

# **The High Priestly Prayer of Jesus**

**A Study of John 17**





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# INTRODUCTION

Jesus concludes His farewell speech in John 13 to 17 with an incredible prayer in chapter 17. Jesus has concluded His mission, has prepared His disciples to carry on without His physical presence, and is now about to leave. He prays to His Father - but this time in front of His disciples. Jan A du Rand writes that it is therefore more than a prayer. It is also an evaluation of His mission, a motivating statement of the task ahead - a peek into the heart of the Son of God.

It allows us, with awe, to have a peek into the unfathomable depth of the Godly Trinity and the close tie between Father and Son. The contents of this amazing prayer is not only an encouragement, but also a motivation for us who would “believe in me through their message”! (John 17:11)

Warren Wiersbe said the following in his commentary:  
*“The progression of thought in this prayer is not difficult to discover. Jesus first prayed for Himself and told the Father that His work on earth had been finished (John 17:1–5). Then He prayed for His disciples, that the Father would keep them and sanctify them (John 17:6–19). He closed His prayer by praying for you and me and the whole church, that we might be unified in Him and one day share His glory (John 17:20–26).”*

Why did Jesus pray this prayer? He was preparing Himself for the sufferings that lay ahead. As He contemplated the glory that the Father promised Him, He would receive new strength for His sacrifice (Hebrews 12:1–3).

But He also had His disciples in mind (John 17:13). What an encouragement this prayer should have been to them! Jesus prayed about their security, their joy, their unity, and their future glory! He also prayed it for us today, so that we would know all that He has done for us and given to us, and all that He will do for us when we get to heaven.

In this prayer, our Lord declares the wonderful privileges we have as His children, privileges that help to make us overcomers.

***Soli Deo Gloria***

**Week 1**

# Jesus prays for Himself

**Memory Verse:**

*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

*John 17:3*







## PERSONAL STUDY

**Read John 17:1-5**

### **OPENING REMARKS:**

Quite often this prayer of Jesus is called the High Priestly Prayer - because Jesus intercedes with God for His followers.

Jesus starts this prayer by praying for himself. However, this is not a model of how we should pray for ourselves. Jesus starts his prayer by praying that the Father will glorify Him, because that will glorify the Father.

The focus of the prayer is all about the Glory of God becoming visible on earth. The word glory is used 8 times in this prayer. Therefore one should not read this chapter on your feet, but on your knees, according to Du Rand!

### **STUDY QUESTIONS:**

**Read John 16:33.**

What was it that Jesus said just prior to His prayer?

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## Read John 17:1

Jesus often went to pray in solitude - but this time He prays audible and in their sight. Compare these entry words with John 11:41 and Mark. 7:34 - what do you learn about the way Jesus prayed in public?

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Jesus begins his prayer with a statement and a petition towards His Father.

Jesus declares that "*the hour has come*". What "*hour*" is Jesus referring to?

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Jesus' mission is completed, and He is ready to return to His Father. What does Jesus' request "Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You", mean? (Refer to John 13:32 and Hebrews 12:2)

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The events of the cross are described as glorification. So, when Jesus prays here that the Father should glorify the Son, He prays that the Father should show people how

important and powerful He really is, that He is indeed the Lord. They will see it when Jesus rises from the dead. Like Thomas (John 20:28), they will then realize that Jesus is Lord and God.

It also means that the Son will glorify the Father, in other words, people will also be able to see in Jesus how important and powerful God is.

**Read John 17:2**

Who had the Father given Jesus power over?

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What would Jesus give to those who the Father gave Him?

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Describe in your own words what eternal life means.

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### **Read John 17:3**

How did Jesus describe eternal life? What does the word *know* mean here?

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To have eternal life is to personally know the eternal, only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. It means having a personal relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ.

Everlasting *life* involves - but does not equal - everlasting *existence*, because everlasting existence also takes place in hell. *Everlasting life* in the Bible refers to life that begins at salvation and lasts forever in heaven with God.

### **Read John 17:4 and 5**

How do you understand verses 4 and 5 in the light of verse 1?

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Jesus glorified the Father in His miracles (John 2:11; 11:40), but He brought the greatest glory to the Father through His sufferings and death (see John 12:23–25; 13:31–32). From the human point of view, Calvary was a revolting display of man’s sin; but from the divine point of view, the cross revealed and magnified the grace and glory of God.

Jesus anticipated His return to heaven when He said, “*I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.*” (John 17:4). This “*work*” included His messages and miracles on earth (John 5:17–19), the training of the disciples for future service, and most of all, His sacrifice on the cross (Heb. 9:24–28; 10:11–18).

It is based on this “*finished work*” that we as believers have the gift of eternal life.

### **CLOSING REMARKS:**

In verses 1 - 5 Jesus declares that He has finished the work He had to do. When Jesus became man, He gave up the position of power He held. Now Jesus asks that the Father restore his position of power to what He had before creation. But it is not a selfish prayer. Dr. R.A. Torrey wrote that; “*our Lord’s burden was the glory of God, and this glory would be realized in His finished work on the*

*cross. The servant of God has every right to ask his Father for the help needed to glorify His name.”*

“*Eternal (everlasting) life*” is an important theme in John’s Gospel; it is mentioned at least seventeen times. Eternal life is God’s free gift to those who believe in His Son (John 3:15–16, 36; 6:47; 10:28). The Father gave His Son the authority to give eternal life to those whom the Father gave to the Son.

Eternal life is knowing God personally; not just knowing about Him but having a personal relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ. It is exciting that the believer does not have to wait for the second coming to receive the eternal life as a gift of the end times - but may already experience it (see John 5:24).

However, we have a free will. If we accept Jesus as personal Saviour and Lord, we have eternal life. We are free to choose, but we need to make a choice.



## **PRAYER**

Thank God for the gift of everlasting life.

Ask Him to help you to choose to live for Him daily.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to glorify God through your life.



## **GROUP DISCUSSION**

### **Prayer**

#### **Memory verse:**

*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

*John 17:3*

#### **Reflection:**

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

#### **Scripture Reading:**

John 17:1-5

## Discussion questions

Read John 17:1. What did Jesus ask the Father to do and what would He do for the Father? What *hour* has come?

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Read John 17:2. Over what did Jesus have authority, and what could He give?

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Read John 17:3. What is eternal life? What does this imply for believers? Do you think it is possible to know God and Jesus personally? How? Discuss in the group.

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Read John 17:4-5. Do you think servants of the Lord can ask Him to help them in glorifying His Name? Why?

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**Close in prayer**



# Week **2**

## Jesus prayed for His disciples!

### **Memory Verse:**

*My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.*

*John 17:15*





## PERSONAL STUDY

**Read John 17:6-19**

### **OPENING REMARKS:**

This part of the High Priestly prayer can be sub-divided into two units. In 17: 6–8 Jesus tells what happened here on earth with his mission, and in 17: 9–19 Jesus prays for His followers who will be left behind in the world when He returns to heaven.

In John 17: 6–8, we hear Jesus sharing about His mission here on earth. Jesus came to tell the people who God is (He came to reveal His Name). An important theme in this Gospel is that God's people are saved. Those who belong to Him, He gives to Jesus and Jesus preserves them by giving them eternal life. Eventually God will take all these people to Him to live with Him forever.

In verses 9-19 Jesus talks about Him coming home to the Father. He is happy because He has completed His redemptive work perfectly. He leaves behind living "monuments" of the Father's redemptive act.

However, Jesus knows that the disciples will be staying behind in a hostile world. Is it not striking that Jesus does not pray that the Father should withdraw the disciples from

the world, but rather asks that they be kept from evil stumbling blocks?

As Christians, we must realize that the task to witness is important, and the risks involved are great. The hatred of the world will increase the more the world sees that you belong to God.

When you live in the victory that Jesus achieved, the world's jealousy will turn into hatred and anger. Therefore, we need the protection of the Father.

### **STUDY QUESTIONS:**

#### **Read John 17:6**

What was the first aspect of Jesus' mission on earth?

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In this part of the prayer, the "Name" plays an important role. It indicates the essence and work of God, and all that God has revealed concerning Him. The "Name" refers to God Himself and all that He has revealed for the salvation of man. This revelation of God can only be known by

accepting its proclamation through Jesus Christ. There is no other way to the true knowledge of the Name of God.

**Read John 17:7-8**

What was the result of Jesus' declaring the Father's Name to the world, for those who believe Jesus?

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Jesus declares that in this world there is a group of believers who accepted His message. Now Jesus proceeds to pray for the needs and protection of His followers who're going to stay behind in this world when He returns to heaven.

**Read John 17:9-12**

What significant distinction does Jesus make in vs 9. Who does He pray for?

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That Jesus does not pray for the world does not mean that a Christian should not pray for the world. Jesus only says that his prayer here is specifically for the family of God, for

those who belong to God. What He is asking here is meant for them. Through their actions the power of Jesus will become clear in this world (17:10).

What is His motivation to pray for His followers according to verse 10(a)?

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What is the reason that Jesus prays for His followers according to vs 10(b) - 11(a)??

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The reason is that Jesus goes back to his Father. The believers will then be left alone. Jesus prays for the demands it will place on them in a hostile world (see John 15:19(b)).

What is Jesus' specific request from His Father (verses 11(b) – 12).

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Jesus' petition that the Father will protect them safely was not only for their own sake, but also for the sake of God himself (17:11). After all, believers are part of God's family.

Their interests are intertwined. If one member of the family gets hurt, the whole family gets hurt.

**Read John 17:14,16**

What is the second aspect of Jesus' mission that He reveals here?

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What assurance does Jesus give in verse 16?

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The believers are in their nature and origin not of this world. They belong to Jesus and act like Jesus (verse 16). Therefore, the world sees them as opponents and enemies (verse 14). However, this does not mean that they must run away from the world. Believers remain in this world as people who belong to God and serve Him right here.

**Read John 17:15 & 17(a):**

What is Jesus' request/petition for His followers who live in this world?

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**Read John 17:14(a),17**

What has God given to protect His people?

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Believers live in this world as people who belong to God and not to the world. But because they serve Him right here where they are hated, they need protection. Jesus has given them the Word - now He pleads his Father to keep them dedicated to Him through His Word. The Greek word here implies that God set apart the believers as the priests are set apart for God in the temple. The priests remained in the world, but their hearts and interests lay with God. They wanted to serve Him alone. However, the Christians do not stay in the temple, but in the Word of God. In other words, the will of God must control and envelop their whole life. It should be the guideline for the believer's life program and actions. Such people can mean something to Jesus in this world. That is why Jesus sends them into the world to continue his work.

**Read John 17:18**

What is our mission?

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As Jesus revealed the Father in this world, so the believers must continue to reveal Jesus to this world. As the people get to know Jesus, so they will get to know the Father. As people set apart for the Lord, as people who live for the truth, the believer must go and do the work of God in this world.

It therefore means that God's revelation to this world continue to roll out by the believers and their actions despite the dark and sinful world. The actions of the believers must be the mirror in which the world sees God.

### **Read John 17:13**

What is Jesus' gift for His followers who live in a hostile world where they do not belong?

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Jesus' Word gives us joy (John 17:13); and this inward joy gives us the strength to overcome (refer to Nehemiah 8:10). The believer does not find his joy in the world but in the Word. Like John the Baptist, we should rejoice greatly when we hear the bridegroom's voice (John 3:29)!

## **CLOSING REMARKS:**

When Jesus leaves, the believers will be without the protection He has given them. No one could snatch them out of Jesus' hand (John 10:28). Now Jesus prays that no one snatches them out of the Father's hand (John 17:12). The church is therefore under the protection of God himself. They need protection because the world is hostile to them (John 15: 18–22).

The Word of God does not only bring us God's joy and love, but it also imparts God's power for holy living (John 17:15–17). The burden of our Lord's prayer in John 17:6–12 was security, but here it is sanctity, practical holy living to the glory of God. We are in the world but not of the world, and we must not live like the world. Sometimes we think it would be easier if we were "out of the world," but this is not true. Wherever we go, we take our own sinful self with us, and the powers of darkness will follow us.

The Word gives us joy, love, and power to live a holy life. It also gives us what we need to serve Him as witnesses in this world (John 17:18–19). Sanctification is not for the purpose of selfish enjoyment or boasting; it is so that we might represent Christ in this world and win others to Him. Jesus set Himself apart for us, and now He has set us apart for Him. The Father sent Him into the world, and now

He sends us into the world. We are people “under orders” and we had better obey! Jesus is now “set apart” in heaven, praying for us, that our witness will bear fruit as many repent of their sins and turn to the Lord.

How can we be overcome by the world when we have the Word of God to enlighten us, enable us, and encourage us?



## **PRAYER**

Thank God for His love and mercy.

Thank Him for His protection.

Thank Him for securing your Salvation through His Son.

Ask Him to help you to not be afraid to fulfil your purpose here on earth.

Thank Him for His Word that enlighten, enable and encourage us.



## **GROUP DISCUSSION**

### **Prayer**

#### **Memory verse:**

*My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.*

*John 17:15*

#### **Reflection:**

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

#### **Scripture Reading:**

John 17:6-19

## Discussion questions

Read John 17:6-7. What people are described in verse 6, and what did Jesus do for them? What did these people come to know?

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Read John 17:8. What did Jesus do with the message of the Father, and what was the disciple's reaction to this?

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Read John 17:9. What significant distinction does Jesus make? Who does He pray for? Does this mean believers do not need to pray for the world?

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Read John 17:14. What was the second part of Jesus' mission that He revealed here?

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Read John 17:15-17. What is Jesus' request/petition for His followers who live in this world?

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Read John 17:17. What has God given His people for their protection? In what way does the Bible help you in your everyday life and with your mission on earth? Discuss.

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Read John 17:18. What is our mission on earth? Do you find it easy to fulfill your mission? Discuss.

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Discuss how you could encourage each other in the group to indulge more in the Word of God and practice more of it in your daily life.

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**Close in prayer**

# Week **3**

## Jesus prayed for His Church and for Unity!

### **Memory Verse:**

*...I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you... so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

*John 17:20(b)-21*







## **PERSONAL STUDY**

**Read John 17:20-26**

### **OPENING REMARKS:**

Success awaits the disciples' mission to the world. That is why Jesus is already praying for those who will come to faith as part of the mission based on the disciples' preaching. He prays that they may be one, just as the Father and the Son are one. To be one means to experience the mutual indwelling of the Father, Son and Spirit: to become blood relatives of God through the blood sacrifice of his Son.

Unity in Christ means that all believers are in a relationship with Christ and, by extension, to every other believer. All believers are united with each other whether they know it or not, like it or not, or feel like it or not.

The orientation point of this unity lies in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is not only an invisible, spiritual unity, but must also be visible in our lives. The challenge of Christian unity is to live up to the truth of that reality.

## **STUDY QUESTIONS:**

### **Read John 17:20**

Who is Jesus praying for in verse 20?

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### **Read John 17: 21**

When Jesus prays that the disciples will be one, what is He praying for?

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### **Read John 17:22**

Who gave Jesus His glory?

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It is important to remember that the glory that God the Father gave to God the Son was glory that often appeared humble, weak, and suffering. It was glory that was ultimately displayed in radical sacrifice. The glory of Jesus

is almost the opposite of the self-glory and glory (vanity) of man.

What blessing did Jesus give the disciples?

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When Jesus tells the disciples to be one, what is He speaking of?

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Jesus did not pray for uniformity, or institutional unity among believers, but for a personal dynamic of unity, bringing together the Church's rich diversity. Unity of institutions does not insure unity of the Spirit.

The foundation of our unity is the same as the foundation of unity between the Father and the Son: a deep relationship between equal persons. We are all on the same ground at the cross. That is what Jesus envisions: a great multitude before the throne of God, of every race, tongue, class, and social strata; and therefore, He prays that they may overcome their different backgrounds and understand their unity.

## Read John 17:23-24

In what is our unity founded?

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There is a unity of compromise, or of fear or coercion. Jesus wanted a unity of love, and common identity in Jesus. Jesus prays for a unity founded in love, because the Father loves the believers as extravagantly as He loves his Son.

How can the world benefit from unity among Christians?

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The idea that the unity of God's people would display to the world that Jesus was truly sent from God the Father was so important to Jesus that He repeats it in this prayer (see verses 11 and 23). Jesus prayed that the unity among generations of believers to come would also demonstrate to the world that Jesus loves His people, after the pattern of God the Father's love for God the Son.

This reminds us of the importance of unity and love among Christians. It is as if Jesus gave the world permission to

doubt both His mission and His love if the world does not see unity and love among believers.

**Read John 17:26**

What great secret of Christian living do we find in this verse?

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Jesus received love from God the Father, and this love relationship was the strength and sustenance of His life. Here, concluding His great prayer, Jesus prayed that the same love that was His strength and sustenance would fill His disciples (both near and far).

This speaks to the essential place of love in the Christian life and community. Jesus thought it so important that He specifically prayed for love when He might have prayed for many other things.

The secret of Christian living is Jesus and His love indwelling the believer. God's love transforms believers so that they love one another as God loves them.

## **CLOSING REMARKS:**

The unity between believers must be so visible in the actions that flows from our love, that it challenges the world to believe in Jesus Christ as well.

Jan A du Randt says in his book: *Love notes in the Vineyards*, that Jesus prays for unity among the believers for three reasons:

- a) *So that the world may believe that the Father has sent the Son;*
- b) *so that the followers may be one, just as the Father and Son are one; and*
- c) *so that the world may know that the Father has sent the Son.*

We therefore see that the mission of the Son and its acceptance by faith, is the heartbeat of John's message.

Jesus concludes His moving prayer with the prayer for the fulfillment of true love. It is that the Father's love, which He has shown to His Son, must become visible in the believers. Our love as believers is not the expression of our good intentions, but the answer planted in us by God. Then God becomes truly visible through our acts of love.



## **PRAYER**

Thank God for His love and mercy.

Thank Him for transforming your life through His love. Ask Him to help you to love your fellow believers and to be one with them.

Pray for unity in your church.

Ask Father to become visible to the world through your acts of love.



## **GROUP DISCUSSION**

### **Prayer**

#### **Memory verse:**

*...I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you... so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

*John 17:20(b)-21*

#### **Reflection:**

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

#### **Scripture Reading:**

John 17:20-26



## Discussion questions

Read John 17:20. Who is Jesus praying for?

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Read John 17:22. Who gave Jesus His glory?

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Read John 17:21-24. Why do you think unity is so important to Jesus? In what is our unity founded?

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Read John 17:26. What great secret of Christian living do we find in this verse?

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Is unity visible in your congregation? Why or why not?

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Read John 17:22-23. Discuss in the group actions that you could take, both individually and as a group, to promote unity and the love of God.

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**Close in prayer**



## **MEMORY VERSES**

### **WEEK 1:**

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

John 17:3

### **WEEK 2:**

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

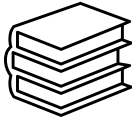
John 17:15

### **WEEK 3:**

...I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you... so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

John 17:20(b)-21





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