

Called as the Intercessor

Bible Background • John 17:14-24

Printed Text • John 17:14-24 | Devotional Reading • 1 Timothy 2:1-7

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE Jesus' intercessory prayer for His disciples, LONG for Jesus' prayer to be answered more fully in their lives and the church, and PRAY for others and work for unity in the body of Christ.

In Focus

The idea came from a pamphlet Anthony picked up somewhere called "The Power of 30 Days." The pamphlet presented a simple way to deal with problems and trials we all face: Choose a prayer partner and every day for 30 days you and your partner come together in prayer and present the need to God. Anthony discussed the idea with his wife and they agreed to come together each day and pray that God would do something about the drug house on the corner of their block. As they prayed, they continued to raise awareness of the problem among their neighbors and village officials. They knew God would provide the perfect solution to the dangerous activities that house promoted. Three weeks into their prayer vigil, the drug house burned down. No one was hurt, but the building was burned down so the city had to demolish the remaining structure.

Anthony and his wife were so overjoyed with the results of their prayer experiment that they shared the news with their church. Soon others were joining in the "Power of 30 Days" prayers and many people were reporting miraculous results. In the cases where God had not yet moved, the participants reported a renewed vitality in their prayer lives. Some people who previously did not pray often had started praying regularly.

Prayer does, in fact, change things. When we communicate our love, gratitude, and needs to our heavenly Father, He is moved to act on our behalf. In today's lesson, we will examine Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" for His followers.

Keep in Mind

"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message" (John 17:20, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Sanctify (John 17:17) *hagiazō* (Gk.) — To set apart for holiness, to be separated from the profane for sacred use; to consecrate

B. Perfect (v. 23) *teleiōō* (Gk.) — To make complete and one, to thoroughly finish, to come to the end

Say It Correctly

Aramaic. air-ah-MAY-ik.

Gethsemane. geth-SEH-muh-nee.

KJV

John 17:14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

NLT

John 17:14 I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

15 I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.

16 They do not belong to this world any more than I do.

17 Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.

18 Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world.

19 And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.

20 I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message.

21 I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

22 I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one.

23 I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.

24 Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!

The People, Places, and Times

God as Jesus' Father. Jesus' relationship with the Father is unique because He is the eternal Son of God. Jesus expressed His unique intimate relationship to God by referring to Him as "Abba" (Mark 14:36). Abba is an Aramaic word that denotes a warm sense of intimacy. On several occasions, Jesus spoke of God as "My Father" (Matthew 7:21; 10:32; 16:17). The personal pronoun is expressive of their relationship. The claim that Jesus had a unique Father-Son relationship with God was shocking to the religious leaders of Jesus' time. His claim not only violated their traditions, but the Jewish leaders understood that Jesus was making Himself God's equal.

The World. In the New Testament specifically, the Greek word kosmos (KOS-mos) carries a variety of meanings. In some verses, it carries a positive denotation of all humanity (John 3:16: "the world"). John most often uses it to refer to the realm of sin and human affairs in alienation and opposition to God (1 John 4:5; 5:19). John declares the nature of the world is ruled by lust and pride and dominated by Satan, God's enemy. The world's system has an inherent hatred toward God. In the end, the world and its wares are passing away. However, those who believe in Christ and obey God's Word will abide forever (cf. 2:8).

Background

The news of Jesus, the worker of miracles, spread throughout Capernaum. This was an exciting time. The community had never experienced a healer and teacher like Jesus. No wonder Mark 1:32-33 speaks of the townspeople bringing all the sick and demon-possessed to Jesus. And in Jesus' great compassion He healed every one of them, but He too needed a time of restful healing. So the next morning He departed to be alone with the Father.

The Scriptures do not tell the length of Jesus' solitude, but His time was shortened by the disciples' appearance. Jesus did not appear to be irritated by the disciples' presence, but informed them that He must preach in other places: "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth" (from Mark 1:38). Of a certainty there were more people in need of healing in Capernaum, but Jesus knew His mission was to spread the Gospel to everyone, so He traveled to other towns.

Do you make time to recharge with periods of solitude?

At-A-Glance

1. The Believers' Protection (John 17:14-16)
2. The Believers' Sanctification (vv. 17-19)
3. The Believers' Unity (vv. 20-24)

In Depth

1. The Believers' Protection (John 17:14-16) In this final prayer before His Passion, Jesus petitions God for His followers. The Lord realizes that His earthly ministry is drawing to an end. Soon He will return to His rightful place in heaven. So He commits His followers to the Father's care. Jesus affirms that He has completed part of His mission already: He has given the disciples the Father's Word. Jesus Himself is the Word of God. By His teaching, preaching, and His holy presence, He has imparted the Father's Word to His followers. Although believers are separated from the world, Christ does not expect us to withdraw from the world. Instead, He asks that we be protected from the world's evil influences. The "evil one" is Satan, the devil, who always seeks to drag people away from God. Though the disciples will be in the world, they belong elsewhere (namely heaven), just like Jesus Himself. Their allegiance and citizenship have changed to the kingdom of heaven.

2. The Believers' Sanctification (vv. 17-19) Jesus' second petition is for sanctification: "Sanctify them through thy truth" (v. 17). To sanctify means to set apart for God and His holy purposes. Every believer has been set apart to carry on the work of Christ (v. 18). Each Christian has been appointed some divine task and equipped to carry it out. God sent Jesus with a specific mission to enlighten all humanity that involved a great deal of courage, prayer, and self-sacrifice. This is exactly what He expects from us, exactly what he has prepared and personally "sanctified" us for. Jesus set Himself aside from all defilement and resisted all temptation so that He could successfully carry out His spiritual responsibility. He did this so that others "might be sanctified through the truth." The truth is God's active Word that must be obeyed. Jesus in His incarnation was God's truth personified (14:6) and all of His followers know the truth (8:32) and abide in it (8:44). For their sakes, He has consecrated Himself as a living sacrifice and stood in the gap on our behalf.

How have you sanctified yourself to God's purpose? How do you manifest that promise in everyday life?

3. The Believers' Unity (vv. 20-24) This prayer can be summed up as a desire for a unity that would mimic the unity that Jesus has with the Father. Up to this point, Jesus has focused His prayer primarily on His disciples. Now He looks to the future and prays for the universal church throughout the ages. The Father and Son provide the best example of Christian unity (John 17:21). Christians will find themselves united with each other as they unite with Christ. The glory of Christ unites Christians with Him. Our common salvation unites us as one and

serves as a sign to the world that Christ came from God and lives within us. Jesus asks that the unity of believers would show the world that Jesus was sent by the Father and would cause the world to believe in Him as Savior. All believers should join with Christ in praying that God be glorified and that believers everywhere be protected, sanctified, and unified.

How has the lack of unity in the Church, the body of Christ, contributed to why the world has not been convinced of the Gospel?

Search the Scriptures

1. What did Christ ask God to do to protect believers from the world’s evil system? (v. 17)
2. Aside from His disciples, whom else did Jesus include in His prayer? (v. 20)
3. What does Jesus want His followers to see when He brings them to heaven? (v. 24)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Jesus prays for believers to be one with each other. How is this made possible? And how do we maintain unity as the church?
2. Is the church currently a unified witness of Christ? Why or why not?

Liberating Lesson

Many of the problems in our communities could be better addressed by a united effort on the part of God’s people. What effect might such unity have on crime, immorality, and social ills?

Application for Activation

This week select a community or church problem that you want God to answer. Then choose a prayer partner. You and your partner will spend at least ten minutes each day praying for this problem. Be prepared to report back to class next week with your experiences.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

John 17:14–24 14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world

This section of Jesus’ prayer begins with His assurance that He has imparted “thy word” to the disciples. Repeatedly throughout His ministry, Jesus says that His teachings are straight from God the Father (John 5:19; 8:28; 12:49). Jesus’ teaching has not been His own, but God the Father’s. Now at the end of His time on earth, Jesus’ mission to preach the Gospel is complete. He has completely revealed Himself—and therefore the Father—to the disciples in His teaching. From much earlier in Jesus’ ministry, He has acknowledged that the world hates Him (John 7:7). The reason He gave then was the world’s resentment that Jesus was a witness

against the world's evils. No one likes to have their flaws pointed out, especially when they believe they are doing well. Because the world sets itself against Jesus, it reflects the need for Jesus' correction. Instead of listening to Jesus' Word and improving, the world stubbornly ignores Jesus and hates that He even mentions its flaws. Jesus will assert several commonalities between Him and His disciples in these verses; this verse contains the first one. The disciples do not belong to this world any more than Christ Himself. It is easy to see why the Messiah would not feel He belongs to this sinful world. He is patient, kind, powerful, loving, and self-sacrificing. His soul is the stuff of heaven. Here Jesus says all those reasons He does not belong to this world also apply to His followers.

15 I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

Take note of the tone of the prayer. Jesus is not asking that God should take them away from the world, but rather that He should protect them. Jesus does not pray that God should destroy Satan, nor that the disciples should die and leave this world to escape the onslaught of the evil one, nor that they should be separated and given a different world of their own so that they would be free from evil. Rather He prays that God should protect them from the temptations and persecutions that await them. He prays that, although they are in a world that is full of evil, they may live as lights and examples of God. This small community of believers would be persecuted in the world, but Jesus does not wish them to be completely spared from the hostility. The only way to accomplish this would be to bring the disciples home to heaven immediately. This would fulfill the disciples' unity with Christ and the Father, but it would leave the world to its own devices and deprive the rest of humanity of learning to follow God. Paul faced a similar quandary in his ministry, telling the Philippian church that he had "a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Philippians 1:23), but that he was needed here on earth to continue his ministry to churches, like the one in Philippi.

He instead asks the Father to protect them from the "evil one." Sometimes, in the face of persecution and death, it seems that they were not protected at all. However, their protection is guaranteed, they are the apple of the Lord's eye, and whatever persecution they encounter, God is always in control. Jesus has told them they are blessed when persecuted for His sake (Matthew 5:11-12). Since they do not belong to this world, God will not leave them alone.

Given His fast-approaching departure, Jesus specifically prays for the disciples' protection from the "evil one," which here refers undoubtedly to Satan, the prince of the world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Jesus, realizing the power and presence of Satan in the world and his work against the people of God, prays for divine protection and strength. Evil comes in many forms, so Jesus prays His disciples would be protected from all of it. But we must also remember that evil is not just an amorphous, chaotic, mindless force of fallen nature. A malevolent spiritual enemy is trying to keep Christ from winning souls. That enemy sets himself against Christ's disciples in many ways. Here He compares Himself with the disciples, attesting to their unity and the disciples' holiness as He has done previously (15:3, 19). He says, "They are not of the world" as He is also not of the world. John records Jesus' words about the world (kosmos), which dominate this prayer. There are many ways to use the word kosmos, whether to refer to all the people of the world, the globe itself, or sinful humanity at odds with heaven. Throughout His ministry, as recorded by John, Jesus uses the word kosmos to refer to all people. When we look at the context, we see those people need saving. Here in the final days of Jesus' ministry, the meaning shifts to a picture of the sinful systems of humanity that have set themselves against God and His workers. Three times Jesus refers to the "prince of this world (kosmos)," implying that the sinful systems of humanity are evil because they are merely following their leader, Satan.

However, Christ contends, neither He nor His disciples are from that sinful world. Christ again confirms that He and we disciples share a unity, which implies disunion with the world. Because we are not one with the world, it recognizes us as its enemy.

17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. 18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

Then Jesus makes another specific request, asking God to sanctify the disciples. The word “sanctify” is the Greek word *hagiazō* (haw-gee- ODD-zo). It means to set apart, to be separated from profane things for sacred use. It has the idea of consecrating, or being consecrated, or making holy. The idea is akin to being separated from the world, a thought Jesus started in the previous verse (v. 16).

He prays that God would continue to keep them separated from the world through the Word of God, which is equated with truth. The Word refers to the teachings of Christ. They are to be separated to continue His ministry on earth (v. 18). As the Father commissioned Him to the ministry, so He commissions them to minister the word of truth in the world (cf Matthew 28:20; Mark 15:15-20; John 14:12; 20:21). For this purpose and the benefit of the disciples, Jesus says that He separates Himself. He consecrates Himself in order to carry out the work of redemption. He, therefore, sets an example for believers to follow (See 1 John 1:7; Ephesians 5:26).

He does not leave us in the dark as to how we will be sanctified. It is by the truth. And we need not even question as Pilate does, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). Jesus tells us: “thy word is truth” (v. 17). We do not need to be confused at this further step of logic because Christ has already said He has given the disciples God’s Word (v. 14)! He has completely prepared His followers with God’s Word, which is truth, which is how to be sanctified. This sanctification involves their consecration for the task entrusted to them and their endowment with all the spiritual resources for carrying out the task. This work is done by the Holy Spirit through the Word of truth—in John, Jesus is both the Word and Truth.

Jesus was sent by the Father into the world and now He sends His disciples into the same world. The Greek word here for “sent” is *apostello* (ah-poe-STEL-low), which means “to order to go to an appointed place” or “to send away.” We get the English word apostle from this same root. The disciples need to be consecrated to serve as apostles—the “sent ones.” The entire Christian community is, thus, to be sanctified as an apostolic community sent by Christ to be His witnesses in the world. This is why, when many Christians recite the Apostles’ Creed on Sundays, they pledge their belief in the holy, universal, and “apostolic” church. The entire church has been “sent out” by Christ into the world. With the impending Cross on His mind, Jesus sets a basis for the disciples’ obedience later by resolving afresh to do the Father’s will—which in His case means death on the Cross. Jesus sets Himself apart (i.e. sanctifies Himself) to perform the redemptive work on the Cross so that the beneficiaries of that work might set themselves apart from the world that hates them. He shows the disciples that the Father’s will reigns supreme and the disciples’ best response to God’s will is surrender.

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

In verses 21-24, Jesus concentrates on unity within the Body of Christ—the Church—that is the mark of authenticity of their relationship with the Father and the Son. The unity to which the Church aspires is exemplified in the unity between the Father and the Son and is to be maintained by a persistent relationship with both the Father and the Son. This ardent request is made four times in this section and once in verse 11.

The Church’s manifest oneness would give public confirmation both of their relationship with Jesus and that of Jesus with the Father. This expanding unity would generate multiplying witnesses throughout the world and that is how the church grows. Such love is only possible through God’s power and not only human effort. What Jesus says here is that the Church cannot be complete as a body if there is a lack of unity. Should that happen, the Church will be fragmented, and Christ is not glorified. Jesus here offers a very important antidote for the world’s rejection of Christ’s authority and purpose on earth—and that is unity in the Church. If Christians want the world to know God, then they should determine to be one as God and Christ are one.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: 23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Not only do we share Christ's otherworldly origins and belonging, but here He says we also share in His glory. John often speaks of the glory of God and Christ. As early as his opening summary, John says the disciples saw Jesus' glory, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14), as Christ performed His miracles (John 2:11, 11:4). Jesus says this is the glory which He shared with the Father "before the world was" (John 17:5), and John sees the glory of God give light to the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:23). We understand from these last two verses that the glory of God is tied closely with His presence. It only makes sense then that is given the glory of Christ would result in unity with each other and with Christ. The glory of the believers is to be evidenced in their interrelationship with one another and with Christ and the Father.

It is in oneness that the church will "be made perfect (Gr. teleioo, teh-lay-OH-oh) in one." This does not mean that the church will be completely without fault and good in all we do. The word perfect here means completed or thoroughly done, so Jesus here prays that our unity would be thoroughly accomplished as we receive His glory and allow Him to dwell in us as the Father dwells in Him. A thorough unity in the church not only helps the world believe God sent Jesus (cf. v. 21), but it also shows that God loves us as He loves Jesus. Here we see yet another commonality between us and the Savior: God loves us just as much as He loves Jesus, His only begotten, beloved Son.

24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

Jesus appeals to His pre-existence here. It is important to remember that Christ did not suddenly appear for the first time in Bethlehem. Rather, He is co-eternal with the other two Persons of the Trinity. Jesus is the same deity as the God seen in the Old Testament. Jesus concludes this prayer by requesting that all persons that the Father has given Him may be with Him where He is (John 14:1-3), i.e. heaven. When Christ's followers join Him in heaven, they will see the glory which Christ had before the world was made and prior to His incarnation into the world. The believers' destiny to behold the glory of Christ is predicated on the merits of Jesus our High Priest who makes this request. One must note how Jesus closes this earnest prayer with its deep theology, with a request for companionship. In the end, the reason Christ came and died on the Cross—the reason for all of salvation history—was to restore the relationship between God and His creation. Christ's most dear request is restored unity with us, just so we can all be together in perfect unity.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Prayer for Peter in Prison
(Acts 12:5–11)

TUESDAY

Pray for a Successful Ministry
(Romans 15:22–33)

WEDNESDAY

Pray for Inner Strength and Power
(Ephesians 3:14–21)

THURSDAY

Pray the Prayer of Our Lord
(Matthew 6:7–13)

FRIDAY

Pray for Your Abusers
(Luke 6:22–33)

SATURDAY

Pray to Avoid Trials
(Luke 22:39–46)

SUNDAY

Jesus Prays for His Disciples
(John 17:13–24)