

John #48: Unify (John 17:20-26)

PRAY

Something I find frustrating is the current backlash against the saying, “Thoughts and Prayers”

Specifically prayers... I do agree that if we’re *only* offering prayer to people in need,
when we *can* do something else to help them, that’s wrong

James made this point when he talks about faith without works in Scripture

If we only *say*, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled”, that’s not enough

So inasmuch as this is an objection to virtue signalling or avoiding compassion, great!

However, implicit in the complaint is usually the idea that prayer is just a throwaway action—

That it’s pointless or useless (even insulting) to tell someone you are praying for them

As if people’s alternatives would do any better: ‘Sending you good vibes’ or ‘positive energy’

What does that even mean?! You have power to control energy fields? You a sorcerer?

Sure, there are plenty of times we should do *more* than pray, but we ought never do *less*

For if there’s a real God hearing our prayers, then it’s the best possible thing we can do—

To call on his great power and love in the midst of our great needs

And there’s something instinctual about telling people that we’ll be praying for them

We know that we need help from someone beyond us—a higher power

And we know that prayer is a way to demonstrate our love and compassion

Some of the most comforting and encouraging things ever told me

were people assuring me that they were praying for me

So, rant aside, if we have confidence that prayer is valuable, powerful, and does change things,

how comforting and encouraging would it be to know *Jesus* was and is praying for us?

What if you actually overheard Jesus praying for you, in the other room?

What would that mean to you? How seen and known and loved would you feel?

What do you imagine he’d be praying for, in your life?

Believe it or not, this isn’t just hypothetical: Jesus did, in fact, pray for us

We also know some of what he prayed for us, and is likely still praying for us

John 17 gives us a little window to listen in on a precious, sacred moment:

Of Jesus, in the extremely limited time before he would die, peering ahead through the

annals of history, and having us on his mind enough to pour out his heart on our behalf

And that would be astounding and deserve our eternal praise... But he didn’t stop then

Hebrews 7:25 says that “[Christ] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

Knowing this should fill us with a calm confidence, endurance, and joy

So what did Jesus pray for us? Let’s **TURN** to John 17 to see this once more [page #903]

We’re 2/3 of the way through his prayer, and we’ve heard him pray for his own glory,

Before turning his mind to his disciples and entrusting them to his Father

Praying that they’d be united, safe, and sanctified—or made holy

Without these things, it would jeopardize their whole mission

So he prayed... Listen in on Jesus, starting from v.15: **READ v.15-19¹**

This week, as we continue dropping some eaves, we’ll hear Jesus focus in on our unity

He already prayed for this, in v.11: **READ v.11b²**... But now he’ll elaborate

The danger and harm of disunity shouldn't be a surprise to us... We see it all the time:

Broken relationships, church splits, denominational divisions, and infighting...

These things have done so much harm to the cause of Christ over the years

J.C. Ryle wrote this over 150 years ago, and it's just as accurate today: *"How painfully true it is that in every age divisions have been the scandal of religion and the weakness of the church of Christ! How often Christians have wasted their strength in contending against their brethren, instead of contending against sin and the devil! How repeatedly they have given occasion to the world to say, 'When you have settled your own internal differences, we will believe!'"*

Jesus surely foresaw these challenges his church would face, and thus he kept praying

READ v.20-21³... Before, he was praying for his first disciples—and us only by extension

But now we don't need to think "by extension"—he's praying *for you and me*

--And for every other true believer, over the ages and yet to come

The early church had the incredible privilege of hearing the gospel message firsthand

But the message was passed on, generation after generation, all the way to us

Some of the apostles wrote their message down, to preserve it for the future

So we're still coming to believe in Jesus through their words: **READ v.20⁴**

[tr] If you ever doubt Jesus' love, thinking, "Jesus couldn't actually care about *me* today..."

He did then! Which means he definitely can still care about the littlest people, even now
And his prayers reveal his desires for us... What he especially wants for us

So he wants us glorifying him... He desires us to be sanctified for him... And here:

Jesus desires believers to be united to God and to one another (v.20-21)

[r] His prayer makes this clear: Jesus wants us believers united to God and to one another

Did you notice those two kinds of unity here? Jesus asks for both: **READ v.21⁵**

He starts by asking that we'd be one—unified, united—with all other believers

Unity is something to be desired... And not just because it's opposites are no fun

As we read earlier: *"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"⁶*

But what does this unity look like?

It seems pretty comprehensive, as Jesus goes on to pray that we'd become 'perfectly one'
It's being kept together as a unified people... We should share one mind, one heart, and one voice

We believe the same truths, we love the same values, we preach the same gospel

We should be one in purpose, in action, in love, in obedience, and in mission

Its opposite is strife, division, enmity, bitterness, divergent purposes or mission, and so on

However, being unified with other believers doesn't mean we become the exact same as them

No, it's more that we are on the same page and on the same team

We're talking about unity, not uniformity, or sameness... We should have unity *in diversity*

We don't all look the same, talk the same, dress the same, eat the same, or learn the same

We don't all have the same relationship status, or the same amounts of kids,

or drive the same kind of car... Even if some may go about in one Accord

Some believers even cheer for the Dodgers, Chiefs, or Maple Leafs

Yet none of our differences (not even the serious ones) ought to take away from our unity...

I think they actually enhance it—they make it more beautiful

I've been united to people who are very different than me... And that's a good thing
Think of the magnificent scene around the throne in Revelation 7, with "*a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb... crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*"

Even once perfected, we won't all be homogenized into one race or language

But we will have one perfected voice and goal: to glorify and enjoy God forever

Remember: We are meant to be one, *as God is one...* So united that we reflect the Trinity

But there are distinctions and diversity in the midst of the Godhead:

The Father is not the Son... The Son is not confused with the Spirit...

The Spirit is distinct from the Father... They are different... Yet they are ONE

I won't quote him here, but Michael Reeves talks about how Jesus' prayer request here

is not the sort of request for a single-person God—to make or receive

As a single-person God (like some out there) would want oneness to equal sameness

Jesus wants us united... So, does this imply that having our own little church is wrong?

Should we maybe be trying to merge with all the other churches around?

But no, not necessarily... When it comes to other good, gospel-preaching churches,

There are still often good or, at least, understandable reasons for our distinctions

Sometimes, we may be even more united by worshipping separately

As differences of beliefs or practices would cause strife otherwise

As for other "churches" that no longer hold to God's truth or preach the gospel,

We *must not* unite with them... That'd make a mockery of true unity

If there is no common foundation to unite upon, let's not pretend there is
All that said, there is a unity of purpose and mission that I think should unite many true churches

Doesn't mean we merge into one super-mega-church... That's not likely even ideal

But we absolutely can and should work and pray with others toward our common goals

We're not meant to be silos or bunkers... We're meant to be embassies and outposts...

All part of the same kingdom... All under Jesus... All after the same things:

We want the lost saved, we want the needy cared for, we want prayer and

worship to resound, we want workers raised up, we want missionaries sent

out, we want our nation transformed, we want the gospel to advance

So let's pray along with Jesus that his church would live out a unity that surprises those who see

As I pointed out last week, the distressing levels of disunity in our world today

do not mean Jesus' prayer hasn't been answered... It *has*, in the most important way

Because even if we aren't living out unity perfectly yet, all *true* believers are already united

We share an objective, blood-bought unity that transcends our differences

Ephesians 2:14 tells us: "*For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...*"

So we don't make our own unity... Rather, we're called to maintain unity

Ephesians 4:3 says to "*[Be] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...*" ...We're to enthusiastically live out the unity Christ procured for us

We already share one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all... This objective oneness is what is most true of us
Then, out of that oneness, our unity should become increasingly evident and observable

Calvary, within our own church, this means we must unite around the same core truths:

Who our God is, the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and so on
But then we can have differences of methods, habits, preferences, ideas, opinions, and so on
We won't all agree on the best songs to sing, or the best ministry methods, or on finances, or parenting styles, or political engagement, or on building projects or church planting...
And we will definitely sin against and hurt one another at times

But when we have differences or conflicts or offenses, we can still maintain unity

That's just where forbearance, gentleness, humility, confession, or forgiveness come in
If there is anyone you know you are disunited with today,

I pray the Spirit moves you to take the first step toward reconciliation
And may God indeed make us all one, as he is one

But that's only half of the unity Jesus desires for his people... He also prayed: **READ v.21b⁷**

We are truly united to one another only once we're united to God... That happens first
In Jesus' prayer, he talks about how the Father is in him, and he is in the Father

And then Jesus prays that we would be in them... United to the Godhead

Again, unity doesn't blur distinctions between us... We are not God; nor do we become God
But our spirits are joined to God in such a way that all that happens to God's Son happens to us
Thus, when Christ died, we effectively died with him... When he rose, we rose

When he stands in perfect righteousness and sinless favour with God, so do we

We can no more be de-united from God than any of the members of the Trinity can be
Believer, are you flabbergasted by this truth? That Christ has actually grafted us to himself!?

We are spiritually inextricable from Jesus! ... Jared Wilson compares us to the temple:

"The holiest of holies was the place where God's presence specially dwelled. But it would not be accurate to say God's wholeness was solely located in that physical space. God is omnipresent... So God was outside the temple and everywhere. But also he dwelled specially in the temple. This is [like] the indwelling presence of Christ in believers. We are in him. But he is also specially in us." Then another analogy: *"Think of a Russian nesting doll, where you open it up and there's an increasingly smaller doll inside. Well, picture just three. The middle one is us. We are inside Christ, so that when you open him up, you find us. And when you open us up, you find him again."*

Jesus prayed for this, and then his dying and rising made it all a reality... Praise the Lord!

[tr] Our oneness in Christ—both vertical and horizontal—is an unspeakable blessing

And yet it's also very difficult to maintain and live out well

So it's vital that we keep our eyes on the reason for this... Why does Jesus want us to be one?

He tells us why in his prayer: Jesus desires believers to be united to God and to one another

...So the world may know Christ's gospel and God's love (v.21-23)

[r] He wants us united, so the world may know Christ's gospel and God's love

We aren't united together so we can look more impressive, so people can admire us, so we can build the best church building, so we can make a name for ourselves...

No, that sounds like the unity of the Tower of Babel, not the kingdom of Christ
Neither are we united together just so we can have a great group of friends
The desired result of our unity isn't to further our own cause... It's to further his
Look: **READ v.21c⁸**... That Jesus was sent by God might as well be a summary of his whole mission on earth, and thus the gospel... He came from heaven, sent by the Father,
In order to live a perfect life, die in sinners' stead, and rise again in glory
And us being one points to all this being real and true... How else could we be united like this?
A multitude of once-self-centred and self-reliant people, saved by grace,
From all over the world, all walks of life, all ages, and all life stages,
Brought together as one people, united with one heart and one goal
Truly, nothing else can transform the human heart like the gospel can
So will the world around us see this in us? Jesus prays that they will, and that they'll take notice
May our unity be so otherworldly and compelling, that the world is magnetically drawn to Jesus

For he deserves the all the glory!
Shockingly, though, the next line of his prayer says the glory doesn't end with him: **READ v.22⁹**
This is the inconceivable grace the gospel offers us: honour and glory from the Lord himself
This world will dishonour you, shame you, and make you feel totally worthless
Christ will honour you, share his glory with you, and make you feel completely loved
If you haven't received this grace of God yet, what are you waiting for?
You could never be good or religious or faithful enough to earn this... It is a gift
And Christ wants you to have it... He wants you to trust in him as Saviour and Lord

But how is this even possible? How can Jesus give us some of his glory?
Especially with what we considered earlier in John 17, that God doesn't share his glory
READ v.22a¹⁰... One author said, "*Those are words to cause a heart attack.*"¹¹
Here's the idea: God is not a miserly hoarder, hugging himself up in heaven, going "Mine!"
No, as a triune God, the Father gives all his glory freely and fully to the Son and Spirit
But then we're united to the Son
And what happens when you place a flowerpot out in the sunlight?
It can't help but soak in the nutrients from the sun's beams
We're the flowerpots placed in the sunlight of Christ's glory—we're immersed in him
And we can't help but soak in what he's pouring out
His nature, his character, his goodness radiates into us until we start to glow

If you follow Jesus' flow of thought, he basically prays: "Make them one"
Then, in v.22, claims: "I've provided all that is necessary to make them one"
READ v.22¹²... Like, "I've given them my own glory... That's all they need."
Think about it: That other believer you're fighting with? They are glorious in Jesus' eyes
And you've both been given the ability to be kind and gracious like Christ
—because his glory has shone in you

Through our oneness, Jesus wants the world to know his gospel—and also God's love:
READ v.23¹³... Woah... Did you catch that? God loves us as much as he loved his own Son!
That should floor us... If you're having trouble wrapping your head around that,
that's because we can't wrap our heads around it...

It's breathtaking, eternal, infinite love
And the unity we share with God and with each other should display this love God has for us
He wants us to be seen as unfathomably loved
...Not to show off, but to show the world how loving God can be to them too
We've been caught up into the extravagant love of the Triune God!
Do you know this security in the love of God? Do you believe he loves you like this?
Confidence and satisfaction will come from knowing his love
And confident and satisfied people will really stand out in our anxious times
Lord, make this true of us! Cause your love to flow through us to the world!

Consider today if the way your life interacts with other believers
is communicating the gospel and love of God to unbelievers around you
Are your priorities clear to everyone? Is your love and compassion evident?
Is your messy life inseparably embedded in others' messy lives?
Or do you just come and go quickly, only wanting a privatized faith?
Do you talk freely about how much your community means to you? I hope so

Notice that Jesus' hope for us is *perfect* oneness—which is obviously impossible for now
But don't be alarmed that we're not there yet...
Earlier, he prayed we'd *be* one... That is already true of us, in Christ
But here, he changes a word, praying that we'll *become* perfectly one
This is something we grow in, over time... We're not there yet... But we'll get there

[tr] While the unity Christ desires for us is partly for the world's sake
He also means to do some amazing things for us through it as well
See: **Jesus desires believers to be united to God and to one another**—
Not just so *the world* may know Christ's gospel and God's love, but—

...So we may know Christ's glory and God's love (v.24-26)

[r] He wants believers perfectly one, so that they (we) may know Christ's glory and God's love

READ v.24a¹⁴... Jesus was about to leave his people behind on earth... So where would he be?
He mentioned it back in v.5: in the Father's presence, with eternal glory
It is any coincidence that 'unite' is the root word for 'reunited'?
I'm sure you know the feeling of being apart from people you love
Whenever I am separated from my closest loved ones for any long period of time,
I look forward to seeing them again... I long to be reunited with them
That's Jesus' yearning desire: to be reunited with us, his people
So he doesn't just want us *in* him, but he wants us *with* him!
He doesn't just want us saved, he wants *us*! ...Can you believe that?!
Dare we say that Jesus misses us? That sounds crazy... But listen: **READ v.24a¹⁵**
We're not nearly that worthy... But his love is that great!

Remember, his disciples, who were distressed about his departure, were overhearing this prayer
So how much must these words have encouraged their hearts over the next few days?
And how much might they encourage us, as we wait with anticipation for Jesus' return?
"We will always be with the Lord.... Encourage one another with these words."¹⁶

READ v.24¹⁷... This brings Jesus' prayer nearly full circle, returning to the theme of his glory
But this is the ultimate goal of our lives, whether we know it or not:

To see his glory with our own eyes, to marvel and worship and bask in it
Now, this doesn't *only* happen in heaven... We get glimpses of his glory, even now—

In answer to Jesus' prayer... John began this book, in chapter 1, by saying,

"*We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father...*" (1:14)

They saw it in his incarnation... In his godliness... In his perfect obedience...

They saw it in his teaching... In his miraculous signs... In his compassion...

Supremely, they saw it on the cross... In the empty tomb... And in his ascension
Have you seen his glory? We can see something of it even now

But one day, we'll see the Son of God in all his unveiled splendour, "as he is"

And we will be forever changed with just one glance

READ v.25¹⁸... "Righteous Father" is another title used only here in all of Scripture

Our Father is perfectly righteous, without a single fault in him

The standard of all righteousness... We are only righteous when we resemble him
The godless world doesn't know him... So God will be righteous in justly judging the world

And he will also be proven righteous in justifying the ungodly through his Son

By grace, he enables us to know him, to know his gospel, and to know eternal life

READ v.26a¹⁹... How would Jesus continue to make God known to us? We know this:

"*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"²⁰

And speaking of his love, Jesus didn't only want us *seeing his glory* one day,

He wanted us *experiencing his love* every day: **READ v.26²¹**

So, we are not merely objects, or recipients, of God's love

We are clay that God's love moulds into something beautiful

His love continually transforms us, so that God's love becomes our own love²²

As Michael Reeves explains, "*The mission comes from the overflow of love, from the uncontainable enjoyment of the fellowship. So it is with the Father and the Son; so it is with us. The Spirit catches us up to share their pleasure, and it is that delight in them that fuels us to want to make them known... [Our] increasing love for the Father and the Son: it turns us to share their outgoing love for the world. We become like what we worship.*"

Notice in v.26 those key phrases again: "*in them*"

Christ wants God's love to be in us, as he himself wants to be in us: **READ v.26b²³**

So are you seeing how this all fits together? Jesus wants us *united* to him and one another

So the world sees God's love... And so we experience God's love

Would you say that you are experiencing the love of God today? It comes in countless forms

But are you experiencing it through your brothers and sisters in Christ?

And on a deeper level, are you experiencing it in your union with Christ?

This'll change your life if you let it

CONCLUSION

The Lord is weaving us together, like a great tapestry... We don't see the finished product yet

Diverse threads that are nothing on their own become something beautiful together

When we're unified, tightly-knit together, we begin to display his glory, even now

So may the world get a glimpse of what's coming when they see us
And may we be blown away ourselves by what has already come for us

"For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Until we see his face fully, may we become one as God is one

Can you hear Jesus praying this for us?

...Let's respond to his prayer with an, "AMEN!"

PRAY

Benediction: prayer, 5min,

¹ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

² Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one

³ "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all 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 that you have sent me.

⁴ I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word

⁵ that they may all 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 that you have sent me.

⁶ Psalm 133:1

⁷ that they also may be in us

⁸ so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

⁹ The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one

¹⁰ The glory that you have given me I have given to them

¹¹ Reeves

¹² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one

¹³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

¹⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am

¹⁵ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am

¹⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18

¹⁷ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

¹⁸ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.

¹⁹ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known

²⁰ Romans 5:8

²¹ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

²² HT Carson

²³ that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."