you in me. May _____ & _____ be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved _____ & _____ even as you have loved me.”

How do your relationships with other believers need to change to reflect the amazing relationship between God and Jesus?

This is Jesus' model of unity among believers: A circle of relationships that are characterized by mutual dependence, mutual submission, mutual love and mutual trust. How does this picture differ from the picture of unity you've been exhibiting lately?

Wrapping It Up

Two big concepts you'll want to help your students grab from this session:

1. All of us were built for connection and relationship—a connection that was severed by sin and restored by salvation through Jesus Christ.
2. All of our connections with other believers are supposed to model the special relationship between Jesus and His Father.

Take a few minutes to read the Group Guide and get familiar with the exercises and confident with the flow of the session. Since it's the first session, allow time to photocopy the student sheets and gather supplies (see “Materials Needed” in the Session 1 Group Guide.) And don't forget to check out InWord's **INNERgized Web Help** for additional prep helps, session ideas and downloadable student pages to tailor this session to your group. Password information can be found on the title page of this study.

Colossians 1:17-23

¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. ²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

John 17:20-23

²⁰ "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

One Week Out

Challenge your students to read John 17 before the first session. You may also want to send out reminder notes about where and when the group will meet. Be sure to commend your students for committing to be part of an in-depth study of God's Word. As you plan the first session, don't be afraid to create an atmosphere of challenge and intensity.

A reminder...

Please visit inword.org and click "Uncommon Prayer." Here you can submit info that will help InWord's prayer team pray specifically for you and your group.

Materials Needed

For this session each student will need: ❶ student journal pages for Session 1; ❷ Scripture sheets for Session 1; ❸ a copy of the student review page.

You'll also need a dry-erase board and a pack of colored pencils. Students should bring their own Bibles and pens.

Session Intro

Goals of Session 1

As students experience this session, they will...

- be introduced to a very personal kind of unity.
- explore in detail Jesus' prayer for unity.
- discover the nature of Jesus' relationship with God.
- be challenged to imitate key aspects of that relationship.

Prayer

Once the group has gathered, **pray** that through this study, each student will go deeper with Jesus...perhaps even deeper than they thought possible. Ask the Lord to help them make His Word a part of their lifelong pursuit of Him.

Open

Open the session with a **free-for-all discussion** of one or more of these questions:

What animal makes the best pet?

If you could make a pet out of a wild animal, what animal would you choose?

Why do we have pets at all?

Transition into study mode by offering the explanation that pets give us unconditional love and loyalty (except, of course, for cats). Human beings were built for relationship, and our attraction to pets could be evidence of the way we're wired.

Digging In—Beginning, Middle and Now

Ask your students to read the verses from Genesis and Colossians printed on their Scripture sheets (student p. 5). As they read, they should use a special color or symbol to mark every reference to themselves. They'll be looking for words like "man" and "you."

After they're read and marked the verses, share that these two passages represent three phases: "beginning" (mankind at Creation), "middle" (mankind after sin entered the world) and "now" (our state once we've accepted Christ).

With that in mind, **discuss the following questions**. Ask your students to record their responses in the space provided on their journal pages (student p. 3).

How does Genesis 1 describe us in the beginning?

-made in the image of "us"; "us" refers to the three persons of the Trinity

How does Colossians 1 describe us after man sinned (the middle phase)?

-alienated from God (v. 21)

-enemies in our minds because of our evil behavior (v. 21)

How does Colossians 1 describe us now (if we're believers in Christ)?

-reconciled by Christ's physical body (v. 22)

-holy in His sight (v. 22)

-without blemish (v. 22)

-free from accusation (v. 22)

How would you define "reconciled"?

Let the students kick this around, eventually guiding them to these points:

- *The word "reconciled" implies that there was a separation, but that whatever was separated has been brought together.*
- *You may want to read Colossians 1:22 from The Message: "...Christ brought you over to God's side and put your lives together, whole and holy in his presence."*

Taking It Inward—The Inside Picture

Ask your students to get a better mental picture of what God does on the insides of believers by drawing a diagram or sketch (or writing a poem or descriptive paragraph) depicting it on their journal pages (student p. 3). If they're short on ideas, have them read 2 Corinthians 5:17–21 and make these verses part of the picture.

After about five minutes, ask a few volunteers to share their creations.

Digging Deeper—Part 1

Tell the group that throughout the New Testament, God uses words like “reconciled” to describe what happens between Himself and anyone who follows Christ. Jesus expanded on the idea when He prayed for His disciples in John 17. Explain that John 17 is a prayer Jesus prayed for His closest friends on earth, just before He was arrested and put to death. But Jesus didn’t only pray for the twelve disciples, as they’ll see in John 17:20–23.

Ask your students to read this passage from their Scripture sheets (student p. 5). As they read, they should mark each of the following with a different color or symbol:

- 1. Who Jesus prayed for.**
- 2. What Jesus prayed for.**
- 3. Anything that describes how to achieve what Jesus prayed for.**
- 4. Anything that explains why He prayed this.**

Now discuss the questions below, taking time to record the students’ answers on the board. Invite the group to write the info on their journal pages (student pp. 3–4) as well. As the session unfolds you’ll be diving deeper into Jesus’ prayer, so for now, go for simple observations.

1. Who did Jesus pray for?

-the apostles (v. 20)

-us: those who will believe through the message of the apostles (v. 20)

2. What was Jesus praying for?

-unity: that we all may be one (v. 21)

3. How did He describe that unity?

-just as the Father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the Father (v. 21)

4. What will happen as a result of Jesus’ request?

-the world will know that God sent Jesus (vv. 21, 23)

5. Any thoughts or questions so far about Jesus’ prayer? In your opinion, has what Jesus prayed for been fulfilled?

Digging Deeper—Part 2

Share that the key to experiencing Jesus’ prayer is understanding the kind of unity He wants His followers to have. The model He gave is His own relationship with His Father, God. For the next few minutes, the group will be exploring that model by studying other Bible passages that describe it.

Ask your students to find a place where they can get alone with God, like a corner of the room or a hallway or empty room nearby. The goal is finding a spot where they can focus on God’s Word without much distraction. Before they head out, make sure they understand the following instructions.

Printed in the chart on their Scripture sheets (student p. 6) are passages that describe the special relationship between God and Jesus. As they read these verses, they should underline anything that describes this relationship. After they’ve read all the verses, they should go back and jot down one-word traits or short phrases that best describe the relationship. The chart is printed on the following page with suggested descriptions for the leader’s reference.

Group Guide

Session 1

Passage	One-word trait or short phrase
<p>[The apostle John writing.] John 1:1–5 ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.</p>	<p><i>intimacy</i> <i>shared life</i></p>
<p>[John T. Baptist speaking.] John 3:34–36 ³⁴ “For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”</p>	<p><i>love</i> <i>trust</i></p>
<p>John 5:19–23 ¹⁹ Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. ²¹ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. ²² Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.”</p>	<p><i>dependence</i> <i>obedience</i> <i>love</i> <i>trust</i> <i>honor</i></p>
<p>[You guessed it. Jesus is speaking.] John 8:26–30 ²⁶ “I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.” ²⁷ They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. ²⁹ The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” ³⁰ Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.</p>	<p><i>submission</i> <i>obedience</i> <i>companionship</i> <i>desire to please</i></p>
<p>[Yep. It’s Jesus again.] John 12:49–50 ⁴⁹ “For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. ⁵⁰ I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”</p>	<p><i>obedience</i></p>

Taking It Inward

When most have finished “Digging Deeper—Part 2” (it’s okay if not everyone has) **call the group back together.** In the right-hand column of their charts, the students should have written several words and phrases that describe Jesus’ relationship with His Father. Explain that these words and phrases describe what it means for the Father to be “in” the Son and the Son “in” the Father (John 17:21). On a more personal level, they describe the kind of relationship Jesus wants between us.

Discuss any new insights your students have had on the kind of unity Jesus is looking for among believers. You could start the discussion like this:

So, what was Jesus asking for when He prayed that we might be one as He and the Father are one?

Try to elicit that Jesus was praying that relationships between believers be built on trust, dependence, obedience, love and submission—the same traits that define His relationship with the Father.

Explain that this is the kind of relationship Jesus wants us to have with one another and with Him. Ask them to think about the Christian friends and family members they typically hang out with. In the spaces provided on their journal pages (student p. 4), have them write the name of a person in each group.

Friends in our student ministry: _____

Fellow believers at school: _____

Fellow Christians in an extracurricular activity (like a team, band, etc.):

Family members who are believers: _____

Others: _____

Others: _____

Now ask the students to choose a name from their list and insert it with their own name in Jesus' prayer. Give them a few minutes to meditate on Jesus' prayer, thinking about what it would sound like for Him to pray specifically for them and their friends. The following tool, printed on their journal pages (student p. 4), will help them personalize Jesus' prayer.

John 17:20-23 ²⁰ "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for _____ & _____ who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that _____ & _____ may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May _____ & _____ also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given _____ & _____ the glory that you gave me, that _____ & _____ may be one as we are one: ²³ I in _____ & _____ and you in me. May _____ & _____ be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved _____ & _____ even as you have loved me."

Wrapping It Up

To wrap up the session, **get back to the "why" of Jesus' prayer for unity.** Why is unity among believers so important to Christ? As the students discuss the following questions, keep track of their answers and ideas. Later in the study you'll be diving into specifics on these questions.

Group Guide Session 1

What's the connection between our unity and the world recognizing that the Father sent Jesus?

What would it look like if your school (or our community) really knew that the Father sent Jesus?

The Student Review Page

At the close of each session you'll be asking your students to jot a key thought, action or commitment on the student review page. This will help them keep track of what God is teaching them personally about God-sized unity. As of this session, the review page is untitled. Challenge the group to come up with a creative title they can use when referring to this page throughout the study.

Before closing in prayer, give them a minute to write (on their newly named review sheets) a way in which they can be an answer to Jesus' prayer this week.

Digging In—Beginning, Middle and Now

How does Genesis 1 describe us in the beginning?

How does Colossians 1 describe us after man sinned (the middle phase)?

How does Colossians 1 describe us now (if we're believers in Christ)?

How would you define "reconciled"?

Taking It Inward—The Inside Picture

Digging Deeper—Part 1

1. Who?

2. What?

3. How?

4. Result?

5. Thoughts or questions about Jesus' prayer?

Taking It Inward

Fill in the blanks with names of believers who fit these categories in your life.

Friends in our student ministry: _____

Fellow believers at school: _____

Fellow Christians in an extracurricular activity (like a team, band, etc.):

Family members who are believers: _____

Others: _____

Others: _____

Jesus' Prayer for You and Other Believers

John 17:20–23

John 17:20–23 ²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for _____ & _____ who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that _____ & _____ may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May _____ & _____ also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given _____ & _____ the glory that you gave me, that _____ & _____ may be one as we are one: ²³ I in _____ & _____ and you in me. May _____ & _____ be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved _____ & _____ even as you have loved me.”

Genesis 1:26-27

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Colossians 1:17-23

¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. ²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

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Digging Deeper—Part 2

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