

Series: What Jesus Would Say

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

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John 17

“The Best Way to Pray”

I have probably shared about one of my beloved characters in my first church—Wayne
-who I was told had in his early years been hit by a train—that explained some of his behaviors

-I was a young, idealistic pastor frustrated by a mid-week prayer meeting I inherited
-it served as a cover for a lot of sanctified gossip—usually leaving just a few moments to pray

-every week it went this way—until—one night—I announced that I would read a brief Psalm to tune our hearts

-and we would get on with praying for nearly the whole hour

-Wayne, stuck in the kind of rut that obscures reality, suddenly bolted out of his chair and headed for the door

-and with his sharp tongue he shot back—“I thought this was a prayer meeting!”

-and then he stomped out

In chapter 17—John records a more civil prayer meeting—led by Jesus

-but in this gathering—only Jesus prayed

-it came on the heels of a long conversation with Jesus’ disciples in the upper room

-one driven by misunderstandings and, at times, inept questions

-but the conversation now is no longer with them—it has shifted to God

-and it is perhaps the most important conversation in the book

-for prayer is the best use, the highest use to which speech can be putⁱ

-what’s amazing is that we get to listen

-Jesus did not shut the door after His conversation with the disciples—nor go to the mountain to be alone with the Father

-He invited them/us into His prayer closet—wherein the deepest parts of His soul were heard

-for this is what this prayer is—a window into the heart

-you read and reread and begin to get a sense that this is sacred, holy ground

-this is the Lord’s Lord’s Prayer

So what initially stands out?

FIRST—WE NOTICE THAT JESUS PRAYED

- something Scripture records He did some 12 times—this being the most extended prayer—and it is often for us
- but Jesus did not END His prayers here
- Heb 7:25 says He always lives to make intercession
- He was praying for us yesterday—He will be praying for us tomorrow
- divine praying is a current event

APPLICATION—if He found it necessary to pray—why would we doubt prayer's importance?

-Yancey once put it this way—

"I can of spiritual weariness over questions like 'What good does it do to pray if God already knows everything?' Jesus silences such questions: He prayed, so should we."ⁱⁱ

SECOND—JESUS PRAYED AT A MOMENT OF BOLDNESS

- remember chapter divisions and verses are artificially imposed—so 16:33 should not be divided
- following "take courage—I have overcome the world" should tell —this is not some somber, downcast, sense of resignation—"Father, the hour has come. Let's get this over with"

- rather—the context compels us to hear a prayer full of life and confidence—even though the cross is the next thing on Jesus' agenda
- He was not asking for strength—He was exerting it!
- He was about to storm the gates of hell!!

APPLICATION—and so our prayers should be prayed with a level of confidence—not in some morose, lifeless way

-confidence sets in motion both how we pray and what we pray

THIRD—HIS PRAYER TELLS US WHAT MATTERS

1. GOD'S GLORY

-Jesus' opening words inform us how all prayer should begin—read verses 1-5

- there is no self-seeking here in this prayer
- if there was to be any personal glory—it was so God could be glorified—verse 1
- from the beginning of John—this has been the driving force of Jesus' life—that His life and death be for the glory of God
- His ultimate goal was making much of the Father—honoring His name, magnifying His Person, lifting up His reputation
- His hesitancy to respond immediately to Lazarus was so that *the Father's reputation would be enhanced*—11:4

-His encounter with the blind man of John 9 was so that *the work of God “might be displayed”*

-His determination to go to the Cross was based ultimately on this one aim—to *glorify the Father’s name—12:28*

-this is why all of creation exists—why we exist

-I Corinthians 10:31—whatever you do—in word or deed—do all to the glory of God

-meaning we were made to showcase God—not ourselves

-and we especially glorify God when we are faithful to the mission God has given to us

So—when we PRAY—God’s honor, reputation, weight must be at the forefront of our minds

-though our needs and feelings are taken seriously by God—they are not the starting point

-if there is to be any making of us in our request—it is so we can make much of Him

-without establishing this as our start point—our prayers are skewed, curved inward

-off balance, out of sync, miss the mark

-here’s what else matters—

2. GOD’S PROTECTION

-from God’s glory—Jesus prays for God’s keeping—read verses 9-11

-Jesus knows we are vulnerable, exposed, and at risk in this world

-so He asks God to protect His investment—what belongs to Him—and everything belongs to Him

-we—and everything we have—are His—verse 9

-but what kind of protection is Jesus asking of the Father?

a. He is not asking God to send rescue planes to evacuate His disciples—read verse 15a

-for that would nullify our purpose—which is to reach a lost world

-nor is He asking that we be wrapped in some danger free casingⁱⁱⁱ

-those who hide in a Christian ghetto—live like some sectarian Qumran community—miss the point here

-Jesus clearly wants us in the world as He was in the world—because we have a mission

b. He is asking that God be our stronghold when facing evil—read verse 15b

-these are words asking the Father to keep us from being seduced by the adversary

- keep us from yielding to the devil's will
- prompt us to remember the victory we have in Christ
- the evil one has been disarmed and disgraced—Col 1-2
- APPLICATION—when we pray for one another's protection—this is the protection we must FIRST pray for
- that God will guard our kids, our spouses, our parents, our friends from being drawn into and mastered by evil
- this is the kind of prayer that serves the will of God, the activity of the Spirit and acts as a boundary to evil^{iv}

-it follows then that Jesus prays for—

3. GOD'S TRUTH

-for our best defense against evil is lives full of truth—read verses 17-18

- as Jesus came full of truth—so our lives must become
- only when a life is set apart by truth—are we capable of having any POWER
- "The power of the devil begins where the sovereignty of the word of God ends"*^v

-it's only when our lives are saturated with God's truth

-the text "into our muscles and bones, our oxygen-breathing lungs and blood-pumping heart"^{vi}—that we are capable of knowing—

- how to treat the world—Genesis 2:15
- what is the purpose of my existence—Acts 20:24
- how to love people—I Corinthians 13
- how to find peace—Phil 4:6
- how to stay married—Eph 5:21
- how to pray—Luke 11:1
- how to invest—Matthew 6:19

-this is Jesus' prayer for only by His truth can we be stable in the cross currents

-have a God-awareness and a God-dimension to us—and ultimately a voice

-it's then we are able to fulfill the reason we have been sent (verse 18)

-glory, protection, truth—here's what especially matters—

4. GOD'S ONENESS

- God hates conflict, division—people sowing words of destruction
- hearts that are cold, hard—relationships that refuse to talk to one another
- unfortunately—there is a lot of this—wrecked churches, wrecked families, wrecked souls
- so this is His petition—read verse 20-23

-here's what matters to God—

- a. that we be "perfected into oneness"—reach the goal of oneness—verse 23
- b. meaning that we have a oneness that reflects the kind of oneness the Trinity shares—oneness that flows out of this

- God will not impose His oneness on us
- but He does and will PRAY
- meaning that when we endeavor to work at oneness, clear up misperceptions, find ways to show grace and reconcile—this is when we will see the will of God, the power of the Spirit move
- and when we choose to remain hardened, divide friendships, create contention
- expect stiff, divine headwinds, powerless lives, the absence of any Spirit anointing or blessing

APPLICATION—so this must be our extraordinary petition—for only when we stand together as ONE will the world take notice

- only when we bridge our differences, determine to make love non-negotiable
- will we be able to effectively convince the world Jesus is the Messiah—that Jesus' claims are real

-finally—here's what matters—

5. GOD'S COMPLETION—read verse 24

- some see this as Jesus' climactic goal—that we finish well
- like Jesus—complete the work He has given us to do
- and then see Him in all of His extraordinary glory

CONCLUSION

At a loss on how to pray for yourself—for others?

- want to know what requests will most align with God's will?
- here's what to pray—
- for His GLORY to dominate life
- for God to be our STRONGHOLD against the evil one
- for God to pour TRUTH into our lives
- for God to give us a heart devoted to UNITY
- FOR God to bring us to COMPLETION

A PRAYER OUT OF JOHN 17

Father, we come boldly before You, knowing in Christ we have overcome. We come to align our prayer with Your prayer, with the prayers we believe You continue to pray in this moment!

We pray for Your GLORY. We ask that whatever You graciously choose to make of us, we will do everything in our power to make much of You. Show us how to enhance Your reputation. We pray that people will see in us a God who is radiant, magnificent in everything He does.

We pray that You be our STRONGHOLD, our rock. Help us to be in this world, but not of it. Guard us from the evil one and his intentions for our lives. May the adversary of our souls be frustrated at every turn, finding in us hearts that are completely unreceptive to his will. Expose his deceptions and open our eyes to his subtleties. Spur us to exercise our divine authority over his ways.

We pray that You pour Your TRUTH into us. Give us wills that hunger for Your Word, the disciplines necessary to become saturated with Your revelation. Mold and shape us to be a compelling witness to the world.

We pray for Your ONENESS. Draw us so deeply into You, so One with You, that we mirror Your unity. Should we be divisive, make us so uncomfortable with living that we will only find relief when we repent and seek for Your peace. If we're going to fight, may we fight for reconciliation.

Finally, we pray for COMPLETENESS. Don't allow us to finish short of the line. Give to us the ultimate joy of standing one day in Your presence, beholding Your glory, and experiencing the whole purpose for which we were made.

ⁱ P.T. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer*

ⁱⁱ Yancey, *The Jesus I never knew*, 265

ⁱⁱⁱ Borceert, John, 200

^{iv} Nigel Wright, *a Theology of the Dark Side*, 185

^v Quoted in Bruner, John, 1003

