

Title: Saying Good-bye

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, you made us in your image – you made us in love and we reflect your love for us to those around us and especially to those closest to us; give us the faith and strength to overcome the loss of the bonds of love knowing that love is eternal as you are eternal and we will live forever in your love and in the love of your son, Christ Jesus, through whom we pray. Amen.

I work with people who bravely say good-bye. I work with people who struggle to say good-bye through their tears. I have people who can't say good-bye because they are in denial that their loved one is dying. And unfortunately, I have a few, a very few, who are very glad to say good-bye.

Being in denial is a defense mechanism. If denial is helping a loved one cope with a death, then that is okay, just as long as they do not have later regret. We help families during this time by giving them all the information they need, if they are ready to hear it and to read it.

The difficulty of saying good-bye increases as the level of attachment that exists between the two people increases. For someone we barely know, we may be sad that they are gone, but little to no tears are shed. For a beloved family member, the grief may seem unbearable. We grieve losses, great and small. The degree of grief is proportional to the degree of attachment.

In English, saying good-bye seems more permanent than saying something like “so long.” Some people don't like saying good-bye. We might say, “See you later,” which implies a temporary parting and a commitment to reconnect that good-bye does not impart.

I am given to say “so long” rather than “good-bye.” When I hang up the phone, I say “bye-bye” rather than “good-bye.”

Poet Les Murray writes, “People can't say goodbye anymore. They say last hellos.

“Take, for instance, a recent experience Murray had with some good friends. They had packed the last of their belongings for a cross-country move and showed up at (his) door before hitting the road. (He) tried to make small talk, awkwardly fending off the inevitable parting. Finally, they gave (him) a hug, and (Murray) blurted out, ‘We'll have to get together again this fall. Maybe I can make a road trip down to see you.’ A *last hello* is what (he) was saying, not a *goodbye*. (Murray) couldn't bring (himself) to say the latter.

“Once, at the end of a degree program, (Murray) went to (his) favorite professor’s office for a similar parting. (Murray) had taken multiple classes with him, and his teaching had left a permanent mark on (Murray). (Murray) wanted to say that (he) would miss (their) regular conversations. (They) talked uncomfortably for a few minutes. (Murray) rose to leave. ‘Well, I won’t say goodbye,’ Murray mumbled, avoiding eye contact. ‘You can ask my wife—I don’t do goodbyes.’”

When Jesus said good-bye to his disciples, he chose to do so in the form of a prayer, though, I guess, he could have said, “See ya later.” John 17 is the prayer Jesus gives his friends. Jesus begins that prayer by acknowledging that his time has come. Jesus asks that he may be glorified so that God may be glorified.

It is so easy to gloss over the beginning of this prayer and that is what I prefer to do. However, the question is still begged: If Jesus is God, who is he praying to? Jesus is very explicit in John’s gospel that he and the Father are one. If they are one, does Jesus really need to pray? If they are one, to whom is Jesus praying?

I do not have definitive answer, because my brain is too small to understand God. But if God is a being who transcends time and space, then being in two places at once should be very easy. One being, I take myself as an example, can have competing and even contradictory ideas at once. That’s my best shot of explaining this part of the Trinity in John 17.

John thought the content of this prayer was important enough to share with other Christians and Jesus seemingly wants the disciples to know what he is communicating.

Jesus has authority over all people. Jesus gives eternal life to all God gave him. Eternal life is knowing God, at least as much as we are capable of knowing God. Again, I think our brains are too small to understand the whole nature of God. Jesus also implies that though God is aware of other Gods, knowing God also means excluding the others. This is likely a shot at the Greco-Roman gods. Knowing God also has Jesus as part of the package. Jesus also acknowledges that he is the messiah.

Jesus’ glorification is not just the cross. Jesus’ glorification is his ministry of teaching, preaching, and performing miracles. Just one quick note: Jesus’ miracles were not done as a sideshow. Jesus miracles were done to show people that there is something greater than what they know. Jesus’ miracles were about bringing wholeness to a broken world. Jesus will be glorified again as he was before he was born in human form, as Jesus was before creation.

God’s name was made known to the disciples by Jesus. I don’t know how Jesus means this. If it was literal, there are issues. If it was meant figuratively, then it may just mean that they have an idea of who God is. They certainly should know God, because they know Jesus. The literal problem is that God’s name is to never be said in Judaism. In the

ancient world to know the name of something or someone, gives power over the thing or person. That's the problem. We can never presume to have power over God.

I think Jesus was speaking, not of power, but of intimacy. Traveling around Galilee and Judea for roughly three years would produce an intimacy among Jesus and the disciples. They knew Jesus quite well. And since they knew Jesus, they knew God.

Jesus says that God gave them to Jesus. Jesus did choose some disciples and others volunteered. Jesus is satisfied that they were faithful. Of course, though, there was that *one* guy. At this point in John's gospel, Judas was long gone.

The disciples understand that the words that Jesus gave them were from God. They know that Jesus came from God.

Jesus is interceding for them. All that God has is Jesus' and all that Jesus has is God's. Jesus is glorified by God. Jesus is glorified by his ministry. Jesus is also glorified by the disciples.

Jesus has already separated himself from the world before he is even arrested. Though Jesus has left the world, the disciples remain. Jesus asks that the disciples be protected in God's name.

The disciples are to be as one. Jesus' message cannot be divided and the spreading of Jesus' word cannot be divided. The disciples are to be united. The example of their unity is the object of Jesus' prayer and of Jesus himself. Jesus and God are not separate. The disciples are not to be separate.

The amazing part of this prayer came to fruition several years later. A rabbi was arresting and overseeing the execution of Christians. On the road to Damascus, Saul was struck down and blinded by Jesus. Saul was made to see that Jesus was son of God and he spread Jesus' message throughout the Roman Empire even though he never personally knew Jesus. Paul said good-bye to a life of hate and said hello to love.

It is love that makes saying good-bye so hard. Maybe saying a good-bye prayer isn't such a bad idea. Jesus gave us the structure of the prayer. In God, love abides with us. As Jesus' love of the disciples abides, it also abides with us.

In his book *A Severe Mercy*, a memoir of Christian conversion and student life in Oxford, Sheldon Vanauken tells the story of his last meeting with C. S. Lewis, who had become a friend. The two men ate lunch together, and when they had finished, Lewis said, "At all events, we'll certainly meet again, here—or there." Then he added: "I shan't say goodbye. We'll meet again." And with that, they shook hands and parted ways. From across the street, above the din of traffic, Lewis shouted, "Besides, Christians *never* say goodbye!" (Wesley Hill, October 31, 2014)

As Christians, good-bye is never a permanent separation. This is Easter. This is resurrection. We will, one day, be in a place where love abounds and good-bye has no meaning. Love may cause grief, but love abides forever.

Text: **John 17:1–11** (NRSV)

17 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you,² since you have given him authority over all people,^a to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.³ And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.⁴ I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.⁵ So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me is from you;⁸ for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.⁹ I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.¹¹ And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.¹

^a Gk *flesh*

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (Jn 17:1–11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.