

ALL CHURCH FAST 2024

'TOGETHER WITH JESUS'

**JOINING WITH CHRIST IN HIS
HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER
JOHN 17: 1-26**

FEB 4-7

WRITTEN BY ALAN FROW

EDITED BY JON MARSHALL & KRISTINE NETHERS

John 17:1-26

“When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 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. 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. “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. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 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. 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. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 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.’”

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version

Introduction: Together in Prayer

Thank you for joining us for these four days of prayer and fasting. We are full of gratitude for what God has done historically as we have come together to seek His face, and are full of expectation that as we draw near to God, He will draw near to us with new mercy and power.

Dane Ortlund, in his exceptional book, *Gentle and Lowly*, poses the question, “We know what Jesus has done while on earth, but what is He doing now?” His answer is simple: “Christ has justified us in his finished work on the cross and in his resurrection, but he continues to work on behalf of those he has saved by interceding for them. This is what He is doing now.”

This is not wishful thinking on his part. The writer of Hebrews assures us that Jesus, our Great High Priest, is always interceding for us. “*Therefore He [Jesus] is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them*” (Hebrews 7:25). Ortlund describes Jesus’ intercession for us as follows: “Jesus’ high priestly intercession hits refresh on our justification so that we are able to live in a moment by moment reality of it.” This is stunning! Jesus is praying for us to live in a *moment-by-moment* reality of the complete salvation he has purchased for us in his death and resurrection.

How would our prayer lives be transformed if we were not only *praying to Jesus*, but *praying together with Jesus*, joining with Him in his high priestly prayer for us? Too often we run out of things to pray to Jesus, and are even unsure if what we are praying is what He truly wants for us. However, if we were able to join with Jesus in His intercession for us, we would be assured that we are praying with Him, in agreement with His will for us.

This is why Jesus’ prayer in John 17, commonly known as the High Priestly Prayer, is so potent. It is Jesus’ longest recorded prayer. He prays just after the last supper, just hours before He would be betrayed by Judas Iscariot. We find Jesus interceding for his disciples as a collective—for those who had believed, but also for those who would come to believe—for you and me!

This prayer may well be called Jesus’ greatest prayer because it is the fullest record of how Jesus prays to His Father for His disciples. It’s the longest prayer of Jesus recorded in the Gospels: 650 words all in all. It takes 3 ½ minutes to read it out loud, which I encourage you to do.

It’s also the longest prayer in another sense. Jesus prays for all those disciples who would believe: from the first disciples who believed the gospel all the way to disciples 2,000 years into the future. If Jesus prayed this for all those who would believe, it is safe to say He is still praying it for us now. This prayer unpacks Jesus’ eternal will for his disciples. So, let’s join together with Jesus these next four days, as we *amen* the intercession of our Great High Priest.

Tips for fasting

- If this is your first fast, ease into it. Don't feel the pressure to go without food for all three days. Start with fasting a meal a day, then gradually build up to a full day.
- An intermediate fast would be what is known as a "Daniel Fast" this is where you abstain from choice food, meat, and wine and only eat vegetables and drink water.
- If you are fasting from food, we typically encourage a juice fast which would include fruit juice and soup/broth and water.
- We only recommend a full water only fast if you have experience fasting and/or participated in one of these other versions before.
- The idea behind fasting is to abstain from a routine habit/practice for the sake of spiritual hunger. You may not be able to fast from food due to health reasons, etc. so consider abstaining from social media, television, or any other habitual practice in your day that you can set aside for the sake of focused prayer.
- The fast begins after dinner on Sunday night. Don't eat a massive, greasy meal as your last meal. You'll regret it!
- At some point during each day of the fast, find a 30-minute time slot (at least) to read that day's devotion. Ideally this is in a quiet, distraction-free place where you can have uninterrupted time.

Bring your juice and ask Jesus to be your nourishment! Feasting on the word of God will do wonders for a growling stomach.

- On each day there will be a theme and a passage of Scripture to contemplate. The idea is to read and meditate on the Scripture for a good 15 minutes, and then spend 15 (or more) minutes in prayer.

- The meditation part is key. It bridges the gap between hearing from God (in Scripture) and speaking to him in prayer. Puritan Thomas Manton said this: "What we take in by the word we digest by meditation and let out by prayer." This will be the model for our daily devotionals during the fast.

- If your days are full and you can't find the time to take a break, consider reading through the booklet on Sunday night, to prepare your heart for what's to come.

Including your family

- If you have kids this is a great opportunity to introduce them and include them to the concept of fasting. Make sure you clarify the purpose of fasting in an age appropriate manner. Much of how they will participate will depend on their age so here are some age appropriate suggestions:

- Age 5-9. Abstaining from candy, soda and dessert. Limited screen time, added worship time.

- Age 10-13. Abstaining from one meal during the day. This HAS to be done wisely and with faith, if it is an intense sports season consider a protein drink as a meal replacement. Limited/no screen time, added worship time.

- 14 and older. Depending on the maturity of your child, they can make the same choices that you, as an adult would make.

- If you do have children that are abstaining from food, this is obviously a great opportunity to be more intentional with family prayer and/or devotions.

Day 1 Together in Unity

"The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 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." **John 17:22-23**

The most prominent theme of this prayer is a passionate plea for unity. Prayer is Jesus' primary tool for maintaining unity in His Body.

It was an argument between the disciples that actually birthed Jesus' greatest prayer. At the last supper, a dispute arose over seating positions and who was the greatest among the disciples. Luke 22:25 uses the word *philoneika* to describe the dispute. It is the only time the word is used in the NT and it means 'a love of winning.' It comes from the root word *nike*, which was the Greek goddess of victory. *Swoosh*.

Philoneika is our fallen condition and none of us is immune from it. Secretly, we all long to be the victor, to be recognized and served first, rather than being unknown and attending to others. Our concern tends to be for *me* over *we*. Our self-focus is the key disruptor to the unity for which Jesus prays.

It is into this atmosphere that Jesus prays and it is a passionate plea for unity: "*Father, may they be one even as you and I are one*" (Jn. 17:21a).

The loving unity of Jesus' Church is a powerful gospel witness in a divisive age. "*That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me*" (Jn. 17:21). We know that unity in the Church has been severely tested these last few years as Christians have strongly disagreed on numerous social and ethical issues. While Christians must stand strong and united on essential matters of faith, we must give room for diversity in non-essential matters. As John Wesley once said, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials, liberty, in all things, charity."

Jesus had a cure for the *philoneika* that caused disunity. He unobtrusively rose from the table, quietly found the pitcher, basin and towel, and then invested himself in washing 24 unattractive feet. The lesson could not be louder: the division between them is a direct result of the selfishness within them. Jesus explained, "*The example I have given you is what you should do for one another*" (Jn. 13:15). Jesus was indicating that they were a community meant to serve one another for His glory. This is the heart of unity.

Pray for unity in your closest relationships. Focus on those relationships that may be strained. Ask Jesus for wisdom on where to stand your ground in essential matters and where to give liberty on non-essentials. Ask Jesus for the humility to repent to those you may have wronged and forgive those who have wronged you. Ask the Spirit to empower you to be a humble servant who washes others' feet, like Jesus did.

Responding as a family:

Unity means a bunch of different things becoming one and working together. Talk about examples of unity and, if time allows, explore them in your home. Puzzles, a band playing a song, ingredients being used in a recipe, athletic teams, etc. How wonderful that God created us each uniquely, but also calls us to unity!

- For smaller kids: work together on a puzzle and discuss how each piece is different, but they are all coming together to make one picture. See if they can identify other examples of unity. Ask: why do you think Jesus wants His followers to be unified (on the same team, working together)?
- For bigger kids: discuss examples of what it is like when a team, family, or group is unified? What does it feel like when it isn't? Ask how they can contribute to unity in God's family. Call out ways that God has created them uniquely, that can be a blessing to His family.
- Pray together and ask God to unify you together as a family. Rejoice in His work to create each member of your family uniquely and specifically for His glory. Work together to memorize our key passage for the week. Come up with actions together! Write it out, make it a song- get creative!
 - "...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."
John 17:21
- For youth age kids, encourage them to share a time where they felt like they were a part of a team. It could be sports but it could also be a group project, your rec team at camp, scouts, etc. Ask them these questions: 1) Do you feel like it was a good experience to be on a team? What made it good or bad? 2) What does it mean to you to be in unity with someone? 3) Why do you think Jesus prayed for his followers (and us) to be in unity with each other?

Day 2. Together in Union

Union is connected to unity but it is not quite the same thing. Union speaks of the relationship that the Tri-une God has with one another. Jesus describes his relationship with His Father as such: *"I in you and you in me"* (Jn. 17:21). The Father is in the Son. The Son is in the Father (Jn. 17: 23). But it doesn't stop there. Because of the gospel, we who were once far off from God, alienated by sin, have been brought near and reconciled to God by grace (Ephesians 2:1-3). Believers are in the Father and the Son, the Son is in believers (Jn. 17:21). While disciples cannot claim the exact union of the Trinity, we share in the glory of the Trinity, because Christ indwells us by His Spirit. Christ in us is the hope of this glory. Therefore, we can expect a sense of God's glorious presence because Christ is in us and we are in Him.

Larry Wattermeyer says that we are able to find unity by honoring one another because we are glorifying the Christ that indwells each one of us. So our union with God is the fuel for our unity with one another.

This is more than a functional union, however. We do not say to God, "Indwell me so that we can all get along!" No. Jesus describes the very essence of eternal life as knowing the indwelling God: *"This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"* (Jn. 17:4). Jesus is praying that we would know his Father as he knows Him. Jonathan Edwards once wrote, "There is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace." This is the kind of *knowing* that Jesus is praying for which is why union is not something we have to force. Jesus knew the Father's heart and prayed, *"Father I desire that they also, whom you have given me also, that they may be with me where I am and may see my glory"* (Jn. 17: 24).

The Holy Spirit is the One who helps the truth of union become an experienced reality for us. That is why Jesus told his disciples earlier that, *"It is for your good that I go because if I go I will send the helper who will be with you forever. He will take from what is mine and make it known to you"* (Jn. 16:7). Jesus prays that we too would know the indwelling God, and that this would result in us beholding His glory and experiencing His joy: *"These things I speak about in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves"* (Jn. 17:3).

Pray in agreement with Jesus that the union he won on the cross for you would become a greater reality in your life. Ask for the Holy Spirit to make your 'In Christ' identity more of a lived reality. Bring the distractions and anxieties that seem to interrupt union with God to Him. Ask for this union to produce the fruit of greater joy and good works in your life.

Responding as a family:

Union is a step beyond unity. It is not just working together, but being one. Talk about examples of a union. Explain that Jesus is asking God to help His followers (the 12 disciples then, and us today!) be in union with God the way He and God are one. Jesus wants to, by the power of the Holy Spirit, be in and with us!

- For smaller kids: explore union by playing with LEGO/Duplos, interlocking blocks, or braiding fabric together. Talk about how the individual blocks or strands have connected or woven together to create something beautiful and strong. They aren't just next to each other, but interlocked. Explain that this is how Jesus wants to be with us!
- For bigger kids: This might bring up questions about the Trinity- wonderful! Talk about how God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons, but are one God. Ask if they've ever felt Jesus *with and in* them. If yes, what did that feel like? What happened? Share about a time if this has ever happened to you.
- When Jesus is with us and in us, we see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control). Call out ways you see the Holy Spirit working in each other. Pray together and ask God to send His Holy Spirit to each of you. Consider sharing which fruits of the Spirit each person is needing more of and ask God to bear those things in you as a family and individuals. Work together to memorize our key passage for the week.
 - "...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."
John 17:21
- For youth age kids, open up about a time where you felt like you and another person or group of people were in union together. A fun example of this would be when you and your best friend say the same thing at the same time in the same way and it's super funny. A more serious example of this would be when you were worshiping at church and you were able to see a group of people all experiencing God's goodness together. Spend some time sharing some prayers for each other as you experience this fast together. Remember you don't need to rush through this time, part of experiencing this as a family is pausing our lives for a bit when we feel like God is telling us something.

Day 3. Together in Consecration

"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. 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." John 17:14-19

A disciple of Jesus has a complex relationship to the world. We are called to be in the world but not of the world. Neither separatism nor syncretism. We are often tempted to separate from the world—to get out and leave it to ruin itself—when we encounter things we do not like in it. But Jesus calls us to be salt and light, a change agent to help a decaying culture. Likewise, we are often tempted to syncretize—to mix our faith together with other worldviews—when we encounter things we naturally like. Syncretism is always more challenging to detect and to break free from.

We are resident aliens in the world, like Jesus was. This is a tough truth in tension to manage. But Jesus prays for His people. He prays that we are not to be snatched away from the world (escape what you don't like!), but to be protected from the evil one (who tries to get you to go along with the culture). Instead, we must be consecrated or set apart to God while living in an unconsecrated culture. The word Jesus uses for this is sanctification: *"Sanctify them by your truth, your Word is truth"* (Jn. 17:17). This means that we do not settle for being justified by Christ, as marvelous as that is, but we desire to become like Christ in the way we think, feel and act.

We will never be unified as a consecrated people unless we have a common standard from the Word of God for what it means to be sanctified. To accurately identify what we need to separate from and what we need to be joined to, there must be clarity from God. His Word spells it out for us.

We need to recognize that the world will hate us for obeying God's word and will try to force us to conform to its likeness. But the Spirit's power is able to transform us into Christ's likeness as we consecrate ourselves to Him.

Consecration requires that we go to God's Word and ask the Holy Spirit to convict us of the sins of both separatism and syncretism. As the Psalmist wrote, "Search me, oh Lord and know my heart. See if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:1). Where have you grown hardened against loving your neighbors, coworkers, and friends who don't trust Jesus? Where have you compromised biblical faithfulness by adopting our culture's way of thinking, feeling or acting?

Spend time today asking God if there is some part of God's Word that you have been disobeying. Is there some way that the world is pressuring you into resisting Jesus' prayer for sanctification? Are you too close to the culture (thinking/behaving too similarly) or too far (not staying close enough to neighbors so that you can love

them)? Ask the Lord to identify your weaknesses in these areas. Ask Him to give you a picture of what your life would be like if you were completely consecrated to Him. Come ready to discard anything that God is calling you to give up in the trash cans provided at our evening gatherings.

Responding as a family:

When something is consecrated, it means that thing is specifically set apart for God. It has one single purpose determined by God. Look around your house to find items that have one single purpose. Examples: can openers, tv remotes, car steering wheel. Jesus came to earth with one, single purpose: to die on the cross and save us. When we say "Yes!" to Jesus, we are given a single purpose: to bring Him glory! God is inviting us all to be consecrated to Him- be set apart for Him.

- For smaller kids: talk about God's glory. Bringing glory to God means we are pointing to the big, awesome, powerful, perfect beauty of who He is. What are ways you can bring God glory? Color pictures of what comes to mind. Call out parts of your child that bring God glory.
- For bigger kids: being set apart for God means that there will be times we will have to courageously be different than those around us. That is hard! Discuss times this may have already happened. Share about when this has happened in your life- what made that difficult or easier. Talk about what might be keeping them from being fully set apart for God.
- For kids who have yet to say "yes" to Jesus, give them the opportunity to surrender their lives to Jesus, making them consecrated to God. Pray together and ask for God's help in becoming more like Jesus. Take time to pray through certain situations where it is hard to be set apart for God. Work together to memorize our key passage for the week.
 - "...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."
John 17:21
- For youth age kids, share with them a time where you felt like you were doing something that you knew God had created you to do. Ask them if they are feeling like God is calling them to something new or big. Maybe it's sharing more about Jesus at school or doing something nice for a neighbor or making friends with a new person. Or, maybe it's something that they need to choose not to do anymore—using language that doesn't glorify God, treating friends or family with disrespect, or engaging in a relationship that isn't healthy. Encourage them to seek guidance from people they trust with these and to remember that if God calls us to something, He will be there with us every step of the way.

Day 4. Together on Mission

"As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world . . ." (John 17:18). Father make them one, that the world may know that you sent me and loved me even as I have loved you."

Note how Jesus makes it clear that He is not praying for the world, but for the Church that belongs to Him: *"I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them"* (Jn. 17:9-10). God so loved the world that he gave His only Son to die for the world, but His answer for the problems of the world is a Church that glorifies Jesus. We are not only sanctified ones. We are sent ones, sent into the world to preach the gospel in word, deed and power. What makes our gospel believable to the world is the love we have for one another. A divided world is drawn to a united church. As Dallas Willard wrote, "United Christian community is the final apologetic of the gospel."

We tend to think that Jesus' biggest problem is saving the world. But seemingly, God's biggest problem is with getting His Church on mission in a way that glorifies Jesus. Just think of the story of Jonah, for instance. God saved Nineveh in three days once Jonah was willing to go there. But getting Jonah to obey Him and then to preach with both boldness and compassion, seemed a much harder task.

Francis Schaeffer wrote:

"Christians must humble themselves to know the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. To the extent that we do not humble ourselves, there will be no power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Lord's work in the Lord's way is the Lord's work in the power of the Holy Spirit and not in the power of the flesh. The central problem of our age is not liberalism or modernism, nor the old Roman Catholicism or the new Roman Catholicism, nor the threat of communism, nor even the threat of rationalism and the monolithic consensus which surrounds us. All these are dangerous but not the primary threat. The real problem is this: the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, individually or corporately, tends to do the Lord's work in the power of the flesh rather than of the Spirit. The central problem is always in the midst of the people of God, not in the circumstances surrounding them."

Pray that the Holy Spirit helps you to see yourself as a sent one.

Pray for boldness to speak about the gospel to your friends.

Pray for the church to glorify Jesus in its unity, compassion, generosity and boldness.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to anoint our evangelism, compassion and church-planting initiatives with fresh power.

Responding as a family:

Jesus gave His followers the mission (or job) to tell everyone about Him. In their neighborhood, state and around the world. There are over 3 billion people in the world who, even if they wanted to learn about Jesus, wouldn't be able to. They don't have a church near them, the bible is not in their language, and they have no one in their neighborhood who knows Jesus. There are people in our schools, families and neighborhoods who don't know Jesus and may have never had the opportunity to hear the gospel.

- Visit joshuaproject.net and learn about one of the unreached people groups featured that day. Take time to pray for them.
- Discuss people in your neighborhood, family, school, etc. who may not know Jesus. Invite them to church on Sunday, pray for their heart to be softened to the gospel and ask the Holy Spirit to give each of you the courage and opportunity to share with them.
- Parents and caregivers: your home is your primary mission field! Spend time in prayer asking God to empower you and to work in the life of your child. If they have not yet surrendered their life to Jesus, give them the opportunity to do so.
- Recite our key passage for the week! Celebrate working together to memorize!
“...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.” John 17:21

Now what?

Thank you so much for joining us over these last four days, we hope that as you have abstained from food and distractions in your life, you were able to pray and connect with God on a deeper level. Maybe you have come to the end of the fast but feel prompted by the Holy Spirit to continue, or maybe you still haven't received the breakthrough or clarity regarding some of the prayers that you have been praying during the fast. We would encourage you to continue to pray and fast from distractions in your life that would keep you from fully seeking God.

You may also be asking the question, "Can I personally fast periodically throughout the year?" With that we would say, "Absolutely!" Fasting isn't just a corporate practice that we do as the body of Christ, it should be an individual discipline as well. Jesus assumes his disciples will fast as he says in the gospels, "When you fast", he doesn't say that his disciples might fast but instead, he suggests that they will.

So, as you're led by the Holy Spirit throughout the year to fast, we would encourage you to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit regarding this spiritual discipline. As you continue to periodically fast throughout the year, with confidence turn your attention to Jesus and trust him that he will reveal himself to you, speak to you, answer your prayers, bring healing, breakthrough, and clarity to the prayers you have prayed. Let's continue to fast, both corporately and personally, until Jesus returns. When he returns, we will no longer be called to fast, but instead we will be called to feast, the bride and the bridegroom, feasting together, for all of eternity!

Acknowledgments

Edwards, Jonathan. *Jonathan Edwards on Knowing Christ*. United Kingdom: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990.

Ortlund, Dane C.. *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*. United States: Crossway, 2020.

Schaeffer, Francis A.. *No Little People*. United States: Crossway, 2021.

Wattermeyer, Larry . "Together with God: Joining with Jesus in his Greatest Prayer", Exponential, 2019

Willard, Dallas. *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. United Kingdom: HarperCollins, 2006.