



JESUS' PRAYER

JOHN 17 · SEPTEMBER SMALL GROUP THEME

Session 1 – Jesus Teaches Us about Prayer

Welcome to the first small group session of September. This month, we'll take an in-depth look at the prayer life of Christ. How and when did He pray? What made up the content of His prayers? For whom did He pray? We can learn much about prayer by studying the prayer practices of our Lord.

We'll begin this session by looking at **how** Jesus prayed. Christ showed through His approach to God in prayer that God was near and accessible. This is evidenced by the first two words of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father." Not only is God close, but Jesus makes it clear that we can call Him Father. He introduced a new dimension to prayer, one that was much more personal and intimate.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord provides additional instruction regarding how we ought to pray. In Matthew 6:5-6, He says, *And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.* Christ was not condemning communal prayer through this teaching, but rather showing how much He despised hypocrisy, and emphasizing that prayer was something serious that should be done in all modesty and sincerity. He showed the importance of this many times, often going into seclusion to commune with His Father through prayer (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35).

In verses 7 and 8, He gives further instruction concerning prayer: *And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.* Christ shows here that the effectiveness of our prayers isn't related to the number of words we use. Consider the Lord's Prayer again. In this model prayer from the Lord, note that there is no repetition. Every line is fresh and simply stated. He also gives us the powerful reminder that God is aware of what we have need of even before we pray. Our prayers don't need to include a detailed description of our needs. Our heavenly Father is omniscient—He knows all things!

Christ also shows us how we ought to pray through His example in the garden of Gethsemane. In these difficult final moments He prays, *Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done* (Luke 22:42). This prayer was a cry from the soul, as evidenced by the 44th verse: *And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.* Whenever the Lord prayed, He did so with devotion and intensity.

When we should pray is also clearly defined by Christ. From what is recorded in the Gospel of Luke, it is evident that He prayed before and during the decisive moments in His life. He prayed before the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (Luke 3:21-22); before designating Peter as the Rock upon which He would build His church (Luke 9:18-21); at the onset of His bitter suffering (Luke 22:41-46); and before He died on the cross (Luke 23:46). Jesus shows through these prayers His complete trust in the faithfulness of the Father and His total dependency upon Him.

We can also see that there were no set times during the day when Jesus prayed. In fact, in Luke 6:12, right before Jesus chose the twelve Apostles, we read the following: *Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.* Here, given the weight of the task at hand, Jesus was inspired to pray all night long. He communicated with the Father as often – and for as long – as He was compelled to do so.

Let's also look briefly at the content of Jesus' prayers. We find the following aspects most frequently: praise, thanksgiving, intercession, and petitions. In Luke 10:21, Jesus prays a prayer of praise: *I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.* Jesus shows here that He was in absolute accord with the will of His Father, and that He had total confidence in Him.

Before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He prayed a prayer of thanksgiving: *Father, I thank you that You have heard Me. And I know that you always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they might believe that You sent Me* (John 11:40-42). What trust and confidence Jesus had in the provision of the Father, that He would thank Him already in advance!

Christ highlights the importance of intercession in Luke 22:31-32: *Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail.* Here, the Lord shows His care for and concern over Peter through interceding for Him in prayer. How often are the names of others included in our prayers?

Finally, Jesus also included many petitions in His prayers – for Himself, for His disciples, and for all believers. We'll discuss these petitions in detail in the subsequent sessions this month.

There is an incredible amount to be learned from Jesus' approach to prayer. In all things, He is the Master Teacher, and this is certainly the case when it comes to prayer. Let's be thankful for His example, and continue to engage His prayer practices in our lives.

Session 2 – John 17: Jesus Prays for Himself

At the end of John 16, Jesus makes a triumphant, comforting proclamation, *...be of good cheer, I have overcome the world* (verse 33). From that bold statement, Jesus began what is known as His high priestly prayer that is recorded for us in John 17, so because He is our great High Priest, the One who, at the moment of this prayer, is about to make a once-for-all sacrifice on behalf of all humanity. Jesus chose to pray this in the presence of His disciples, providing them with both comfort and instruction. Today, we can also find comfort and instruction from His prayer. In this session, we'll focus on the first five verses of John 17, as Jesus begins by praying for Himself, that He might once again enjoy the Father's glory after fulfilling His will on earth.

Let's begin with verse 1: *Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You."* The first thing that stands out in this verse is Jesus' posture. In the midst of His disciples, He pauses and lifts His eyes to heaven, taking a customary posture for prayer at that time. Then He begins the prayer by stating, "the hour has come." Throughout John's Gospel, we find several references to time. In chapter 2, verse 4, Jesus tells Mary that, *My hour has not yet come.* In chapter 7, verse 6 and 30, Jesus said, *My time has not yet come.* It is made clear for us that Jesus was on this intentional journey towards the cross, and now, in this intimate gathering, He states that the time, the hour for which He has come, has arrived. The time of His death, resurrection, and ascension was about to begin. The Son would be glorified on the cross, realizing the pleas spoken in this prayer. And as the Son is glorified, the Father would be glorified as well through the perfect obedience of the Son, His love for those who are lost, and in His demonstration of power over the evil one.

Moving to verses 2 and 3, Jesus continues, *"...as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."* The supremacy of Jesus is the focal point of these verses. The Synoptic Gospels tell us that Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth. He has authority over all humanity in order that He might save people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Eternal life is in Jesus Christ. That is a truth that John made known multiple times in his writing (John 3:17, 10:10). In 1 John 5, verses 11 and 12, he writes: *And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.* Eternal life is not something that can be earned; it is a gift from God (Romans 6:23). That gift is to know the one true God and to be in fellowship with Him for all eternity.

Jesus concludes the first section of His prayer this way: *"I have **glorified** You on the earth. I have **finished** the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."* What stands out here is that Jesus is speaking in the past perfect tense. He speaks of a future event that is about to happen as a completed act. For Him, His death on the cross

was a foregone conclusion. There wasn't any doubt that it would happen. The decree of the triune God was that the Son would be incarnated and dwell on earth amongst humanity, and sacrifice His sinless life so that all who have faith in Him would have eternal life. No other sacrifice would ever be needed to bring the will of the Father into reality. With His work finished, Jesus longed to return to the intimate fellowship He had shared with the Father. As He looks to heaven, He expresses His desire in sharing that glory once again and rejoicing together over all the faithful who have been saved. As we hear the words of Jesus, we can recognize without a doubt His divinity, and that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one.

As we come to the end of this session, take a few moments to ponder this part of Jesus' prayer, and write down what it means to you.

Session 3 – John 17: Jesus Prays for His Disciples

Welcome back! In this session, we'll continue looking at Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17. In verses 6 through 19, we see how Jesus prays to His Father for the disciples.

Jesus begins this part of His prayer with testimony that the disciples believe and have faith in the one true God – that they belong to Him and that they know Jesus Christ is God incarnate, sent to earth to save humanity. Each prayer we share with God is like a testimony of our belief in Him. Otherwise, why would we pray if we didn't believe it would have some effect? Even though God knows our hearts and sees our faith, we can always include an element of this in our prayers. Express to God what you know about Him, His works, and His promises. When we share our own faith with Him, it is another way to confirm to ourselves what we believe to be true.

The gospel is the foundation of the work the disciples would have to do once Jesus ascended to heaven. Without their faith, they would struggle and fail to follow His commands, and Jesus knows this. This is why in the next portion of His prayer, Jesus prays for them to be unified, to keep them from evil as they work in the world, and to sanctify them by God's truth. Already, Jesus is showing the disciples that He is their Advocate (1 John 2:1). In heaven, He pleads with the Father on our behalf, while the Holy Spirit is our Advocate here on earth, sent to help us, remind us of Jesus' teachings, and to give us strength to overcome our imperfections and prove our faith (John 14:26).

In John 17:11, Jesus prays, *Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.*

Though the disciples would remain in the world once Jesus ascended, they were not *of* the world because they belonged to Christ (v.16), which is why Jesus asks His Father to protect them. The purpose for this protection is so that the disciples can remain unified. Unity amongst the disciples would not only help them to accomplish their godly mission, but it also would reflect to the world around them that God, as three Persons, is perfectly unified in love and wants the same for His creation. This unity is a characteristic of all of Christ's disciples. When we live by the truth of His gospel and are obedient to the will of God, we are unified in our purpose and in our love for each other and Him.

In John 17:14-15, Jesus also petitions God: *I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.*

Sometimes, in the midst of hardship, we may wish to be removed from our situation or only live for our future with God in His kingdom. However, Jesus does not ask for His disciples to be delivered from their difficulties and removed from those of this world. God has placed us on this earth for a purpose. As His children, we should have a different nature and mindset than those who belong to this world, and while we are here on this earth, our task as Jesus' disciples is to continually bring forth fruit for the kingdom, to do good and serve. As those striving to be *not of the world*, we do not want to succumb to the evil influences that we often find here. In Jesus' prayer, we see His intercessions for His disciples, and are further assured of the protection of our faith

from evil by Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:13 – *God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

Jesus knows the way for His disciples to be kept from evil, and He prays this for them in the last part of this section of His high priestly prayer: *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth* (John 17:17).

To be sanctified by God means to be made holy or to be set apart for His purposes. Sanctification is not just a one-time event, but rather a lifelong process where we work to remain separate from that which is influenced by evil, while we also continually pursue and grow in that which is godly. We are only able to distinguish good from evil through the truth of God's word. His word is the standard of truth that we are to test everything against, and in this context, His "word" is the gospel itself.

In verses 18 and 19, Jesus says, *As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.* For Jesus, to "sanctify Himself" means that He follows His Father's will by readily sacrificing Himself of the cross. Through His act alone are His disciples able to be justified and then sanctified. It is through Jesus, His life, death, and resurrection, that we are set apart from this world and can dedicate ourselves to God. This is the truth of the gospel through which we are sanctified, and we are to live by this truth.

As we reflect on this part of Jesus' prayer, we are not only comforted by His petitions for the disciples, but we can also learn from His example. We, too, can intercede and pray for those around us and in the world who are working for Christ. We can pray that they are able to bear their crosses while still being persistent and tireless in answering God's call. We can pray that they experience the true joy that Jesus experienced as He was obedient to and fulfilled the Father's will. Ultimately, we can pray that they know and remember the words that Jesus prayed over His disciples many years ago: *And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them* (John 17:10).

Session 4 – John 17: Jesus Prays for All Believers

Welcome! Today, we're going to finish up our month learning about Jesus' prayers, specifically the one recorded in John 17. Jesus ends this prayer with a focus stretching beyond the pages of the Bible, to uncountable generations of believers – including us! We'll find that He focuses on three items: unity, love, and His presence in our lives. Let's take the verses piece by piece, starting at verse 20:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word...

The "these" that Jesus is talking about are the apostles. Future believers would come to faith in Christ through the word of the apostles, the apostles' doctrine, which Jesus establishes here as the foundation of the church.

...that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me... (John 17:21-23)

In these few short sentences, we learn a lot about what Jesus meant by unity. Our unity is grounded in Jesus' relationship with His Father. Our Chief Apostle recently said: "Jesus wanted the church of Christ, His church, to become an image of the unity of the triune God. God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, but perfectly one." The concept of musical harmonization could be useful in understanding this: each note retains its distinct character and tone, yet blends in harmony with others to create a melody. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians expands on this thought: *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ* (1 Corinthians 12:12). How do we develop unity as members of the body of Christ? We are united through Christ by sharing in His body and blood – *For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread* (1 Corinthians 10:17). There is also work that we can do to embody oneness in our relationships – bridge the gaps! This starts with self-reflection – "How should I change?" – rather than judging others. We overcome our self-interest

and contribute to the common good of the congregation and community. We recognize that every believer is equal in Christ, and stand in solidarity with each other because *if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it* (1 Corinthians 12:26). Perhaps we have looked at agreement as the only measure of unity. However, based on the words of Jesus, it is our oneness with Christ and our testimony of Him that weaves us together as Christians. When we refuse to let disagreement divide us, it can become a catalyst for a more in-depth, shared experience with Christ.

We also see from Jesus' words that our connection with God, the Father is only possible through the Son; *No one comes to the Father except through Me* (John 14:6). Jesus says He has given glory to His believers. What is this glory? It is the revelation and presence of God that we have come to know through the life of Jesus. Through the Son, we experience the Father.

...that they may be perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me (John 17:23).

Our oneness with Christ flows from a life characterized by love. We are to reflect God's love to the world around us as living proof of His gracious character. Jesus' coming to earth brought God's presence and love into the life of the believer. When this is evident in the congregation through our words and deeds, the church will become a welcoming place where people will come to believe that God, in His unending love, sent His Son for them.

Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:24-26).

Jesus ends His prayer, not only desiring that we will be where He is in the future, but promising His continued presence in our lives today. He has proclaimed the name of His Father and pledges to continue proclaiming it – a reference to the arrival and work of the Holy Spirit after His ascension. When we strive to be a community of believers, filled with God's life, light, and love, who model Jesus' unity with His Father, it *will be* evident to those around us, and we will have endeavored to fulfil Jesus' hope for His church.