

JESUS PRAYED  
**“THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE: THAT THEY MAY KNOW YOU...”**  
JOHN 17:1-5

## INTRODUCTION

It's a wonderful world of technological advances. It is amazing what you can get these days, what apps you can download, stuff you can record, (talk about my cycling app.)

Over Christmas I tracked down a fancy gadget able to report on everyone's prayer life. In a few moments all the data will be displayed on the screen and we'll be able to analyze who is the godliest among us. I wonder what you are thinking now?

Perhaps it would be an “Oh no, now they'll all know that I'm a spiritual pygmy! My prayer life is at best indifferent. Why, I've not prayed longer than 3 minutes a day for months!”

But what if I told you my machine doesn't just tell you how often you pray, it analyses your prayers. In the old days cricket commentators were content to let you know that player A had made 27 runs. Now they will tell how many 4 or 6's and singles made up the 27. The computer graphics will show you the trajectory of the ball and just where each shot was placed. So our analysis is not only interested in if your prayer life amounted to 27 runs or 27 minutes – but also in what it was made up of.

So for example, some people pray a lot, but almost all their prayers are for themselves. Whenever God hears from them He knows He is going to be treated to a soliloquy of “me, myself and I.” Others are more generous. They focus on the needs of those around them. Yet others are prepared to intercede for those they have never met. Some prayers are really structured or repetitive, others are very loose and waffley.

When it comes to evaluating the caliber or quality of our prayers, we need to look for models. Clearly simply praying a lot or a little is not necessarily a key indicator in terms of effectiveness. While I don't really have any magical gadget, one model we can use to assess our own prayers is to look at some of the prayers of Jesus.

And that's what I intend to do over the next 3 weeks as we look at what is sometimes called Jesus' High Priestly prayer, found in John 17. As we look at it, we quickly find that it has 3 different focal points.

In v 1-5 Jesus prays for Himself. So don't ever think that it's selfish or improper to do so. Then in v 6-19 he prays for his disciples. Next he prays yet more widely and in v 20-26 enlarges his prayer to all those who will come to faith – it's a prayer that embraces you and I even though we live so much later than Jesus' journey on this planet.

Understandably this prayer is serious and somber. After all, the Cross was not many hours away. For all that, we mustn't think of it as gloomy. Immediately before this prayer Jesus had made the bold declaration "Take heart, because I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The prayer is made with the awareness that final victory lies with Jesus.

To be sure it is a prayer that marks the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, but it looks ahead to the future ministry of the disciples and of those who would come to faith in the future.

Your Bible, like mine, makes a clear divide between chapter 16 and 17. It's fair enough because a new emphasis now comes in. But in other ways it's unfortunate. There are no chapter divides in the original and there is no time gap between Jesus' discussion with His disciples in chapter 16 and the start of this prayer. In terms of timing Jesus simply says, "take heart, because I have overcome the world" (16:33) and then lifts up his eyes to heaven (the typical Jewish gesture of prayer) and starts praying, "Father, the time has come..." I guess that gives you the first clue about Jesus' prayer life...

We Christians have developed some interesting habits within our prayers and I do sometimes wonder what God thinks about them. For example, we Christians gather and at the end of a small group meeting we might say, "so are there any prayer needs", and that is great, it is really important to share together and so we can pray for each other, it's an important part of Christian community. So we share our situation and what we might like prayer for and then we pray. And we pray exactly the same things that we have just shared, as though God wasn't there until we "assume the position" of eyes closed and heads bowed! At times after we have shared I have simply said "and Lord those are our prayer to you, amen."

Formal prayer times are really important and there is definitely a place for prayers meeting like that, but in this model it's different. Jesus is speaking

to his disciples one minute, the next he raises His eyes to heaven and continues His conversation with God. There is something wonderfully natural about the flow. It underlines the fact that for Jesus prayer was simply part of the natural stream and movement of life.

Today we focus on Jesus' prayer for Himself...

**17** *After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. <sup>2</sup>For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. <sup>3</sup>And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. <sup>4</sup>I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began.*

### **AN AWARENESS OF A TIME LINE (v 1)**

It's interesting to note how often Jesus referred to time in his ministry. His awareness of living from a calendar was shown from the beginning of John's gospel.

- In John 2:4 at the wedding in Cana Jesus tells his mother *"My time has not yet come"* when it seems as though she wants to catapult him into public ministry.
- In 7:8 John tells how his brothers wanted him to go to Jerusalem to gain publicity for himself, but his reply is that his time has not yet come.
- John 7:30 and 8:20 both inform us that Jesus is able to avert arrest because his time had not yet come.
- But now, very significantly, Jesus says, *"The time **has** come..."* (John 17:1)

It is not that the rest of Jesus' life was irrelevant, but rather that the key moment of obedience was now at hand. Jesus knew the Cross stared Him in the face. He is able to embrace the moment because He knew this was the chief reason he had come.

Some of us wake up each day and think 'what am I going to do today. Others don't think about it - they just accept that life will fill itself. Quickly the weeks, then the months, then the years slip away. Not so with Jesus. He was very conscious that his time on this planet was limited. Sent for a purpose, the most important thing was that he followed through obediently.

Jesus knew what the main thing was, what his purpose was. Gay and I enjoy going to the movies, the other day we went to the hobbit. It was good, but – the fight scenes were a bit long – it fact if I had a criticism about all of peter Jackson editing of the Lord of the rings and the hobbit, the fighting scenes were a bit long, we got the point, there was conflict but was it really necessary to go on for so long for the main story. Understanding the main point of the story is vital when editing a movie, otherwise you can very easily miss or lose the point.

One editing story that has almost reached legendary status is Ward Kimball, an animator with Walt Disney in the making of the original Snow White. He worked for 240 days on a 4 ½ -minute sequence in which the dwarfs made soup for Snow White and almost destroyed the kitchen in the process. When Disney saw the scene he thought it was really funny, but decided that it got in the way of the films pace. Without a second thought he discarded it. He never lost sight of the big picture and wouldn't be sidetracked by an amusing but distracting clip.

It's a similar kind of purpose we sense in Jesus' life. He was conscious that the clock was ticking. He knew why He had come. Now He confirms "The time has come."

We are fast coming up to the time when some might be tempted to make a New Year resolutions. This week I was reading through a set of statistics. They had researched what % of people stick to their New Year resolutions. Apparently by the end of January only 50% are still on track. After 6 months, its down to 20%. For most people, making resolutions is an idle game. There is little intention to follow through for the long term. Time slips away.

The month of January is named after the Roman god Janus, who had two faces looking in opposite directions. The one looked towards the past, the other towards the future. It's a helpful picture towards the start of a new year. The backward look reminds you of where you have come from. It tells something of the story of your life. But there also needs to be the looking ahead part. Where is this going?

As Jesus looked back he could see the years of faithful ministry and obedience to His Father. Looking ahead He could see both the Cross and the glory of all that would be achieved through it. His prayer request was that He would be glorified through His obedience to God, so that the Father in turn would be glorified. The driving purpose of His life on this earth was that God would be known and glorified.

Perhaps for you “Now is the time” to both look back and to look ahead and to ask God to give you a clear sense of purpose and direction.

### **AN AWARENESS OF THE ESSENCE OF LIFE (V 3)**

At the time of this prayer Jesus had less than 24 hours left of life on this earth, it is natural enough that His thinking turns to the essence of eternal life. What is interesting is that in this prayer He does not so much define eternal life in terms of time, but in terms of relationship.

I remember once hearing someone trying to explain what eternity is like. They suggested we imagine a huge cliff jutting up from the ocean. Once, every 1000 years, we were to visualize a bird flying up to that cliff, and pecking away just one tiny grain of it. A thousand years later it would be repeated... and so on, indefinitely. By the time the cliff has been completely eroded away by the birds thousand yearly trip, said the speaker, the first day of eternity would just have finished.

Well, I guess that’s one way of looking at it. Actually the converted slave trader, John Newton, is far more accurate in his hymn, “Amazing Grace” he writes, “When we’ve been there a thousand years, bright shining as the sun; We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise, than when we first begun.”

For all that, when Jesus prays about eternal life he takes the discussion outside of the realm of time and into the realm of relationship. “This is the way to have eternal life – to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth” (3).

Eternal life in Jesus’ teaching is not primarily about how many years to the power of how many zillions eternal life will last for, but whom it centers around. Simply put, eternal life begins when we know God.

Jesus affirms that eternal life is found in a relationship with God. He reminds Himself of this as He stands before the Cross. Why else would He go to the Cross if He didn’t know that the largest of all issues was at stake. Through the obedience and forgiveness of the Cross, people would open their lives to friendship with God. That relationship would transform everything.

### **A COMMITMENT TO FINISH THE TASK (v 4-5)**

As Jesus concludes the section of the prayer that is primarily for Himself, he commits himself to complete the task God has given Him. Jesus is able

to say to God that he has brought Him glory by completing everything he has been told to do.

How can Jesus say he has done it all? He is standing this side of the Cross, not the other side of it. Given the magnitude of the Cross, surely that's like one of your kids insisting they have washed all the dishes because they have cleaned one teaspoon!

Actually, that's to miss the point. Jesus started the prayer with an affirmation that the time had come. He shows he fully understands that the purpose of what lies ahead is that people may have the eternal life that flows from knowing God. When He now states that he has done all that has been asked of Him He is quietly affirming that there will be no turning back. He has no intention of trying to back away from the Cross. It no longer matters just where on the time line it lies for it is going to happen.

Jesus finishes off the prayer by asking that after the task is complete, He be returned to the exalted position He enjoyed with God before the creation of the world (v5). So often we focus on Jesus' life on earth that we forget what he left behind to come to this planet. His request is that after He has suffered the humiliation of crucifixion, God reinstate Him to the glory he had previously enjoyed. It is a request God is more than willing to grant.

The special prayer examination app I discovered is about to be switched on. It will examine your prayers in the light of Jesus'. Like Jesus, you are certainly entitled to pray for yourself. And why not ask God to help you to have a prayer like Jesus' – one that shows **REAL PURPOSE, REAL RELATIONSHIP AND REAL COMMITMENT.**

By all means, when you next have headache, ask God to cure it. But also ask Him to help you enter the loftier realm of prayers that are caught up in the service of God's glory...

**Video** Matthew West - My Own Little World

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9Yasgzjc0w>