

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

6"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

11And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

"The church is like a bank," says one, "a place to save for a ticket to heaven. Each week another deposit is made until at the end all the assets are withdrawn."

The church is like a jewelry store, a place where God displays all that is precious to God. You are God's treasures, carefully selected - now God is polishing you so that you will sparkle and shine forever.

The church is like a hospital, where the injured and the wounded gather. God patches us up here, heals our wounds - gives therapy so that we can walk again.

The church is like a nursery where God is growing plants for God's garden. Here we are fed and watered so that we can grow and bear fruit.

The church is like a school where we learn of what has been and what will be and how to live.

The church is like a theater, a place to be entertained and to laugh and cry and learn about life and ourselves. We gathered to witness the drama God has presented.

The church is like a gas station, each week we are filled up for another week of traveling the highways of life.

The church is like Cheers "where everyone knows your name", and all your little quirks and habits, and where you belong.

Yet all of these things that I have mentioned are like the wrapping and the ribbons and bows on a gift. They may attract us to the gift, but they are not the gift.

Praying to the Father, Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

We are selfish. My happiness, my safety, my living forever, my being healed, my being befriended, my race, my country, I always put myself in the center.

God belongs in the center. All the studying and meeting together that you ten have done over the last two years has been so that God would be in the center of your life, in the center of your words, in the center of your deeds - not self, but God. "Eternal life," Jesus said, "is knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ." God sent his son, Jesus suffered and died and was raised so that you might know the only true God, love the only true God, trust the only true God through life and death and into life once more.

God forgives and helps and heals and saves you and protects you. God puts you in the center of God's concern. Not because we belong in the center, but because God loves us.

When we know God's love, and know God and Jesus Christ, then God fills our center, and love is returned.

"And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Why have Mrs. Polacok and your parents and I invested so much time and energy in you these past two years? So that you might feel good about yourself, have a better self-image? No, everything we have given has been given so that you might each know that you are loved by God, and that you might love God in return. For in all your life one thing matters above all else, that you will be with the God you love and the God who loves you forever. Amen.

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