

SESSION 1: JESUS TEACHES US ABOUT PRAYER

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Matthew 6:5-8, Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35, Luke 3:21-22, Luke 6:12, Luke 9:18-21, Luke 10:21, Luke 22:31-32, 41-46, Luke 23:46, John 11:40-42 / The Lord's Prayer

QUESTIONS

1. Reflect on the difference between having a conversation with a close friend versus a stranger. Discuss what each experience is like.
2. What aspects mentioned in the session were frequently part of Jesus' prayers? What other aspects are included in your own prayers?
3. How does a strong knowledge of God help us in our conversations with Him?
4. Discuss the significance of the first two words of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father." Why did Christ begin His model prayer this way?
5. Read Matthew 6:5-6. What makes one a hypocrite when praying? How might people do the same thing today? What did Jesus say that we should do differently?
6. Consider Matthew 6:7-8, specifically the second sentence of verse 8: *For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.* Why should we ask anything of God, including our needs, if He is omniscient and knows all things? What are some repetitious phrases you've prayed in your lifetime? It can be tempting to use the same, potentially

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cliché, phrases. What are some ideas that can stop your prayers from becoming stale and repetitive?

7. Walk through the phrases of the Lord's Prayer together. Discuss what each phrase teaches us about prayer.

8. How have you experienced that God is your Father?

9. What is a decisive moment in your life when you turned to prayer for help or for an answer? What was this experience like?

10. How can studying the prayers of Jesus help us to deepen our prayers and our relationship with God, the Father?

11. From whom have you learned to pray, as a child and even now as an adult? Have you ever felt like not praying? What are some situations or attitudes that could deter someone from praying? Discuss this quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *It is precisely when a person, who is borne down by inner emptiness and weariness or a sense of personal unworthiness, feels that he would like to withdraw from [prayer], that he should learn what it means to have a duty to [pray], and the brethren should support him in his weakness, in his inability to pray.*

12. How is prayer presently a part of your day? Are there any changes you would like to make?

13. Write down a prayer of praise, thanksgiving, intercession, or petition.

14. Write a version of the Lord's Prayer in your own words.

SESSION 2: JOHN 17: JESUS PRAYS FOR HIMSELF

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

John 2:4, John 3:17, John 7:6, 30, John 10:10, John 16:33, John 17:1-5, Romans 6:23, 1 John 5:11-12

QUESTIONS

1. What was your last personal prayer about?
2. Why do you think that Jesus takes time to pray for Himself?
3. What does Jesus mean when He says, "I have overcome the world?" What did He overcome? And why should we be of "good cheer" because of this?
4. The video says that it is a gift to know the one true God. How do we come to know God through our prayers?
5. As He prayed, how does Jesus glorify His Father? How was Jesus glorifying the Father through being obedient and sacrificing His life on the cross?
6. How does Jesus define eternal life in John 17:2-3? Read 1 John 5:11-12. What do these verses tell us about eternal life?
7. Read John 17:1-5 together. What aspects of prayer do you recognize? What do these verses teach us about God, the Father? What do they teach us about Jesus?
8. Read Psalm 23. What do these verses teach us about God? What do they teach us about the author of the verses? What do they teach us about prayer?

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9. How could posture affect your personal prayers?
10. Jesus makes it clear that it's okay to pray for yourself. Describe a time when you felt the Lord respond to a prayer of yours.
11. Write down a list of things that you usually pray for yourself. Reflect on how Jesus and the author of Psalm 23 prayed for themselves. What can you learn? How can you change your prayers? Write a short prayer to God using either of the examples.

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SESSION 3: JOHN 17: JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

John 14:26, John 17:6-19, 1 Corinthians
10:13, 1 John 2:1

QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel when you hear someone praying for you?
2. Jesus prays for unity amongst His disciples. Why does He pray for this? How do you experience godly unity in your family? In your small group? In your congregation?
3. What does it mean for Jesus' disciples to be "not of the world"?
4. The video mentions that we should be encouraged in our prayers to express to God what we know about Him, His works, and His promises. Take some time to think about and discuss these important elements of prayer. What do you know about God? What do you know about His works? What do you know about His promises?
5. Read John 17:11, 13, 15, 17. What is Jesus asking of the Father for His disciples? This week, include these petitions in your prayers to intercede for those who are working for Christ.
6. Consider the following sentence from the video/script: "Each prayer we share with God is like a testimony of our belief in Him." Discuss what is being said here. How does prayer express to God our faith and beliefs? Come up with an example of a belief statement that you could use in your own prayers.

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7. Jesus clearly showed the importance of praying for others. What are some things that we can pray for when it comes to our neighbor?
8. All of us still live in this world where evil surrounds us and temptations challenge us daily. How can prayer help us to resist temptation and glorify God in all we do?
9. Why is sanctification important for us and our Christian life? How are we sanctified?
10. What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ to you? What did you learn about being a disciple from the session today? What steps could you take to better sanctify yourself?

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SESSION 4: JOHN 17: JESUS PRAYS FOR ALL BELIEVERS

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

John 14:6, John 17:20-26, 1 Corinthians
10:17, 1 Corinthians 12:12, 26

QUESTIONS

1. What did the Chief Apostle say about “bridging the gaps” from the Pentecost service? (For some hints, see the page on www.nac-usa.org called *Bridging the Gaps*.)
2. In John 17:20-22, Jesus expresses His desire for all believers to be unified. Why is unity so important amongst the body of Christ? What are some things that get in the way of unity?
3. In Jesus’ prayer, He asks the Father, *that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved me*. What evidence does the world have that God loves you and has called you for a purpose?
4. How is it possible for people from diverse backgrounds with vastly different personalities to come together as one and work together to be effective witnesses of Jesus?
5. Together as a group, make a list about what unifies us together as believers. Then make a list of items that separate us. Does the list that brings us together outweigh the list that divides us?
6. This session mentions, “bridging the gaps.” What are concrete ways we can bridge gaps in our community and congregation?
7. Jesus says that He has given glory to His believers. How does the video define this glory? How have you experienced His glory personally?

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8. Read John 14:1-11. Discuss what these verses mean. How do they connect to Jesus' prayer in John 17? What do they tell us about God? How are they relevant to your life?
9. Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-26 together. What do these verses teach us about unity? What do they teach us about our dependence on one another and on God?
10. What is your response to the realization that Jesus has prayed for you?
11. "Through the Son, we experience the Father." What have we learned about God, the Father, from Jesus' example? What are some of His characteristics?
12. In the entirety of Jesus' prayer in John 17, what part(s) feels most relevant or applicable to you?
13. What have you learned about prayer over the past four sessions? Write down two things that you will try to incorporate into your prayers over the next month.

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: JESUS TEACHES US ABOUT PRAYER

Welcome to the first small group session of September. This month, we'll take an in-depth look at the prayer life of Christ. How and when did He pray? What made up the content of His prayers? For whom did He pray? We can learn much about prayer by studying the prayer practices of our Lord.

We'll begin this session by looking at **how** Jesus prayed. Christ showed through His approach to God in prayer that God was near and accessible. This is evidenced by the first two words of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father." Not only is God close, but Jesus makes it clear that we can call Him Father. He introduced a new dimension to prayer, one that was much more personal and intimate.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord provides additional instruction regarding how we ought to pray. In Matthew 6:5-6, He says, *And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.* Christ was not condemning communal prayer through this teaching, but rather showing how much He despised hypocrisy, and emphasizing that prayer was something serious that should be done in all modesty and sincerity. He showed the importance of this many times, often going into seclusion to commune with His Father through prayer (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35).

In verses 7 and 8, He gives further instruction concerning prayer: *And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.* Christ shows here that the effectiveness of our prayers isn't related to the number of words we use. Consider the Lord's Prayer again. In this model prayer from the Lord, note that there is no repetition. Every line is fresh and simply stated. He also gives us the powerful reminder that God is aware of what we have need of even before we pray. Our prayers don't need to include a detailed description of our needs.

Our heavenly Father is omniscient—He knows all things!

Christ also shows us how we ought to pray through His example in the garden of Gethsemane. In these difficult final moments He prays, *Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done* (Luke 22:42). This prayer was a cry from the soul, as evidenced by the 44th verse: *And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.* Whenever the Lord prayed, He did so with devotion and intensity.

When we should pray is also clearly defined by Christ. From what is recorded in the Gospel of Luke, it is evident that He prayed before and during the decisive moments in His life. He prayed before the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (Luke 3:21-22); before designating Peter as the Rock upon which He would build His church (Luke 9:18-21); at the onset of His bitter suffering (Luke 22:41-46); and before He died on the cross (Luke 23:46). Jesus shows through these prayers His complete trust in the faithfulness of the Father and His total dependency upon Him.

We can also see that there were no set times during the day when Jesus prayed. In fact, in Luke 6:12, right before Jesus chose the twelve Apostles, we read the following: *Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.* Here, given the weight of the task at hand, Jesus was inspired to pray all night long. He communicated with the Father as often – and for as long – as He was compelled to do so.

Let's also look briefly at the content of Jesus' prayers. We find the following aspects most frequently: praise, thanksgiving, intercession, and petitions. In Luke 10:21, Jesus prays a prayer of praise: *I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.* Jesus shows here that He was in absolute accord with the will of His Father, and that He had total confidence in Him.

Before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He prayed a prayer of thanksgiving: *Father, I thank you that You*

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 2: JOHN 17: JESUS PRAYS FOR HIMSELF

At the end of John 16, Jesus makes a triumphant, comforting proclamation, *...be of good cheer, I have overcome the world* (verse 33). From that bold statement, Jesus began what is known as His high priestly prayer that is recorded for us in John 17, so because He is our great High Priest, the One who, at the moment of this prayer, is about to make a once-for-all sacrifice on behalf of all humanity. Jesus chose to pray this in the presence of His disciples, providing them with both comfort and instruction. Today, we can also find comfort and instruction from His prayer. In this session, we'll focus on the first five verses of John 17, as Jesus begins by praying for Himself, that He might once again enjoy the Father's glory after fulfilling His will on earth.

Let's begin with verse 1: *Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You."* The first thing that stands out in this verse is Jesus' posture. In the midst of His disciples, He pauses and lifts His eyes to heaven, taking a customary posture for prayer at that time. Then He begins the prayer by stating, "the hour has come." Throughout John's Gospel, we find several references to time. In chapter 2, verse 4, Jesus tells Mary that, *My hour has not yet come*. In chapter 7, verse 6 and 30, Jesus said, *My time has not yet come*. It is made clear for us that Jesus was on this intentional journey towards the cross, and now, in this intimate gathering, He states that the time, the hour for which He has come, has arrived. The time of His death, resurrection, and ascension was about to begin. The Son would be glorified on the cross, realizing the pleas spoken in this prayer. And as the Son is glorified, the Father would be glorified as well through the perfect obedience of the Son, His love for those who are lost, and in His demonstration of power over the evil one.

Moving to verses 2 and 3, Jesus continues, *"...as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."* The supremacy of Jesus is the focal point of these verses. The Synoptic Gospels tell us that

Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth. He has authority over all humanity in order that He might save people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Eternal life is in Jesus Christ. That is a truth that John made known multiple times in his writing (John 3:17, 10:10). In 1 John 5, verses 11 and 12, he writes: *And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have life*. Eternal life is not something that can be earned; it is a gift from God (Romans 6:23). That gift is to know the one true God and to be in fellowship with Him for all eternity.

Jesus concludes the first section of His prayer this way: *"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."* What stands out here is that Jesus is speaking in the past perfect tense. He speaks of a future event that is about to happen as a completed act. For Him, His death on the cross was a foregone conclusion. There wasn't any doubt that it would happen. The decree of the triune God was that the Son would be incarnated and dwell on earth amongst humanity, and sacrifice His sinless life so that all who have faith in Him would have eternal life. No other sacrifice would ever be needed to bring the will of the Father into reality. With His work finished, Jesus longed to return to the intimate fellowship He had shared with the Father. As He looks to heaven, He expresses His desire in sharing that glory once again and rejoicing together over all the faithful who have been saved. As we hear the words of Jesus, we can recognize without a doubt His divinity, and that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one.

As we come to the end of this session, take a few moments to ponder this part of Jesus' prayer, and write down what it means to you.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 3: JOHN 17: JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES

Welcome back! In this session, we'll continue looking at Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17. In verses 6 through 19, we see how Jesus prays to His Father for the disciples.

Jesus begins this part of His prayer with testimony that the disciples believe and have faith in the one true God – that they belong to Him and that they know Jesus Christ is God incarnate, sent to earth to save humanity. Each prayer we share with God is like a testimony of our belief in Him. Otherwise, why would we pray if we didn't believe it would have some effect? Even though God knows our hearts and sees our faith, we can always include an element of this in our prayers. Express to God what you know about Him, His works, and His promises. When we share our own faith with Him, it is another way to confirm to ourselves what we believe to be true.

The gospel is the foundation of the work the disciples would have to do once Jesus ascended to heaven. Without their faith, they would struggle and fail to follow His commands, and Jesus knows this. This is why in the next portion of His prayer, Jesus prays for them to be unified, to keep them from evil as they work in the world, and to sanctify them by God's truth. Already, Jesus is showing the disciples that He is their Advocate (1 John 2:1). In heaven, He pleads with the Father on our behalf, while the Holy Spirit is our Advocate here on earth, sent to help us, remind us of Jesus' teachings, and to give us strength to overcome our imperfections and prove our faith (John 14:26).

In John 17:11, Jesus prays, *Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.*

Though the disciples would remain in the world once Jesus ascended, they were not *of* the world because they belonged to Christ (v.16), which is why Jesus asks His Father to protect them. The purpose for this protection is so that the disciples can remain unified. Unity amongst the disciples would not only help them to accomplish their godly mission, but it also would reflect to the world around them that God, as three Persons, is perfectly unified in love and wants the same for His creation. This unity is a

characteristic of all of Christ's disciples. When we live by the truth of His gospel and are obedient to the will of God, we are unified in our purpose and in our love for each other and Him.

In John 17:14-15, Jesus also petitions God: *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 pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.*

Sometimes, in the midst of hardship, we may wish to be removed from our situation or only live for our future with God in His kingdom. However, Jesus does not ask for His disciples to be delivered from their difficulties and removed from those of this world. God has placed us on this earth for a purpose. As His children, we should have a different nature and mindset than those who belong to this world, and while we are here on this earth, our task as Jesus' disciples is to continually bring forth fruit for the kingdom, to do good and serve. As those striving to be *not of the world*, we do not want to succumb to the evil influences that we often find here. In Jesus' prayer, we see His intercessions for His disciples, and are further assured of the protection of our faith from evil by Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:13 – *God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

Jesus knows the way for His disciples to be kept from evil, and He prays this for them in the last part of this section of His high priestly prayer: *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth* (John 17:17).

To be sanctified by God means to be made holy or to be set apart for His purposes. Sanctification is not just a one-time event, but rather a lifelong process where we work to remain separate from that which is influenced by evil, while we also continually pursue and grow in that which is godly. We are only able to distinguish good from evil through the truth of God's word. His word is the standard of truth that we are to test everything against, and in this context, His "word" is the gospel itself.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 4: JOHN 17: JESUS PRAYS FOR ALL BELIEVERS

Welcome! Today, we're going to finish up our month learning about Jesus' prayers, specifically the one recorded in John 17. Jesus ends this prayer with a focus stretching beyond the pages of the Bible, to uncountable generations of believers – including us! We'll find that He focuses on three items: unity, love, and His presence in our lives. Let's take the verses piece by piece, starting at verse 20:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word...

The "these" that Jesus is talking about are the apostles. Future believers would come to faith in Christ through the word of the apostles, the apostles' doctrine, which Jesus establishes here as the foundation of the church.

...that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me... (John 17:21-23)

In these few short sentences, we learn a lot about what Jesus meant by unity. Our unity is grounded in Jesus' relationship with His Father. Our Chief Apostle recently said: "Jesus wanted the church of Christ, His church, to become an image of the unity of the triune God. God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, but perfectly one." The concept of musical harmonization could be useful in understanding this: each note retains its distinct character and tone, yet blends in harmony with others to create a melody. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians expands on this thought: *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12)*. How do we develop unity as members of the body of Christ? We are united through Christ by sharing in His body and blood – *For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread (1 Corinthians 10:17)*. There is also work that we can do to embody oneness in our relationships – bridge the gaps! This starts with self-reflection – "How should I change?" – rather than judging others. We overcome our self-interest and contribute to the

common good of the congregation and community. We recognize that every believer is equal in Christ, and stand in solidarity with each other because *if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it (1 Corinthians 12:26)*. Perhaps we have looked at agreement as the only measure of unity. However, based on the words of Jesus, it is our oneness with Christ and our testimony of Him that weaves us together as Christians. When we refuse to let disagreement divide us, it can become a catalyst for a more in-depth, shared experience with Christ.

We also see from Jesus' words that our connection with God, the Father is only possible through the Son; *No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6)*. Jesus says He has given glory to His believers. What is this glory? It is the revelation and presence of God that we have come to know through the life of Jesus. Through the Son, we experience the Father.

...that they may be perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me (John 17:23).

Our oneness with Christ flows from a life characterized by love. We are to reflect God's love to the world around us as living proof of His gracious character. Jesus' coming to earth brought God's presence and love into the life of the believer. When this is evident in the congregation through our words and deeds, the church will become a welcoming place where people will come to believe that God, in His unending love, sent His Son for them.

Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:24-26).

Jesus ends His prayer, not only desiring that we will be where He is in the future, but promising His continued presence in our lives today. He has proclaimed the name of His Father and pledges to

continue proclaiming it – a reference to the arrival and work of the Holy Spirit after His ascension. When we strive to be a community of believers, filled with God’s life, light, and love, who model Jesus’ unity with His Father, it *will* be evident to those around us, and we will have endeavored to fulfil Jesus’ hope for His church.