

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

June 7, 2026

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Trustworthy

Equipped by Jesus to live for Jesus (John 13-17)

The Lord's Prayer

(John 17)

Study #17

Introduction: The disciples' prayer...

Today's time in Scripture brings us to a uniquely powerful prayer. So, we'll start off by thinking together about prayer .

Dyenu! That's Hebrew for *"It would have been enough..."* It is also the name of a Jewish song that we have sung together here.

At Passover, the Jews would sing verses like, *"It would have been enough if God had led us out of Egyptian slavery...but then He opened the Red Sea for us to pass through on dry land!"*

And today, we might sing, *"It would have been enough if God had given us the free gift of eternal life...but He also has opened wide the door of access by giving us freedom to come to Him in prayer!"*

Prayer is an amazing gift. God invites us to come to Him at any time, to bring to Him our praises, thanksgivings, confessions, and requests. He is always listening.

And while it can - and often is! - a challenge to enter into a life of prayer, THAT we are invited to pray is an incredible privilege.

It wasn't too long before the disciples came to understand how critical prayer was to the life of following Jesus.

So, in the Gospel of Luke, we read of that time when they asked Jesus, **[Luke 11:1]... "Lord, teach us to pray..."**

Jesus was happy to oblige and told them to pray like this:
**[Luke 11:2] "Father, hallowed be Your name.
 Your kingdom come.
 [3] Give us each day our daily bread.
 [4] And forgive us our sins,
 For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
 And do not lead us into temptation."**

That's Jesus' most concise teaching to His disciples about prayer.¹ It gave them a basic template to use in approaching God.

That prayer was a helpful training tool for them, and it's helpful to us, today, who also want to learn how to pray.

We call it The Lord's Prayer. Of course, it would be more accurate to call it "The Disciple's Prayer," because that is what it is.

What we're going to see this morning is, actually, The Lord's Prayer. Today, we hear the Lord, at prayer.

We are not surprised that Jesus concluded His last time with His eleven disciples² by pouring out His heart to His Father in prayer.

If you study the life of Jesus, you'll find that He was deeply committed to prayer. He would frequently leave the crowds and the Twelve to spend time praying. (Luke 5:16)

He was the Son of God AND He expressed His dependence on His Father through the lifeline of prayer.³

¹ Jesus also gave this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9-13) using slightly different wording. It seems that He gave this teaching about prayer, as He gave many of His teachings, on different occasions in slightly different formats.

² Judas had already left the room to betray Jesus.

³ He evidently prayed this out loud, so that the disciples heard Him.

This prayer before us this morning is the longest prayer of Jesus we have in the New Testament.

Given the timing - the night before His death - I think that we can say that He was praying about those things that were closest to His heart.

For that reason, we'll want to pay close attention to what Jesus prayed here. We want what is closest to His heart to be close to our own hearts.

I imagine the whole group stopping at some point on their walk from the upper room in Jerusalem to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Before they got to the Garden, Jesus stopped to pray.

Jesus Prayed That God Would be Glorified (17:1-5)

Jesus Prayed for His and the Father's Glory (17:1)

[1] Jesus spoke these things; and raising His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, so that the Son may glorify You..."

He knew that the time had come for Him to die the gruesome death of crucifixion.

He will soon fulfill John the Baptist's prophecy. He will be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

To men of His day, crucifixion was a symbol of all that was evil and shameful. But to Jesus, the cross was the source of glory - and NOW was the time for the fulfillment of His life's mission.

He prayed that He and His Father would receive maximum glory through it.

That was His first prayer. He followed that request with a note of clarification, for us.

Clarity: Knowing Jesus = Eternal Life (17:2-3)

[2] "just as You gave Him authority over all mankind, so that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. [3] And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

The Father gave the Son **"authority."** And Jesus exercised that authority, not by lording it over anyone, but by serving.

He came to earth to free people from the penalty and the bondage of sin and to give to everyone who believed in Him eternal life.

That **"eternal life"** consists of entering into a relationship with the Father through faith in His Son, Jesus.

The great news about the good news is that we don't have to die to start eternal life. It begins the instant we believe in Jesus.

That is how the cross works gloriously on our behalf. Let's call it the *near purpose* of the cross. Jesus gives eternal life to all who believe in Him.

But there is another, grander reason for the cross than our salvation (Think, *"It's not about me!"*).

We look back to the text and revert to Jesus' first request. The ultimate purpose of the cross is that God would be glorified.

Jesus To Receive Glory - Again! (17:4-5)

[4] "I glorified You on the earth by accomplishing the work which You have given me to do. [5] And now You, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world existed."

That's a lot of *"glorifying"* and *"glorifying."* What does Jesus mean by this?

Well, to boil it all down, to *"glorify"* someone is to bring to light all the good things that might have been hidden about that person.

To “*glorify*” someone means that you say things or do things to make them look as good as they really are.

As an example, when a basketball team wins, it makes the coach look good. And right now, the Spurs are making head coach Mitch Johnson look really good.

No doubt, Coach Johnson is a fine coach. But it doesn’t hurt to have Victor Wembanyama, Stephon Castle, Dylan Harper, Devon Vassell and crew. They all make the coach look good. Using biblical language, they “*glorify*” him.

Everything Jesus did - His miracles, His teachings, His interactions with people - made God look as good as He really is.

Jesus’ death on the cross will put an exclamation mark on God’s goodness because the cross highlights how much God loves people.

How much does He love people? This much: ***“He gave His only Son!”***

As Jesus came to this watershed moment, He had no regrets.

He would soon be executed, accused of being a traitor to Rome and a Jewish blasphemer. Neither was true.

He wasn’t a victim; He was a victorious Agent. And He wasn’t a failure; He accomplished all that the Father assigned Him to do.⁴

So, Jesus began His prayer with a doxology. All glory to the Father. All glory to the Son.

Then His prayer turned a corner. From here on out, His requests focused on others. He first prayed for the men with Him on that night.

Listen to this mashup of prayers by Jesus that the Father will keep these followers in God’s “*Name*.”

Jesus Prayed For His Followers (vv. 6-19)

They Are in God’s Name (17:6, 11, 12)

[6] “I have revealed Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have followed Your word...[11]...Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me...[12] While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name, which You have given Me...[26] and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

Why so much emphasis on God’s name”?

Well, as the Bible uses the idea of a “name,” the name stands for everything behind the name. In this case, the Name stands for the Person of the Father and all the resources that belong to Him.

In 1979, I married Kathleen Marie Kerr. On the day we married she took my name and immediately became the beneficiary of all my vast resources. My resources weren't very vast. But when she took my name, everything I had became hers.

God the Father gave to the disciples His own Name. Jesus kept them in God’s Name. And because they were in God’s Name, they had access to all the resources they would need to glorify the Father.

On the strength of that, Jesus prayed for them. First, for joy.

Requests for His Followers (17:13-19)

For joy (v. 13)

[13] “But now I am coming to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.”

⁴ In John 16:33 Jesus says, - ***“I have overcome the world!”*** The word “*overcome*” in Greek is *νικαω* / Nike.

Jesus Himself had **“full joy”** because He was fully committed to fulfilling His Father’s will. And He prayed that these men would also have **“full joy.”**⁵

And we can mark off this request as answered.

The book of Acts records some of the early history of the Jesus movement and some stories of the lives of the apostles.

One of the chief themes of the book of Acts is joy. Even when they faced persecution, the disciples radiated joy.

One time, all of the apostles were beaten and commanded to stop speaking about Jesus.

After they were set free, ***[Acts 5:41]...they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His Name. [42] And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not stop teaching preaching the good news of Jesus as the Christ.***

Joy. Then, a few years later, Paul and Silas found themselves in jail for spreading the gospel - and they started singing hymns of praise to God at midnight. (Acts 16)

Again, joy. Answered prayer. Full joy. Then Jesus prayed again for these guys.

For protection (vv. 14-16)

[14] “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. [15] I am not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.⁶ [16] They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”

⁵ For any of us, full joy comes as we fully engage in something that is fully good.

⁶ No doubt, Judas’ recent departure (only hours earlier) was on Jesus’ mind as He prayed for their protection. Verse 12 of this chapter refers to Judas as **“the son of destruction.”** The thought is not that Judas lost his salvation. He was never saved.

⁷ See John 13:36; 14:30; 15:18-21; 16:1-4.

Obviously, Jesus faced tremendous opposition from His opponents. These men were about to face opposition as they spread the Word.

He had already warned them earlier on this night about this. So, this was obviously at the front of His mind.⁷

Jesus didn’t ask that they wouldn’t face opposition. He asked that the Father would keep them from the power of the evil one.⁸

It’s a request that they would be protected against the temptation to call it quits and from the temptation to compromise the message so as to avoid hardship.

Again, answered prayer. The book of Acts tells us that these men were faithful to the end. Most were martyred for their faith.

They all suffered greatly, but they didn’t fall for the evil one’s tricks. And then, Jesus prayed something else for them.

For sanctification (vv. 17-19)

[17] “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. [18] Just as You sent Me into the world, I also sent them into the world. [19] And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, so that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

“Sanctify” is another word (like **“glorify”**) that can be difficult to understand. So, here’s a handle that helps me understand “to sanctify.”

The root meaning of the word *sanctify* is *“to set something apart for a purpose.”*

⁸ Moses (Numbers 11:15), Elijah (1 King 19:14) and Jonah (Jonah 4:3,8) all prayed that they would be removed from the world - but all their requests were denied. For disciples to be removed from the world would be bad for the disciples and disastrous for the world. We are to be separated, but not isolated.

So, at home, my shovel is *set apart / sanctified* for the purpose of digging holes. My hammer is *set apart / sanctified* for the purpose of pounding things.

When Jesus prayed that God would *sanctify* His followers, He was asking that God would set them apart for His purposes. This *setting apart* would happen as they embraced God's truth as found in God's Word. (v. 17)

And, again, answered prayer. These guys were completely set apart for His purposes, as is evident from the book of Acts.

Jesus' heart was that these men would be sanctified, protected, and filled with joy. So, He prayed for all of that.

But in reading John 17's prayer, we can't miss Jesus' overriding passion that His followers would experience unity.

One Primary Request: One (vv. 9-11)

[9] "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but on the behalf of those whom You have given Me, because they are Yours; [10] and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. [11] I am no longer going to be in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, so that they may be one just as We are."

These guys were soon to be missing the Glue that had held them together for three years: Jesus. He was the Unifier. In light of that, He prayed that they would stay unified.

Jesus prayed that the unity they would experience in the aftermath of His death, resurrection, and ascension to Heaven would mirror the unity that He and the Father had enjoyed from eternity past.

And, again, as it was with the Lord's prayer for joy, protection, and sanctification, the book of Acts shows the early disciples displaying a remarkable unity as they took the Good News of Jesus from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

They had disagreements. They faced challenges. They worked through doctrinal issues. But the unity of the early church remained intact.

And now, having prayed for Himself and for them, He turned a final corner.

He looked to the future and prayed for us. That's right, we made it on to Jesus' prayer list. He prayed for all those who through the ages will believe in Him. And what did He pray for us?

He prayed for the area of greatest challenge. He prayed for us just what He had prayed for those men who were with Him on that night: Unity.

Jesus Prayed for the Unity of His Followers' Followers! (vv. 20-26)

[20] "I am not asking on behalf of these alone, but also for those who believe in Me through their word; [21] 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 sent Me. [22] The glory which You have given Me I also have given to them, so that they may be one, just as We are one; [23] I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and You loved them, just as You loved Me. [24] Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. [25] Righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; [26] and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

A True Organic Unity

The reality of organic unity

In this section Jesus prayed to the Father...
 ...that believers would be **"in"** the Father and Son. (v. 21)
 ...that believers would be **"one"** with each other. (vv. 21, 22)
 ...that believers would be **"perfected in unity"** with each other. (v. 23)

Jesus also described the interconnectedness between Himself and the Father and believers. It is an organic unity that is beyond full comprehension.

He affirmed that the Father was “*in*” Jesus. (v. 21, 23), that Jesus was “*in*” the Father (v. 21), and that He (Jesus) was “*in them.*” (that is, all believers) (v. 23)

All of that is a physical impossibility, so we aren’t to take them spatially.

But they make sense if Jesus was speaking relationally - and He was. He was affirming our intimate and organic, interconnected, and interpersonal, unity.

Unity actually exists between God the Father and God the Son AND between God and the sons and daughters of God AND between each child of God with every other child of God.

We who believe in Jesus are united in Jesus, just as surely as siblings are genetically united by a shared mom and dad. Unity among all Christians is in place because of our faith.

- We all call God “Father” and are thus a part of one big family.
- We have all been redeemed and justified.
- We have all been baptized by the Holy Spirit.
- We are all indwelt by the Spirit.
- We are all members of the global body of Christ, the church.

This is why Paul wrote exactly what he did to the church at Ephesus. We read there that we are to be ***[Ephesians 4:3] diligent to keep*** (not “create” or “make”) ***the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.***

The beauty of a realized unity

King David began Psalm 133 with these words, ***[1] Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity!***

To that I say, “**Amen!**” I don’t think that there is anything more winsome and beautiful than brothers and sisters in Jesus worshipping together, connecting with each other, and serving together.

But just as it is possible for family members to be united by a common gene pool and still not get along, so it is possible that Christians who are truly united might NOT live out that organic unity.

The Unity Challenge

The ugliness of disunity

And very few things are as un-winsome and ugly as us Christians living as if we were enemies. And it happens. We’ve all seen it and it’s tragic when it happens.

We want to live out our actual unity. And a realized unity between believers is close to the heart of Jesus.

But it isn’t close to the heart of everyone...

Believing the Bible - we DO have an enemy

There is an enemy who would like nothing better than to sabotage the unity that the Spirit has created.⁹

This enemy wants us to gossip about each other, envy each other, jump to unwarranted assumptions about each other, and divide over non-essentials.

⁹ A few years ago, I had the honor of getting to know Glenn Kehrein. Glenn and I served on the National Board of the EFCA at the same time. Glenn had worked in a multi-ethnic ministry in inner city Chicago for decades. Over the years of working in this field, he saw lots of stunning breakthroughs in unity among Christians from

varying ethnic and demographic backgrounds. And Glenn saw lots of times when Christians divided, when there was infighting, when there was no observable unity. Glenn pointed out that one reason Christians don’t experience unity with each other is that we don’t believe the Bible’s teaching about spiritual warfare.

Not believing - or not taking seriously - what the Bible says about this enemy, we might not pray for protection against his schemes. And chief among his schemes is to tempt us to divide over issues other than Him.

Imagine a scenario in a first-century church no larger than Northwest. It is made up of Christians from the city's wealthiest and poorest people. In this church there are slaves...and slave-owners. There are Jews and Romans and Greeks.

The differences between the members of that church body were significant, but unity was possible because of the transcendent unity they had in Jesus.

Just so, today, we come together with vastly different life stories and backgrounds. We have made different decisions about schooling choices. We have different opinions about political issues.

I could go on. And, as important as these and other items are, in comparison to our shared life in Jesus, they are all trivialities.

Part of entering into a realized unity with each other involves remembering that our core identity is Jesus. We are on the same team, and we are to pray against the schemes of our common enemy.

One other piece of the unity challenge that we must keep front and center is that our realized unity is so very important to Jesus.

Actively pursue unity

This is the Jesus who lived for us, gave Himself on the cross for us, and rose from the dead for us. This is the Jesus who prayed from the deepest part of His soul to the Father that we would be **"one."**

And when, despite all the differences of opinion and ethnicity and demography that exist between us, we are **"diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace,"** He is delighted.

That realized unity comes when we major on the majors, cherish those truths that bind us, and unite in worship and community and service.

When that happens, we reveal Jesus to be as good as He really is. We glorify Him...and one more thing.

Conclusion: Unity in Jesus - A Powerful Witness to the World

Jesus says that we're being effective evangelists when we are dealing with each other in love and uniting in worship and service.

Listen again to His prayer:

[John 17:21] that they may all be one...so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

[23]...that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent me.

How does it follow that people will see Christian unity and be convinced that Jesus came from the Father?

Well...it is a human tendency to segregate and homogenize and to separate between "us" and "them."

So, when Jesus followers who have varied opinions, perspectives, and backgrounds...
...bow their wills to the same Lord,
...have hearts set on fire for the same gospel, and
...experience a lived-out unity...

...outsiders will see that God is at work and will be drawn to the Jesus who makes us **"one."**