

# TEACH US TO PRAY

Week Three | October 29, 2017 | How Jesus Prayed for Us

## PREPARATION

### MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Spend some time alone in God's Word reading through John 17:20–26. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truths of this text and allow you to teach it well to those in your care.

### THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Read through the questions included in the guide this week. Many questions have been included in this lesson for discussion. Determine which questions will work well to encourage, push, and grow your group in the best way.

### DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming week at the corporate church gathering. Pray also for your time together as a group, that the Spirit would make effective your teaching and bring gospel clarity, gospel change, and a heart for gospel mission to those who are present.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL REALITY

Jesus' prayer teaches us to pursue unity in Christ, to bear great witness to Christ, to experience the love of Christ, and to model our prayers for the church after His example.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

This prayer reminds us of what Jesus wants for believers and the way He wants us to pray for the church.

### MEDITATE

*"I ask that they all may be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe you have sent me" (John 17:21).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: Explain why a sports team marked by division might say the wrong things about its coach?

Q: Why is it difficult to learn something new without the example of an expert?

Q: What do you think it means to pray like Jesus?

In the fun-filled kid's movie, *Kung Fu Panda*, an unlikely panda named Po is chosen to join a team of five kung fu warriors and their master. Their master, Shifu, was famously trained by fierce and ancient Senior Master, Oogway the Tortoise, who prophesied that Po and this team would be overcomers. The team's ultimate goal is to defeat an evil snow leopard. While Po laughably tries to dabble in kung fu, it becomes painfully clear he will not get far without learning from Master Shifu himself. After watching Shifu time and time again and putting in countless hours of practice, Po is ready to join the other kung fu warriors. Eventually, their unified attack ends up defeating the enemy, saving the surrounding villages. But that's not all. In one of the final lines of the movie, after Po and his team have defeated the leopard, Shifu says something vital. "Wow. It is as Oogway foretold. You have brought peace." In this moment, we see another big reason behind why Po and his team needed to be unified in their attack—to prove to the surrounding villages that Oogway, the senior master, and Shifu, the master, were trustworthy and right all along in their prophecy. The unity of Po and his team not only saved the villages, it also helped them believe the right things about the masters themselves.

As we study John 17 this week, we will see similar things. Like Po, we cannot possibly learn about prayer without watching the Master. Though we can try to dabble in it here and there, without truly learning from Christ Himself about prayer, we will get nowhere. Once we watch Him pray and model our prayers after His, we will be ready to join other prayerful believers in the team sport of the Christian life. When we do join other prayerful believers, we must do so in a unified way, just as the kung fu warriors did. Furthermore, like Po's team did for Shifu and Oogway, when believers are truly unified in their mission, it communicates the right things about the Master Himself, Christ, as well as the Father who sent Him.

**Q:** *Have you ever thought about your Christian life being an answer to Jesus' prayers and desires? Why is this a powerful thought?*

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Last week, we learned what praying in the “bad times” looks like. This week, we will learn about prayer from the Master Himself, Jesus Christ. On the eve of His crucifixion, He takes the time to pray for all believers in what Christian history has called “the high priestly prayer.” In this precious prayer to the Father, Jesus asks for a few specific things for His followers and for the lost world. When we forget how to pray for ourselves or other believers, we can return to John 17 to be reminded of Jesus’ desires for believers as well as unbelievers. As we learn from His prayer, we can examine if we are lining up with it. We also can use it as a guide to pray for our fellow believers the way He does. In these verses, we will see Jesus modeling a prayer that teaches us to:

- 1. PRAY FOR BELIEVERS TO HAVE GREAT UNITY IN CHRIST**
- 2. PRAY FOR BELIEVERS TO BEAR GREAT WITNESS TO CHRIST**
- 3. PRAY FOR BELIEVERS TO EXPERIENCE THE LOVE OF CHRIST AND THE FATHER**

## GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

## PRAY FOR BELIEVERS TO HAVE GREAT UNITY IN CHRIST

■ **JOHN 17:20–23**

**Q:** *Why is it surprising that Jesus Christ prayed often, given that He was divine? What does that tell you about His beliefs and how He views the Father?*

John 17 records a prayer that Jesus prayed the night before His crucifixion. His ministry time is running out, and the cross lies before Him. At this vital moment, we are not only told that He prays, but we are given a written record of what He prayed. While we might expect him to pray for many things, Jesus prays for something simple, for His disciples and those who would be impacted by their ministry, which includes all believers to this day! In short, Jesus is praying for the church! Though He's about to undergo the most excruciating experience of His life, His focus is on others. Jesus knows He's about to "pass the baton," so to speak, to His disciples to carry forth the mission of spreading the gospel to the whole world. To do this well, He knows they need help, so He prays for them. Imagine that! The One who has all power over creation (as the disciples had seen at this point), decides to stop and ask the Father to help His best friends continue in steadfastness to the mission He has laid before them. If Christ Himself felt the need to pray and seek the Father's face for the church, how much more should we be doing this for one another? As we move through these verses, we will see four major requests Jesus has in His prayer for believers.

❓: *How many times do you see the word "one" in these verses? What is Jesus emphasizing here?*

❓: *In what ways has the church today shown unity? In what other ways has it not shown unity?*

The first thing Jesus prays for believers is that they would display great unity in Him. He prays multiple times that believers would be "one." What's more, Jesus does not leave this term general. He gives "oneness" a clear characteristic that makes it different from other forms of unity, namely, that it would resemble the same kind of oneness He and the Heavenly Father share! Just as Jesus and the Father are totally one in nature and in mission, Christ wants us to be one with other believers. Though we have different personalities and gifts, we are ultimately "one body" with the same Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:5), and thus share a common nature. We are bound together by Christ's Spirit, and Jesus wants our "oneness" with each other to be as unbreakable as His bond to the Father. There's no separating Jesus and His Father, as He has said already in the gospel of John (Jn. 10:30). May we, as Christ's followers, have a unified bond that mirrors the Trinity itself.

❓: *Would you say your relationship with other believers mirrors the unbreakable bond between Jesus and His Father? Why or why not?*

- Q: *What is required of a Christian to truly be “one” with other believers? What sacrifices and efforts are needed?*
- Q: *In what ways have you worked against Jesus’ prayer for you to embody unity in your relationships with other believers?*

## PRAY FOR BELIEVERS TO BEAR GREAT WITNESS TO CHRIST

### ■ JOHN 17:20–21

- Q: *Who else does Jesus include in His prayer besides the disciples who were there with Him? What does this tell you about His assumption about our mission as His followers?*

Jesus starts this section by clarifying who He is praying for, the disciples and “also for those who will believe in me through their word.” From the start, Jesus assumes that His disciples will bear witness, and that by sharing the gospel wherever they go, people will come to faith! Today, the same thing is true. New believers will arise because current disciples verbally share the gospel with the lost around them. Jesus assumes we will be His witnesses, just as He has commanded us (Mt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8). He also assumes that as we bear witness, we will bear the fruit of new converts. Even at the very start of His prayer for the church, He includes those who will come to know Him through its verbal testimony. This means that though Jesus is praying for you in these verses, He’s also praying for all those who will come to know Him through your spoken witness.

- Q: *What is Jesus’ reason behind praying for the church’s unity? Explain how unity among Christians produces belief among non-Christians.*
- Q: *Conversely, if the church were to show disunity instead of unity, what would the world believe about Christ? Why?*

Next, we see the theme of bearing witness again in verse 21. After praying for unbreakable unity among believers, Jesus reveals the purpose for the request, “so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Jesus wants unbreakable unity for His followers, not just for solidarity’s sake, but because it bears witness to the truth that the Father actually sent the Son to do the humanly impossible. Jesus wants our unity to send a beautiful message to the lost world—that He’s real and that He can actually change people, even a group of natural enemies (as the disciples were)!

When we as a church do not embody the deep unity He desires for us, we communicate the wrong message about Christ and His Father, namely, that they are not truly able to do the impossible and that they can’t really change sinful people. If Christ’s people aren’t different than the surrounding culture in their great love for one another, then the world assumes their master, Christ, isn’t all that different or loving. Eventually, this misbelief leads people to conclude that God did not truly send a loving Savior to us who was powerful enough to create unity out of division. As we ponder this, we realize that our unity is of utmost importance because it bears witness to the very unified character and mission of God and his Son. If we operate in unity, we reflect what’s true about the Trinity. When we operate in disunity, we communicate the false message that Christ and his Father’s bond is separable, and their character and mission is breakable. This should push us to evaluate our own relationships in the church and make sure they are ones of vibrant unity. It also pushes us to pray often, as Christ did, for great unity in the church around the world.

*Q: What unbeliever in your life has become interested in Jesus solely based on the unity you display with other believers? If this has not happened, why?*

## **PRAY FOR BELIEVERS TO EXPERIENCE THE LOVE OF CHRIST AND THE FATHER**

**JOHN 17: 23,26**

*Q: If you are honest, do you believe God loves you, “has to” love you, or simply likes you? Why?*

*Q: When you pray for your friends or family, do you ask God to fill them with the same love He has for His Son?*

In verse 26, another part of Jesus' prayer for His believers is that their unity would not only show that the Father sent the Son, but that the Father truly loves them. And this is not a general type of love. Christ wants His followers to know that the Father has loved them even as He has loved Jesus. Imagine that! We are not merely "liked" by the Father. He pours out His love on us to the very measure He overflows with love for His own Son!

This principle is repeated in verse 26 as Jesus asks the father that "the love with which you have loved me may be in them." Christ doesn't want to hoard the Father's favor and love. He wants to share it. He wants the immeasurable love that God has given to Him to be placed in His followers so they can have a taste of the greatest love they could ever experience. It is encouraging to know that of all the things for which Jesus could pray, He chose to pray that we would know just how loved we are by the Father. As we model our own prayers after Christ, we must also pray this for ourselves, our families, and our fellow believers.

**Q:** *Now that you know the specific things Christ has prayed for you, how are you encouraged? How does this change your own prayers?*

## NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

**Q:** *How can you practically pursue being "one" with the other believers in your church? List some of the obstacles that keep you from this, and come up with ideas on how to overcome those obstacles.*

**Q:** *Are the non-believers in your life close enough to observe your unified relationship with other believers? From now on, how can you practically use your Christian friendships as a witness to those who don't know Jesus?*

**Q:** *In what practical ways can you remind yourself that God loves you to the very*

*same measure He loves His Son?*

**Q:** *Do you pray for the church the way Jesus prayed for it in John 17? If not, write or print these prayers of Christ and place them in a location you will see often. Take time throughout the week to, like Jesus, pray these four points for the other believers in your church and around the world.*

## PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- Jesus, thank you for praying these things on my behalf the night before your crucifixion. The fact that you had future believers like me on your mind at such a painful time gives me great hope.
- Jesus, help my relationships with other believers to be so unified that the lost world sees an accurate picture of you and the Father. Help the unity of my church bear great witness to you.
- Jesus, remind me often that the Father loves me with the very same measure He loves you. Help me pray for other believers to trust this as well.
- Jesus, teach me to pray like you in these specific ways for the believers around me.

## COMMENTARY

**JOHN 17:22** “Glory” here likely refers to excellence of God’s entire character as manifested in Jesus’ life (John 1:14). Jesus has given this manifestation and witness to all believers (17:20), given that His entire life revealed the glory of God. He imparted this to His followers, and Christians now reflect God’s excellency in their own lives in imitation of Christ.

**JOHN 17:24** In this verse, the entire purpose of salvation is revealed by Jesus: He wants believers to join Him where He is, that is, in the heavenly places and in perfect communion with the Father. In one sense, we already

enjoy this as believers now, though not fully (Eph. 2:6). In the new heaven and earth, we will experience this in full, sinless, resurrected glory.

**JOHN 17:26** The phrase “I in them” is filled with covenantal overtones (John 14:20; 17:23). After the giving of the law at Sinai, God came to dwell in the midst of Israel in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34). As they moved toward the Promised Land, God frequently assured His people that He was in their midst (Ex. 29:45–46; Deut. 7:21; 23:14). Now, in the New Covenant, the Christ dwells within us through the Holy Spirit.

*\*All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes and The New American Commentary Series*