

Praying for Unity



By Dave Butts

You can tell a lot about a person by listening to him or her pray. The passions of the heart flow out through prayer and give us a glimpse into the soul. What is really important to a person will find its way into the prayer life of that one. So it was for Jesus as He prayed in John 17. The entire chapter is often referred to as “The great high priestly prayer” of Jesus.

As you study this powerful prayer of our Lord, you can find five basic petitions:

1. Restore Me to the glory I had in heaven.
2. Protect My followers from the evil one.
3. Sanctify them by the truth.
4. May they be one.
5. May they be with Me forever.

I'd like to focus on a point of passion with Jesus. It concerns the fourth petition, “May they be one.” It seems to me that Jesus is most passionate about this request. It is this part of the prayer that seems to identify the believer most with both Father and Son. The practical, lived-out unity

of the Body of Christ is literally the most powerful apologetic to the world that God had sent Jesus into the world and demonstrated for all eternity the Father's great love for mankind.

New Testament scholar Merrill Tenney writes, "The unity mentioned here is not simply a unity achieved by legislation. It is a unity of nature because it is comparable to that of the Son and the Father. The unity of the Church must spring from the common life that is imparted to all believers by the new birth; and it is manifested in their common love for Christ and for one another as they face a hostile world. The unity of the Son and the Father was manifested in the deep love that each sustained for the other and by the perfect obedience of the Son to the Father and the perfect response of the Father to the Son." (The Gospel of John, Merrill C. Tenney, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Zondervan Publishing, 1981, p.164).

Our passion needs to come alongside that of our Lord's. Should we not join our prayers with Jesus for the unity of all believers? We can discuss the implications and obstacles to unity forever, but the most powerful force toward unity is the same used by Jesus...prayer! How can we pray in an effective way concerning this essential issue in God's kingdom?

Praying Scripture is always my first impulse. It is in praying the Word of God that we most line up with His thoughts and intents. Would it be possible for us to take Jesus' prayer for unity that we find in John 17:20-23 and make it an integral part of our prayer life? I've taken the words of Jesus and adapted them to our own situation. May they be a blessing to you as you regularly pray back to the Father a similar prayer to the one He heard 2,000 years ago from His only begotten Son.

Holy Father, I lift before You today the scattered followers of Jesus Christ. In the same way that Jesus prayed, not just

for the disciples who stood in front of Him as He prayed, but for all who would believe in Him through their message, so I too, do not limit my prayers just to the Christians around me. Lord, there are millions of us now...divided by language, creed, and customs. Our divisions have brought us shame and have hindered the advance of the Gospel.

Father...make us one. In the same way that You and Your Son are one, would You make us one? I don't understand Your unity...how two can be one, and how the Holy Spirit added to that makes the three still one. But in some ways that is reassuring, because I also don't understand how You can make all of us one. It's obvious though, Lord, that our unity is somehow rooted in Your very unity as God. That gives me hope.

Father, in a way that is beyond our comprehension, You dwell in Jesus and Jesus dwells in You. That astonishing unity is what You desire for us by inviting us as believers in Jesus to come to dwell in You. We confess our desire for that as well. We want to live in You. We want to continually experience Your presence...Your oneness.

We are beginning to see that dwelling in You in unity is so amazing that it literally declares to a watching world that You truly did send Jesus into the world. We need a supernatural work of Your Holy Spirit to break down our divisions and to bring us together into Your presence. We long to see the day when the world wakes up to the realization of Your awesome love that prompted You to send Jesus into the world. Father, make us one that this day might come soon.

Father, as You and Your Son are one, Your presence in Him and His presence in You, we pray the presence of Your Spirit in us will make us one with You and Your Son. And if we are one with You and Your Son, then we certainly become one with each other. You are not divided, Lord. Forgive us for our actions and attitudes that have appeared to divide the Body of Christ.

Would You give us the passion for unity that You and Your Son have? Help us to see how important this issue is to the proclamation of the Gospel. You have loved us as You love Your Son. Please teach us to love each other in that way...people who are different from us in so many ways...yet who are still a part of Your Body. Bring us to complete unity that the world may know of Your astounding love. We ask in Jesus' name.

–Dave Butts (1953-2022) was the president of Harvest Prayer Ministries, and the author of multiple books, articles and resources on prayer. Some of his books are [Prayer, Peace and the Presence of God](#), [The Giving Church](#), and [Prayer Ministry Volunteer Handbook](#) co-authored with his wife, Kim.

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