


Learning how to
talk to God
from the great prayers of the Bible

How Jesus Prayed

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This spring and summer, we've been studying prayer and *learning how to talk to God from the great prayers of the Bible*. We've studied the great prayers of David and Solomon and the desperate prayers of Jonah and Jeremiah. We've studied several principles of prayer. Like Jesus giving us permission to ask and how much faith it takes for God to answer our prayers. We dealt with hard issues like when God says no. And last week we learned about intercession, believing enough and caring enough to pray for other people.

The deepest prayers we ever pray are for our children. In the delivery room waiting for my first son to be born, I remember praying for eyes and ears, and fingers and toes. And I remember at some point during those long hours giving up in exhaustion and saying, "Lord, he's in Your hands and I trust You." When our children are toddlers, we pray for their health and safety. When they are teenagers, we pray for their grades and their character and good friends who will be a positive influence. And when our children are adults, we pray for their marriages, their parenting, their jobs, and for them to follow Jesus. The deepest prayers we ever pray are for our children.

And the deepest prayer Jesus ever prayed was for us. This morning, we're going to look at the prayer of Jesus in John 17.¹ We get to hear how Jesus prayed to His Father and how Jesus prayed for us.

Matthew 6 is normally called The Lord's Prayer. "Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be your name ... give us this day our daily bread ..."² That's actually the disciples' prayer because Jesus was teaching them how to pray. But John 17 is truly the Lord's prayer because we hear Jesus praying to His Father.³

The New Testament records 21 prayers of Jesus. The Bible says, "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16, NIV). "Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God" (Luke 6:12, NIV). "In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there" (Mark 1:35, NAS). And of course, He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane the night of His arrest. "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me, yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39, NAS).

John 17 records the prayer of Jesus. These are the words of Jesus.⁴ Precious words. Sacred words. And words which reveal His concern for us and His prayer for us.⁵

So I do not want to distract from these sacred words with a manufactured outline or flashy illustrations. I want to let Jesus speak. And as we walk through His prayer, may we understand that *if it was important to Jesus to pray these things, it is important for us to live according to these things*.

So let's see what we can we learn from the prayer of Jesus in John 17?

We clearly hear Jesus declare Himself to be the Son of God. “After Jesus said this” – the instructions in John 13-16 – “he looked toward heaven and prayed, ‘Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you’” (John 17:1, NIV).

By calling God “Father,” Jesus declared Himself to be the Son of God.⁶ Many of us have experienced the depth of relationship between a father and son, but we cannot imagine the depth of relationship within the Trinity. One God, yet three in one. One being, yet three persons. Father, Son, and Spirit. The Trinity is a complex, mysterious concept. But to put it simply, elsewhere Jesus said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30, NAS). He said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9, ESV).⁷ So we’re not just hearing Jesus pray to His Father, we are hearing God speak to God.

Jesus said, “The time has come” or “the hour has come.” The time, the hour, for what? For the deed for which He came. The time had come for His arrest, His scourging, and His crucifixion. The time had come for the cross, for the sacrifice, and for the great act of atonement by which we are saved.

In His prayer, Jesus said, “Glorify your Son.” This was not a self-centered statement, but a reference to the cross. Jesus was praying that His sacrifice would point the world to the Father’s grace. Jesus was praying, “Lift Me high on the cross so the world will see Your holy justice punishing sin. Lift Me high on the cross so the world will see Your loving grace forgiving sin. Lift Me high on the cross so the world will see Me as the only way of salvation.” And that’s exactly what Jesus said earlier in John 12, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32, NIV). That’s what He meant when He said, “Glorify your Son.”

And for his sacrifice, Jesus surely deserves to be glorified and praised. In Revelation 5, John recorded what he heard and saw when God allowed him a peek into heaven. John writes, “I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels and living creatures all around the throne, singing in a mighty chorus, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain – to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and **glory** and blessing.’ And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, all singing, ‘Blessing and honor and **glory** and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever’” (Revelation 5:11-13, NLT). Because of His love, His sacrifice, and His victory, Jesus deserves all glory.

Jesus also prayed, “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (John 17:5, NIV). “The glory I had” refers to Jesus’ position in heaven before the incarnation. Jesus was looking forward to being restored to His place in heaven. He was anticipating His return to His Father.

His prayer makes it clear that Jesus came to make eternal life possible.⁸ Jesus spoke of Himself in third person, when He prayed, “For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him” (John 17:2, NIV).

The great purpose of the cross and the great victory of resurrection was to conquer sin and death and Satan. As Paul said, we mock death and say, “O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55, NAS). The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus makes forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God and eternal life a real possibility for us. Think about that. Eternal life!

Every day brings us closer to death, and every day brings us closer to heaven. To seeing Jesus face to face. To experiencing relief, rest, and peace. To being with Him forever. That's why the Bible says, "We do not grieve like those who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Paul reminded the Corinthians of this great hope. "We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18, ESV).

"Now this is eternal life," Jesus said, "that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3, NIV). Notice Jesus did not define eternal life with a description of heaven but as knowing Him and enjoying an eternal relationship with Him. The moment we close our eyes on earth is the same moment we open our eyes in heaven and see Jesus face to face and live with Him forever. One day it will happen for all of us, and what a glorious day it will be.

In His prayer, Jesus made it clear that He accomplished everything that needed to be done to secure our salvation.⁹ "I have brought you glory on earth," He prayed to the Father, "by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4, NIV). From the cross, Jesus said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30, NAS).

What was finished? Prophecy was fulfilled.¹⁰ Satan was defeated.¹¹ Justice was satisfied.¹² Bondage was broken.¹³ Victory was won.¹⁴ *Tetelastai!* It was a common word found in ancient documents, on receipts of business transactions, meaning paid in full.¹⁵ Jesus accomplished everything that needed to be done so that we might be saved. There is nothing to add and nothing to do.¹⁶

That's why Paul said, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9, ESV).

In these sacred words, we also hear the tenderness of Jesus, ***that He loves us and we are precious to Him.*** "I am praying for them," He said to His Father. The deepest prayers we ever pray are for our children, and the deepest prayer Jesus ever prayed was for us. "I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them" (John 17:9-10, ESV).

"I am praying for them" (ESV). They are "mine."¹⁷ They are "yours." We belong to Him, and He loves us, and we are precious to Him. He prayed to His Father, "(May) the love you have for me be in them" (John 17:26, NIV). Earlier in John 15, Jesus said, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you, abide in My love" (John 15:9, NAS).

The Apostle John burst with joy when he said, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is who we are!" (1 John 3:1, NIV).¹⁸

There is no doubt. He loves us and we are precious to Him.

Jesus also prayed that we would be one. “I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:11, NIV). Jesus prayed that three more times in His prayer.¹⁹

One of the most repeated priorities in the New Testament is for oneness and unity. Paul urged the Ephesians to “make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:3, NIV). Why? Because, Paul wrote, “There is one body and one Spirit ... one hope ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:3-6, NIV). We have one faith and we are one family. But oh how it must grieve the Lord’s heart to see so many denominations, so many factions, and so many conflicts and petty disagreements in His bride.

Why is unity a big deal? Jesus tells us why in His prayer. “That the world may know” (John 17:23, NAS). The world is watching us to see if Christianity is worth believing, and our oneness, our unity, and our love for each other are the best proof that Christianity is real.²⁰

Why is unity a big deal? Because we need each other. We’re stronger when we stick together. We’re stronger when we love and encourage each other. We need each other to resist temptation, to withstand Satan, to endure trials, and to persevere through all life throws at us. Jesus prayed for this, so it must be important.

Jesus also prayed for our protection because we still live in an evil world. “I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one” (John 17:14-15, NIV).

We are “not of this world.” Peter referred to us as “aliens ... exiles ... foreigners ... and strangers in this world.”²¹ The spiritual reality is that we belong to God, and that this world is not our home and its values are not our values. That’s why Peter wrote two letters to Christians scattered all over the Mediterranean world. They fled persecution, dragging their families behind them. Life was difficult and they were very much in the minority. That’s why Peter said, “I have written these things to you, encouraging and assuring you that (the Gospel) is the true grace of God. So, stand firm in it” (1 Peter 5:12).

Jesus said we are “hated.” He told us to expect it. “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first ... I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (John 15:18-19, NIV).²² Jesus told the disciples, and this applies to us, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NIV). And the Bible promises, “The Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one” (2 Thessalonians 3:3, NAS).

No matter what the culture says about us or does to us, we believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ is true. And that’s why we love Him, we follow Him, and we trust Him with our today and with our eternity. Through Him, we shall overcome.

Jesus also prayed that we would grow in truth. “Sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth” (John 17:17, NIV). The disciples did not have a Bible. It would come later. So the truth they had were the words of Jesus. Today, we have the Bible. We call it the word of God. It is God speaking to us. The Bible is an expression of His heart, His love, and His will. It is the voice of God on paper, spoken and written so that we may know Him.

Paul explained the theology of the Bible to Timothy, when he said, “All Scripture is inspired by God.”²³ And according to 2 Timothy 3, it is “profitable for teaching.” The Bible teaches us what we need to KNOW. It is “profitable ... for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” The Bible teaches us who we are to BE. It “equips us for every good work.” The Bible teaches us what to DO. KNOW-BE-DO. Knowledge, character, skill. The Bible teaches everything we need to face life, obey God, serve Him, and glorify Him.

Anything you do everyday is going to slowly change your life. Like walking and exercise, anything you do everyday is going to slowly change you and shape you. And so it is with the word of God. The more we read it and feed on it, the more it will change us and make us more like Jesus.

Jesus’ prayer was that we be drenched in truth, sanctified in truth. For that to happen, we must treasure His word. David said, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word ... Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You” (Psalm 119:9, 11, NAS).

In Jesus’ prayer, He also talked about the mission. ***That we are sent into the world to represent Him and to share the gospel.*** “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18, NIV).

With His last words to His disciples, and in His great commission to us, Jesus said, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20, NAS). That’s the mission. That’s our mission.

Paul described it this way. “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us, we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:19-20, NAS). Devoted, passionate, serious disciples of Jesus are compelled to tell people about Him.

When Peter and John were threatened by the religious leaders and ordered to stop talking about Jesus, they said, “We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Peter and John knew Jesus. They heard Him teach, they witnessed His miracles, they watched Him die on the cross, and they saw Him alive again! They experienced Jesus personally. He was real to them. They loved Him so much that they couldn’t stop talking about Him. And that’s how it should be for us. If we know Him, if He is real to us, if we truly love Him, we will be compelled and delighted to tell people about Him.²⁴

Paul embraced the mission, when he said, “I am obligated ... I am eager ... and I am not ashamed” (Romans 1:14-16). May that be true of us. May we fulfill Jesus’ prayer. “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18, NIV).

Jesus also prayed with joyous anticipation, “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory” (John 17:24, NIV). ***His prayer assures us that one day we will see Him and live with Him forever.***

The Bible tells us heaven is a real place being prepared for us at this very moment. Jesus promised His disciples, and He promises us, “In my Father’s house are many rooms ... and I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and get you and take you home to be with me” (John 14:2-3). If you know Jesus, then He is preparing a place for you at this very moment. And one day, perhaps soon, you will see Him face to face and live with Him forever.

CONCLUSION

John 17 records the prayer of Jesus. The Son praying to the Father. These are the words of Jesus. Precious words. Sacred words. And words which reveal His concern for us and His prayer for us.

Again, what are we to learn from the prayer of Jesus in John 17?

- That Jesus is the Son of God
- That Jesus came to make eternal life possible, and that eternal life is knowing God and enjoying Him forever
- That He has accomplished everything that needed to be done to secure our salvation
- That He loves us and we are precious to Him
- That He prayed that we would be one
- That He prayed for our protection because we still live in an evil world
- That He prayed that we would grow in truth
- That He sends us into the world to represent Him and share the gospel
- And that one day we will see Him and live with Him forever

If it was important to Jesus to pray these things, then it is important for us to live according to these things. So may we make every effort to be one. May we be devoted to the word of God and continue to grow in truth. May we be bold to share the gospel. And may we live each day with the hope and assurance that we will see Him and live with Him forever.

I want to end by highlighting the most tender part of Jesus’ prayer. In verse 9, when He said, “I am praying for them.”²⁵ Of course, Jesus was referring to everyone, throughout history, who believes in Him. But He was also referring to you and to me. “I am praying for ____.” Put your name in the blank ... and it’s true. The Bible says, that even now, He is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. Right now, He sees what you’re going through. And right now, He is asking the Father to help you. To encourage you when you’re down. To strengthen you when you’re weary. Right now, Jesus is asking the Father to bless you. When Jesus said, “I am praying for them,” that includes you.

NOTES

¹ John 13-17 is a section called the Farewell Discourse. It includes the final words of Jesus to His disciples in the upper room the night of the last supper. This was the night before He would be crucified. And that night, He washed the disciples' feet, He warned that Judas would betray Him, and that Peter would deny Him. See John 13:5 on Jesus washing the disciples' feet. See John 13:2, 21 on Judas betraying Jesus. See Luke 22:31-34 on Peter denying Jesus. This is a fascinating section of Scripture, where we get to listen in to what Jesus said that night. And John records His fascinating prayer.

² See Matthew 6:9-13.

³ Only recorded by John recorded this prayer. The other gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – do not. Jesus either prayed this prayer in the upper room or in the garden of Gethsemane. We do know from John that immediately after praying this prayer, Judas betrayed Jesus, leading the Roman soldiers to arrest Him.

⁴ Each phrase is a sermon in its own. Each phrase a grand theological truth.

⁵ John 17 is called the High Priestly Prayer because Jesus assumes the role of priest and prays for us.

⁶ See Matthew 3:17, 14:33, 16:16, John 1:14, 3:16, 5:19, 10:34-36, 14:7, 20:31. There are many other verses declaring Jesus to be the Son of God. "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18, ESV).

⁷ John 1 states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth ... No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (John 1:1, 14, 18, ESV).

⁸ See John 5:24 and 1 John 5:13.

⁹ John 17:1-5 captures the entire purpose of God in human history. To make eternal life possible.

¹⁰ See Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, John 19:24, 28, 36, 1 Corinthians 15:3.

¹¹ See Genesis 3:15.

¹² See Romans 3:21-26.

¹³ See Romans 6:6, 18.

¹⁴ See 1 Corinthians 15:54-57.

¹⁵ Other ways the word *tetelastai* was used – ripening of fruit, reaching maturity, graduating from school, completing a project, paying a debt, signing a contract.

¹⁶ See Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:5.

¹⁷ Jesus was also praying for those who would believe in the future. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message" (John 17:20, NIV).

¹⁸ See 1 John 4:16.

¹⁹ Jesus repeated this thought, when He said, "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. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – 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" (John 17:21-23, NIV).

²⁰ See John 13:34-35.

²¹ See 1 Peter 1:1, various translations in various Bible versions.

²² Peter tells us to expect opposition. "Do not be surprised" (1 Peter 4:12, NIV). He also said, "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed," for it proves that "the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (1 Peter 4:14, NIV). "If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God," and be proud "that you bear that name" (1 Peter 4:16, NIV).

²³ See 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

²⁴ Paul said, "For the love of Christ compels me" (2 Corinthians 5:14). He said, "I am compelled to preach" (1 Corinthians 9:16, NIV). The Greek word carries the idea of being distressed. The circumstance of people's lostness was so distressing that Paul had to preach. He said, "Woe if I do not preach the Gospel!" It's like saying "Oh no! How terrible for me, and how terrible for others, if I do not preach the Good News!" (1 Corinthians 9:16, NLT).

²⁵ Jesus constantly intercedes for us. "Who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (Romans 8:34, ESV). "He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25, ESV). "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1, ESV).