

STUDY UNIT 5

John 17

CHRIST'S PRAYER LIFE

Christ's public ministry on earth was a brief three-year period. The gospels tell us that our Lord spent a good amount of this time in prayer. You will remember that He began His ministry with forty days of prayer and fasting, alone with the Father.

This began His habit throughout his public ministry, and which was probably to some degree done throughout His whole life, to arise early in the morning, often before the sun arose, to go fellowship with His father. Then, in the evening, we are told that He would often go to the Mount of Olives or another quiet place to pray. He was in constant conversation with His Father, just as He has instructed all of us, through the apostles, to "be devoted to prayer" and to "pray without ceasing."

Then, in the hours before the end, as He faced the cross, we have the wondrous prayer that we find recorded in John 17. In chapters 13 through 16 of John's gospel we find the Lord's parting words to His disciples (13–16) and then His prayer to the Father (chapter 17) as He finished His earthly work and faced the cross. The work of taking the gospel to all mankind—making disciples over the long centuries to come—was now to be pursued and completed by these men and their disciples.

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.... 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 observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 24:14 / 28:19–20

Turning the work of proclaiming the truths of the gospel and making disciples over to the first disciples was a confusing shock to them. Christ explained what He had done for them and what they were now to do in chapters 13 through 16. Then He prayed to the Father regarding what He had done and asked Him to empower these men to do these same things for and through all the saints to come going forward in chapter 17. What are these things? Here are His prayers:

1. **That the Father would keep them from the evil one.**
2. **That the Father would transform them through His Word.**
3. **That there would be unity and love among God's people.**
4. **That the final victory would come with the wonder of its oneness and fulness of joy.**

We shall look at each of these to clarify them, but first, let us note that **our primary reason for studying these chapters is to identify how we, like our Lord, are to pray** for our own disciples and all of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

These chapters and Christ's prayer are a treasure and a wonder. The whole scope of God's person, plan, and means are to be found here. They tell us how to pray with power and confidence to the glory of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Notice what He emphasizes to His disciples on their prayer life.

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these will do; because I go to the Father. **Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do**, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."*
John 14:12–14

What does Christ mean when He mentions asking "**in My name?**" He means that when we pray to God, **we are coming to Him as a disciple of Christ, seeking to do exactly what He is asking us to do and asking for what our Lord Jesus desires.**

*"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, **ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you**. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."*
John 15:7–8

*"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that **whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you**."*
John 15:16

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. **Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full**."*
John 16:23–24

Now, let us look at **the primary requests** we find in Christ's prayer to the Father for His disciples and those of us who have believed on Christ because of their work. (See Jn 17:20) They teach us what we are to pray for as we serve our Lord. Before we do, pray this sample prayer as part of preparation for the coming study.

"My Father in heaven, I surrender my life unto You again this day to use me as You wish. I know that the Holy Spirit will lead me in Your will as I do this. Please may He comfort me in what I am facing, help me in what you have given me to do. May I walk today, not in my own strength, but may I be strengthened with all power by Your Spirit. Show me what my Lord has done in prayer that I may imitate Him. Amen"

1. **That the Father would keep them from the evil one.**

Our prayer life is to be seen in the context of God's battle with Satan, as Christ prayed for us.

"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one."

John 17:15

This aspect of our prayer life is also an important part of the apostles teaching. Notice how Paul's lengthy passage on putting on the "armor of God's Truth" is set in the context of prayer for "**all** the saints, at **all** times, with **all** perseverance" against the forces of darkness.

*"Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of **the devil**. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against **the spiritual forces of wickedness** in the heavenly places.*

*Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.***

*With **all** prayer and petition pray at **all** times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with **all** perseverance and petition for **all** the saints."*

Ephesians 6:10–18

This passage is worthy of our study and use in much of our prayer time. It tells us of the forces we face, their strategy and tactics, and the means of resisting and defeating them in our prayers.

"Our Father, how helpful is Your Word in the midst of our pressures, our discouragements, and our defeats. Help us to put on the armor of the truths we find in Your Word, bring them to our mind, counsel us with Your eye upon us, and guide us in these battles we are facing in life. Help us to resist the forces of darkness and to stand firm for You in what you are allowing. Strengthen our faith, our hope, and our love for You and others. Amen."

Are you praying consistently through the "putting on of the armor" of truth for yourself and others? Satan's primary attacks are directed toward our minds. We are to be careful to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:5). God's people often make foolish and damaging choices thinking they are doing the right thing. They have been deceived. We are to help them with **all** prayer, at **all** times, with **all** perseverance. For **all** of them.

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of (mental) fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:3–5

"Our Father, hallowed be Thy name. Lead us not into temptations but deliver us from evil, by teaching us the principles of Your Word and empowering us to impose them on our thinking and our circumstances in life. Thank you. Amen"

2. That the Father would transform them through His Word.

"Sanctify them (set them apart) in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify (set apart) Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified (set apart) in truth." John 17:17–19

Our sanctification is a setting apart, lifelong, process, that conforms us more and more into the image of God, as our thinking, our decisions, and our character is changed by our yieldedness and obedience to the principles of God's Word and the leading of the indwelling Holy Spirit. As used in the New Testament, "sanctification" speaks of the separation of a believer from evil things and ways. This is God's will for us, is learned as He teaches and leads us by the Holy Spirit, and must be earnestly pursued by us.

*"For this is the will of God, your sanctification.... that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor.... For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives **His Holy Spirit** to you."* 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8

This transformation of us into the image of Christ is accomplished, as the above verse indicates, by the teaching, leading, and empowerment of the Holy Spirit who has come to dwell within us.

*"I will ask the Father, and He will give you **another Helper**, that He may be with you forever; that is **the Spirit of truth**, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you...But the Helper, **the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in My name, **He will teach you all things**, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."* John 14:16–17, 26

*"But I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another.... Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness self-control.... If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk **by means of the Spirit**."* Galatians 5:16–25

Our Lord asked the Father that we might be transformed into His image so that we could be like Him and share His life in eternal oneness with Him. We are to seek this in our prayers for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Do you know some who are trying to live life in their own strength? Pray for them. Do you know some who are immature in the faith? Pray for them as Christ prayed for you. Do you know some who have grieved or quenched the Spirit and need to confess and repent?

"Our Father, we pray for our brothers and sisters who are struggling with the temptations of the world, the lies of the devil, and their own fleshly and worldly desires. May they yield to Your

will and seek Your leading and power to say no to their flesh and choose to obey You and Your Word by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit that lives within them. Amen.”

3. **That there would be unity and love among God’s people.**

This desire of our Lord, that the selfless love of the Trinity for one another would be shared by us, is perhaps the dominate focus of His final teaching to His disciples and His prayers to the Father. It is to be ours as well.

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you **love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**"*
John 13:34–35

*"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; **that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us; so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.**"*
John 17:20–23

There is a great contrast between the most immature church in the New Testament and the most mature one. This great difference, that is addressed so clearly in Paul’s letters to them, is that one of them was characterized by love for one another and the unity that came from it, and the other was characterized by division and strife with one another. They loved themselves.

These divisions and strife were abundant and dominate in the Corinthian church, while the Thessalonian Christians were praised by Paul as great examples of love, having become imitators of our Lord. As a result, they were known “not only throughout Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place their faith and love had become known” (1 Thess 1:8). They are examples for us to imitate, while the spiritually weak and immature Corinthians are certainly not.

Our Lord’s prayer above was that all Christians throughout the entire church age would be characterized by selfless love for one another, which would be seen in their oneness and their unity.

The apostle John emphasized this as he lived and taught this as Christ’s apostle:

*“Beloved, **let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.**”*
1 John 4:7–12

To what extent are you praying that this selfless love characterizes you and others that you know and love?

“Our loving, forgiving, merciful Father, we ask that You would forgive us for falling short of being the example of You and Your selfless love of others. We ask that You would move in our hearts and bring a new spirit of unity and oneness to our fellowship. May we become useful to You here in this broken, divisive world, manifesting who You are by our love for one another. We pray also for unity and love to be seen throughout the world among your people. May their light so shine before men that they may see You and be drawn to the Savior who died for them. Amen.”

4. **That the final victory would come with the wonder of its oneness and fulness of joy for all who are saved by grace.**

*"Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, **be with Me where I am** (referring to heaven), so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."*
John 17:24

*"But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so **that they may have My joy made full in themselves.**"*
John 17:13

This is the final petition of our Lord's prayer. He asks that those whom the Father has given Him would be with Him in glory when their work on earth is done. If you still do not think that your prayers are very important in the grand scheme of the plans of a sovereign God, think again. Why would our Lord ask the Father for this? Isn't it determined that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord—for a Christian? It is. Then why would we need to ask that the Father would do this? Quite beyond our ability to comprehend all that is true of God is this truth that our prayers "availeth much" (Jas 5:16).

God wants us to share His life with us. We are to become "the fulness of Him who always has already filled all in all" (Eph 1:23). Please explain that to my small mind. How can we be the fulness of Him Who fills all in all. Why would He desire it and make it come to pass? Because He loves us. Explain that!

Of all the things God could have made for Himself—He made you!

Of all the things God could have given His life for—He gave it for you. Why?

Because He loves you!

Jesus our Savior desires that we be with Him soon in heaven so that we can share His life in all its wonder and fulness—because He loves us. He asked this of the Father, and He asks us to pray with Him for others, in His name, to the Father, that they might be with us in heaven, sharing the fulness of Christ's joy, and being, somehow, "one" with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and all the saints, for all eternity.

“Our Father Who art in heaven, Thy kingdom come, and may many who are not yet saved be saved by Your grace, by Christ’s atoning sacrifice of His life, that they may stand with us before the presence of Your glory, blameless, and with GREAT JOY! Amen.”

UNIT 5 STUDY SESSION #1:

In preparation for the group study, read and study the summary above and then complete the following self-evaluation.

Praying For Others Like Christ

I regularly pray for others that:

1. The Father would keep them from the evil one. ____ I do ____ some ____ not very often
2. That the Father would transform them through His Word. ____ I do ____ some ____ not very often
3. That there would be unity and love among God’s people. ____ I do ____ some ____ not very often
4. That the final victory would come with the wonder of its oneness and fulness of joy. ____ I do ____ some ____ not very often

Discussion Questions For Study Session #1

1. Before we begin to discuss this week’s study, did God answer any of your prayers this week?
2. Regarding the first major request that Christ made to the Father in John 17, that His disciples would be kept from the evil one, do you have any questions or comments?
3. Regarding the second, that the Father would transform His disciples—any questions or comments?
4. Regarding the third, that there would be love and unity among Christians. Why has this declined in our country in recent years? What are the reasons it has declined throughout the church age?
5. Regarding the fourth, regarding the final victory over evil would come. Why hasn’t it? Does this delay, and the reasons for it help us in our own prayer life?

Prayer Together

UNIT 5 STUDY SESSION #2:

Our goal in these studies has been to grow in our relationship with God by the maturing of our prayer life. Our ongoing project through these studies is to set aside regular and special times to **SEEK THE LORD IN PRAYER** and to keep a **PRAYER JOURNAL** of our requests and God's answers. Given the focus of this study of Christ's prayer in John 17, consider choosing one or more of the following projects to pursue this week:

Preparation For Session #2: Application Project

Choose one of the following projects to pursue this week and come prepared to share about it.

1. Add the 4 prayer topics, noted in the study, that Christ used to pray to the Father in John 17 to your prayers and journal record. Consider adding a broad, even worldwide scope to these prayers. Christ certainly had this perspective. You may find the prayers at the end of each of the 4 sections in the study helpful.
2. After John 17, Christ lived for a few hours. During this time, He also spoke to the Father several times in which we know what He prayed. Find these and meditate on what we can learn from them about our own prayer life.
3. Before John 17, Christ's public ministry stretched for about three years. He prayed often and many of His prayers are recorded for us. Find these and meditate on what we can learn from them about our own prayer life.

Discussion Questions

1. Well, how did your prayer life and journaling go this week?
2. If you were able to pursue one of the application projects, can you share with us how it went?

Prayer Together