

John 17 and Praying for One Another

Prayer

Introductory Questions

- What is your approach to praying *for fellow Christians*? For example, do you keep lists or use note cards? Do you pray for them at set times and/or spontaneously?
- What is the content of your prayers? In other words, what do you pray for others?

Overview of the Lesson

John 17 records what Christians call Jesus’s High Priestly Prayer, which is Jesus’s longest prayer recorded in the Bible. Why is it useful to study the prayers of Jesus? We learn much about Jesus as a person—including his desires, thoughts, and emotions. We also learn about God the Father and about Jesus’s relationship with him. For example:

- **Jesus praised God for his revelation:** “25 I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to infants. 26 Yes, Father, because this was your good pleasure” (Matt. 11:25–26).
- **Jesus submitted to his Father’s will:** “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me—nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).
- **Jesus asked God to forgive those who crucified him:** “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).
- **Jesus identified himself as the righteous, suffering descendent of David:** “About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “*Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni?*” that is, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”” (Matt. 27:46; Ps. 22:1).
- **Jesus entrusted himself to God:** ““Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit.” Saying this, he breathed his last” (Luke 23:46; Ps. 31:5).

Each of these prayers deepens our understanding of Jesus and his Father, and they stimulate us to worship them even more. Jesus’s prayers also teach us *how to pray*—whether Jesus provided us with a general model to follow (Matt. 6:9–15; Luke 11:1–4) or he prayed for his disciples (John 17). This lesson focuses on what we can learn from Jesus’s prayer in John 17, in part so that we can pray more faithfully for one another.

We organize John 17 into three main sections: (1) Jesus Prays for Himself (vv. 1–5), (2) Jesus Prays for His Disciples (vv. 6–19), and (3) Jesus Prays for All Believers (vv. 20–26). We conclude this lesson by summarizing ways we can pray for one another.

1. Jesus Prays for Himself

1 Jesus spoke these things, looked up to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you gave him authority over all people, so that he may give eternal life to everyone you have given him. 3 This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ. 4 I have glorified you on the earth by completing the work you gave me to do. 5 Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with that glory I had with you before the world existed.” (John 17:1–5)

In John 13–17, Jesus instructs his disciples and prays in preparation for his crucifixion and resurrection recorded in chapters 18–20. Jesus prayed that God would *glorify* (to display his supreme worth) the Son in and through the cross, so that he would glorify God (v. 1). Jesus received all authority from God, so he may give eternal life to all God has given him (v. 2). Eternal life consists in knowing God, the only true God, and the one God sent, Jesus Christ (v. 3). Jesus glorified the Father *on earth* by completing the work God gave him to do (v. 4). Jesus desired to be glorified *in heaven* with the glory he had with God before creation (v. 5).

- What is *Jesus’s glory*? What does it mean for us *to glorify* Jesus Christ?
- How does the crucifixion and resurrection glorify God and Jesus Christ?

2. Jesus Prays for His Disciples

- “6 I have revealed your name to the people you gave me from the world. They were yours, you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you, 8 because I have given them the words you gave me. They have received them and have known for certain that I came from you. They have believed that you sent me. 9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world but for those you have given me, because they are yours. 10 Everything I have is yours, and everything you have is mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.” (John 17:6–11a)
- “Holy Father, protect them by your name that you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I was protecting them by your name that you have given me. I guarded them and not one of them is lost, except the son of destruction, so that the Scripture may be fulfilled. 13 Now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy completed in them. 14 I have given them your word. The world hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I am not praying that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” (John 17:11b–16)

- “17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 I sanctify myself for them, so that they also may be sanctified by the truth.” (John 17:17–19)

In verses 6–11a, Jesus prays for his disciples (not those who are part of the world) because “(1) they belong to the Father, (2) they bring him glory, and (3) he is about to leave them” (*NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, 1928). Jesus completed the work God gave him to do—to reveal God and his words to the disciples. In verses 11b–16, Jesus prays that God would protect the disciples so that they would be unified and so that his joy would be complete in them. They needed protection from falling away and from the attacks of the evil one. In verses 17–19, Jesus prays that God would sanctify (purify) them by the truth—specifically the truth of God’s Word. Just as God sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus sent them. Jesus sanctified (set apart) himself for God’s will, so that they would be sanctified (purified) by the truth.

- In what ways do Christians need God’s protection? How does God accomplish that?
- What are the primary ways that we become progressively sanctified (holy)?

3. Jesus Prays for All Believers

“20 I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. 21 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. 22 I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. 23 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. 24 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. 25 Righteous Father, the world has not known you. However, I have known you, and they have known that you sent me. 26 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)

Jesus then prayed for all future believers—all who would come to believe through the disciples’ ministry (v. 20). He prayed that we would be unified (just as the Father and the Son dwell in one another) and that we would be incorporated into the Father and Jesus (so the world would believe through our witness) (v. 21). Jesus revealed his own and the Father’s glory, which, when we see their glory and cherish it, unifies us (v. 22). Because Jesus is in us and God is in Jesus, we are unified, which leads us to witness to the world (v. 23). Jesus wants us to be with him to see his glory, both now and throughout eternity (v. 24). God is righteous in his character and actions. Though the world does not know God, Jesus does, and we know that God sent him into the world (v. 25). He revealed the Father and will continue to do so, so that God’s love and Jesus may be in us (v. 26).

- In what ways does God call us to be unified? How can we grow in unity?
- How does Christian unity help us to take the gospel into the world?

Sound Doctrine: Praying for One Another

Below are seven ways that we can pray for others within our Christian community.

1. **We pray that God would open their eyes to the glory of the gospel, and grant them repentance and trust in Jesus.** For non-Christians and Christians, we pray that God would grant both clarity about the nature of the gospel and the willingness to embrace it—by turning from sin and trusting in Jesus (Mark 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:23).
2. **We pray that God would grant them unity.** While the body of Christ is wonderfully diverse, God grants us the ability to desire, think, and act *in the same ways*. For example, we pray that God would unify us in our theological beliefs and commitment to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:18–20; John 17:11, 21–23; Eph. 4:1–6).
3. **We pray that God would grant them love.** In broadest terms, love is devoted affection that desires, thinks, and acts for the benefit of another (Eph. 3:17–19; Phil. 1:9). Ultimately, God is the one who helps us to love him and to love others (Matt. 22:37–40).
4. **We pray that God would grant them knowledge and wisdom.** As an act of grace, God grants us knowledge (awareness of the nature of reality) and wisdom (the skill to apply knowledge to accomplish his purposes) (Eph. 1:17; James 1:5–8).
5. **We pray that God would grant them boldness to witness to Jesus.** Boldness does not mean that we are arrogant or rude or loud. Instead, bold people do what needs to be done and say what needs to be said—despite their fears (Acts 4:29–31; Eph. 6:19–20).
6. **We pray that God would grant them perseverance.** The world, our sinful nature, and demons tempt us *away* from loving God above all, and *toward* loving people and things more than God. Perseverance is the act of continuing in our faith despite such opposition, which we can do only through God’s sustaining grace (John 17:11–16; Jude 24–25).
7. **We pray that God would grant them the ability to glorify him.** To glorify God means to see, cherish, and express his supreme worth, importance, and beauty—which Christians do individually and together (Rom. 15:5–6; 2 Thess. 1:11–12; 1 Pet. 2:9).

- What questions or comments do you have about this lesson?
- Explain one or more ways you can pray for others more faithfully.

Prayer

Applying God's Word

Use these two pages to reflect on and apply this lesson. Schedule a time to discuss your answers and pray with family members and friends during the week, and/or as part of your next group meeting.

1. Renew Your Mind

- a. What did you learn about **God the Father, God the Son, and/or God the Holy Spirit** (concerning their character qualities, words, and/or actions)?
- b. What did you realize about **your sinful tendencies** (concerning your desires, values, thoughts, words, and/or actions)? "I sin against God by _____."
- c. What did you learn about **God's will for your life** (concerning your desires, values, thoughts, words, and/or actions)? "God desires that I _____."

2. Memorize the Word

Identify one or more verses of Scripture from this lesson that you plan to memorize and write them out below.

3. Obey the Word

In response to this lesson:

- a. How do you want to grow in **your character**? “By God’s grace, I want to become more (or less) _____. I will work on that by _____.”
- b. How can you apply this information in **your words and/or actions** (with your family, church community, neighbors, and/or coworkers)? “By God’s grace, I will _____.”

4. Express Your Desires

- a. Write out one or more prayers to God in response to this lesson.
- b. What other prayer requests do you want to share with your family and friends?