

What Did Jesus Pray for? Part 3

John 17:20-26

August 9th, 2026

1. The Request: That we may be _____ (17:20-21)

2. The Effect: The world may know that the Father sent _____ (17:21-23)

3. His Desire: That believers may _____ Jesus one day (17:24)

4. A Glorious Summary (17:25-26)

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on John 17:20-26

1. List the different verses/phrases in John 17 that affirm the unity of the Father and the Son in essence and mission. What are some different ways that is expressed?

Examples:

17:1 – glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You

17:5 – the glory I had with You before the world was

2. Jesus describes being “in” us (vv. 23, 26) and believers as “in” the Father/Son (v. 21). How do the following verses describe this same “union” between believers and Christ? Col. 3:3; Gal. 2:2; Rom 6:3-8; 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5
3. If Jesus prayed for us to be one (vv. 21, 22) and for us to be “perfected in unity” (v. 23), why is it necessary for us to diligently pursue unity? (Ephesians 4:1-6)
4. What does Jesus pray would be the effect of our unity? (17:21, 23) How does true, loving unity have that effect? (See also 1 John 4:20-21) What makes that kind of loving unity difficult in a real life?
5. What is your response when you read that Jesus desires for you to be with Him? (17:24)
6. How do verses 25-26 summarize Jesus’ ministry?

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Big idea: Jesus prayed that His people would be unified as an apologetic evidence for Him.

Intro –

In the early 1990's there was a movement for Staten Island to secede from the city of New York to become its own city. It had been part of New York City since 1898. This would have split up the five boroughs of New York. Like most secession movements, it was rooted in a sense of feeling overlooked and mistreated. It is the least populated of the five boroughs, with only half a million people living in it out of the total New York City population of 8.8 million. It is much less dense and much more wooded. The main complaint was the location of the city landfill on Staten Island. All the trash for the entire city of New York made its way to Staten Island where it was dumped. At one point it was not just the largest landfill in the world but one of the largest man-made structures in the world.

The motion in favor of secession received 65% of the votes from Staten Island in the 1993, but was blocked by the State Assembly. In the same election, Rudy Giuliani was elected as Mayor of New York City and he promised to address their concerns by closing the landfill and making the Staten Island Ferry free.

Remaining unified is hard. Whether it is a one part of a city, like New York, or part of a state, like the eastern part of Oregon that has had a movement that wants to join Idaho for many years. People feel overlooked. They feel like their identity doesn't match that of the rest of the state or city, like the farmers and ranchers in eastern Oregon that feel like they have more in common with Idaho than with Portland.

Remaining unified as a church is hard, for some of the same reasons. People feel overlooked. They feel like they don't fit in, especially if a church moves older or younger in its demographics. A subset of the body develops a complaint against the leadership or moves towards a different theological camp. Or often, it's just a conflict that develops between a few people and spreads as others take up that offense and take sides and it might be cloaked in theological terms, but it's relational at its core.

What will it take for UBC to remain unified? Or, a more pointed way to ask it, what would it take for UBC to be your church home for the rest of your life? Provided you don't move, but you remain in this region. How would we need to function as a church to cultivate that type of unity? How would you need to function as a believer in this body? How would you need to resolve conflict? How would our elders need to shepherd?

Is that type of unity even desired?

In this prayer Jesus anticipated the hostility and pull of the world so He prayed for the Father to keep us and sanctify us.

But He also maintains a heart for the world, so He prayed that those who are kept and sanctified would also be sent into the world.

In final section, these themes are woven together into a final appeal. It's remarkable for its tenderness. What we see in these final words is that Jesus doesn't merely want us as soldiers in His war or tools to accomplish His project, He wants *us*. He wants us to be *with Him*. He wants us to be united with Him. And as we are united with Him, He wants us to be united with each other.

“that they may be in Us” v. 21

“You sent Me and loved them, even as You have loved Me” v. 23

“I desire that they also...be with Me where I am” v. 24

He prays that the result of this unity with Him and with each other would be a message to the world about Himself.

1. The Request: That we may be one (17:20-21)
 - a. The language here swirls back and forth in a way that can be confusing. It doesn't lend itself well to a rigid outline. We'll use an outline to help us track with it, but don't force it into place. The themes will jump back and forth.
 - i. Emphasis is on our unity with Him. As we are individually united with Him, we also are united with each other.
 - ii. In a way we can see this as the end result of the whole prayer – He's glorified, we are kept and sanctified, and we are united with Him.
 - b. Notice that the Father and the Son are united
 - i. The Father is in the Son and does His Works through the Son
 1. **John 14:10** "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.
 - ii. The Son always did what was pleasing to the Father
 1. **John 8:29** "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him."
 - iii. The Father and Son are one.
 1. **John 10:30** "I and the Father are one."
 - iv. God the Father and God the Son are fully united in purpose and priorities and in essence.
 1. There is an interconnectedness – still distinct within the Godhead but united.
 2. There is a love between the Father and Son that extends back into eternity. Jesus says to the Father, "You loved me before the foundation of the world." (v. 24)
 3. The uncreated, self-existing God existed in perfect love before He ever spoke this dusty planet into existence and breathed life into people.
 - a. Ancient question in philosophy – why is there something rather than nothing? Where did it all come from? There was an uncreated creator, incredibly powerful, separate from His creation. And the Bible tells us that love was already a defining characteristic of His even before there was an "us" to love.
 4. Kids feel more secure when they know their parents love each other. It brings stability to their life. They may cringe when the affection is displayed, but they feel safe because they are brought into that love. Likewise, when we know that God's love has been active since before He made us, we can rest secure because it's not a fickle love. It's His nature.
 - c. All believers are united with Christ and the Father
 - i. Not in the exact same sense as the Father/Son, but in a similar way.
 1. V. 23 – I in them and You in Me

2. V. 26 – that the love with which you loved Me may be in them, and I in them
- ii. MacArthur and Mayhue on our union with Christ
 1. It is not that Christians merely worship Jesus, obey him, or pray to him, though surely those privileges would be enough. Rather, they are so intimately identified with him and he with them that Scripture says they are united – he is in them and they are in him.” Macarthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, pg 602
- iii. We have died with him (Rom 6:8; Col 2:20)
- iv. We have been buried with him (Rom. 6:3)
- v. We have been raised with him (Eph. 2:5-6; Col 3:1)
- vi. We have been enthroned in heaven with him (Eph. 2:6).
- vii. We are “in” Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor 5:17) and Christ is in his people (Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5)
- viii. Committed to fulfilling the same mission as the Father and Son
 1. As He was sent, so we are sent (17:18)
 2. Reconcile people to God through Christ
 - a. **2 Corinthians 5:18** Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,
 3. I talked about this last Sunday and then had a great reminder of it on Monday.
 - a. Went up to Salmon in central Idaho where I grew up. We were there to float the river. I had to hitch hike from the take out to the put in. The guy who picked me up was driving a bus that had just dropped off a group of floaters downriver. As we made small talk, he asked me what I do. When I told him I was a pastor he said, “my brother” and shook my hand warmly. He then told me the story of how he came to faith in Christ in the 1960’s in Sun Valley. He was deep into drugs and partying as he worked at a ski resort when he noticed one of his coworkers brought a Bible with him to work so he could read it on break. That led to a conversation and an invitation to meet another guy who was there as a “resort missionary” sent out by a Baptist group. They invited him to church. He resisted for a couple months but eventually came, heard the gospel, trusted Christ and has been walked with Christ for 50+ years. As he drove us along the river, I realized it was almost exactly 30 years ago that I first heard the gospel right along that river as a friend in high school told me as we drove along that same stretch of river that he knew if we drove off the road into the river and died, he knew where he would go.
 - b. This man’s coworker, the “resort missionary,” and my high school friend who shared the gospel with me were all “sent” by Jesus just as we are sent by Jesus.
- ix. God loves us as He loves Jesus (v. 23)
 1. “even as” can be translated “just as” or “in proportion to” or “to the degree that.”
 2. The same full, inexhaustible, unstoppable, unending love of the Father for the Son is directed from the Father to you. Every earthly father loving his children is an imperfect picture of this. For some the picture is far from perfect. For others, you get a glimpse of the Father’s love when your father embraces you and comforts you and helps you and welcomes you home at the end of a hard day.

3. On your worst day, He doesn't love you any less than on your best day. Because His love isn't dependent on your performance.
- d. All believers are objectively, spiritually united with one another.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 12:13** For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
 - ii. It is a truth that we are united with one another whether we feel like it or not, whether we are getting along or not.
- e. Because of these realities, we should strive for the experiential unity in the body that Jesus prayed for in this passage.
 - i. There is an objective unity that is simply true of all Christians because of the work of the Holy Spirit. We simply are united with each other and will spend eternity together. We must also pursue and perfect an experiential unity that the world can see.
 1. We must seek to be "perfected in unity" (v. 23)
 - ii. **Ephesians 4:3-6** ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;* ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.
 - iii. But unity should never come at the expense of doctrinal truth
 1. Not praying for a single, ecumenical church in which doctrinal heresy would be maintained along with orthodoxy.
 2. Instead, he was praying for a unity like that seen in Philippians – love, spirit, purpose – a unity of obedience to God.
 3. This is the unity of a family. And this is a unity of men at war, it's the unity of a people on mission together for something greater than themselves. It can't be a unity around convenience or entertainment.
- f. What makes unity a challenge?
 - i. Often the challenge is disagreement lower tier issues.
 1. Unified in key doctrines (essential) and unified in worship styles and political nuances, views on homeschooling vs public vs private school, the right standards for clothing and entertainment, etc. – so that there is no room for disagreement, no freedom of conscience, only conformity all down the line...
 2. There can be a tendency to push everything up to a "Die for" or "Divide for" issue when it can be a "Debate for" issue in which unity is not compromised.
 - ii. Kent Hughes - Christ's prayer for unity does not mean we all should be the same, though many Christians mistakenly assume that. Too many think other believers should be just like them— carry the same Bible (my note – it must be a MacArthur study Bible, imitation leather cover, worn enough that its obvious you read but not so worn out that it seems like you don't value it), read the same books, promote the same styles, educate their children in the same way, have the same likes and dislikes. That would be uniformity, not unity. We are not called to be Christian clones. In fact, the insistence that others be just like us is one of the most disunifying forces in the church of Jesus Christ. It engenders a judgmental inflexibility that hurls people away from the church with deadly force. One of the gospel's glories is that it hallows our individuality even while bringing us into unity. Unity without uniformity is implicit in Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts.

2. The Effect: The world may know that the Father sent Jesus (17:21-23)
 - a. Returns to the same purpose of why we are left in the world and sanctified – because we are sent into the world in ministry.
 - b. One reason reason we are united with God and united with one another is to be a witness to the world.
 - i. Stated in v. 21 and then repeated and expanded in v. 23
 - ii. Thomas Manton said, “Divisions in the church breed atheism in the world”
 - c. What do we have to offer the world?
 - i. You can find funnier people to listen to on tv. You can find more dynamic communicators on Ted talks. You can find live music elsewhere. What do we have to offer people? Truth and love. And those are compelling.
 - d. **John 13:35** "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."
 - i. Context is similar because it's the same night – Jesus was informing His disciples that He would be leaving soon. The mission will rest on their shoulders, in a sense.
 - ii. Giving the world permission to judge the reality of our message and our discipleship based on our love for each other.
 - e. It's easy to see this and ask the question – am I being loved like this? A better question is, “am I loving like this?”
 - i. If everyone at UBC adopted the same mindset as me, served each other like me, prayed for each other like me, showed the same level of faithfulness as me...would the body be more healthy or less healthy?
3. His Desire: That believers may be with Jesus one day (17:24)
 - a. He was leaving His followers behind in the world, but not forever.
 - i. **John 14:1-3** "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. ² "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. ³ "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also.
 - ii. When we feel like this world is not our home and we don't belong – we're right! And someday we'll go to our true home.
 - iii. Jesus offers us joy in the here and now (v. 13). But if you feel overwhelmed by the sorrow of this life, it's good to look to the end.
 - b. Not only that we would be with Him there but we would be able to see His glory on full display.
 - i. 17:5 contains a request to return to the glory He had before His incarnation. Now He is praying that we could see Him in that glory.
 - ii. Is this prideful or selfish for Jesus to desire us to see His glory?
 1. No more than it would be selfish for me to take a visitor from another place to see the glories of the American west. I might take them to see Yellowstone, to stand at the rim of the Grand Canyon, to float through the Frank Church wilderness – because I want them to see the glory, the beauty of our region. Jesus knows without false humility that

He is truly glorious. How could He not want us to see and experience and understand His glory?

4. A Glorious Summary (17:25-26)

- a. A praise for God's revelation at the closing of Jesus prayer and, in a sense, at the end of His earthly life.
- b. A series of contrasts – the world has not known the Father, but Jesus has known the Father, and the disciples have known that the Father sent the Son.
 - i. The world didn't know God and couldn't know God but Jesus has made Him known to us.
 - 1. **Colossians 1:15** He is the image of the invisible God,
 - ii. To make known God's name was to make God known.
- c. In Jesus, God condescended to make Himself known.
- d. He stepped into the world. Now He sends us into the world.

5. Conclusion

- a. Four key parts to this magnificent prayer
 - i. Glorify
 - ii. Keep
 - iii. Sanctify (and send)
 - iv. Unify – with Us and with each other
- b. That prayer continues to echo – that prayer reflects Jesus' heart for you today, believer, in whatever your circumstances.

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be one (17:20-21)

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