

The Great Intercessory Prayer of Jesus.

John 17 is the longest recorded prayer of the Lord Jesus and it was probably prayed in the upper room before the group moved to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus prayed to His Father for Himself, but it was not in a selfish way – He wanted the Father to glorify Him through His death and resurrection, before He finally ascended to Heaven again.

Then Jesus prayed for His disciples and for all believers, you and I.

Jesus describes the disciples as the ones God gave Him from this world.

He prayed for protection so that we may be one as the Trinity is one.

He prayed that we would have the full measure of His joy within us, knowing God intimately.

He prayed for our protection from the evil one. Not removal from the world but protection from the temptations the world brings.

He prayed that we would know and accept God's truth. And we would need this as we obey Jesus' instruction and begin to make Christ known, calling on people to repent and believe God's truth.

Even while facing His impending death on the cross, Jesus prayed for those around Him whom He knew and loved and those who would believe in the future.

So how do you pray? What do you pray for?

Consider this example: Two men were adrift in an open boat in the ocean and it looked like the end. For days they had been drifting.

Nobody had shown up, and they were thirsty, hungry, and the sun was beating down, and they knew the end had come.

One of the men knelt down in the boat and prayed: "**Oh Lord**, I've broken most of your commandments. I've been a hard drinker, but if my life is spared now I'll promise you that I never will again . . ."

And about that time his companion tapped him on the shoulder and said, "**Wait a minute Jack**. Don't go too far. I think I hear a boat coming." Here was a man who made deals, and he figured he could make deals with God.

What about the boy who prayed – God please make Jimmy quit throwing rocks at me ... and by the way I've mentioned this before! **This is someone who felt he could manipulate God.**

In Luke 18 we hear what the tax collector prayed - Lord be merciful to me a sinner". This revealed a lot about the tax collector as a pray-er.

There are basically 3 sections to this entire chapter.

Jesus prays for Himself about His own glory that He had with His Father before the foundation of the earth; Jesus prays for His immediate disciples and Jesus prays for us specifically.

Jesus had a deep relationship with His Father. Jesus didn't try to manipulate, or demand anything in His prayer – there were no conditions. He prayed as one who had a relationship with God before we ever knew the name of Jesus. His prayer revealed His intimate relationship with His Father before the foundation of the earth.

Jesus lived in complete obedience. What do your prayers sound like at the end of the day? Do you pray – I did what You told me to do today,

I obeyed Your Will or do you pray – I disobeyed today but it was because of.....?

There's a definite link between your prayers and your true obedience. Some people live a completely different life from what they present at church on Sunday to the rest of the week.

Obedience is the necessary ingredient for power within prayer

Jesus prayed for His disciples and for us, Christians who followed on. One of the challenges identified for the disciples and for Christians today is unity. If we look back on the growth of the Church we can see that there has been much disunity. At first it was one group who chose to put Scripture above Church structure and called for change but they were rejected, so they protested. So, then there was a split forming the Protestants and the Roman Catholics. But then it snowballed and the Protestants became disagreeable toward their brothers and sisters in the faith. And there was disunity in the body of Christ.

Unity in the Christian faith is paramount if we are to obey Jesus' commandment to spread the word of the Gospel throughout the land.

Rev. Max Lucado says about today's Scripture: "On the last night of His life our Master did not pray for the health of the disciples; for the success of the disciples; even for the happiness of the disciples. He prayed that they would get along with each other."

So how do you and I ensure unity within our Church family and the broader community?

You see, it has to start with us – we have to be proactive. We have to take the first steps. We have to stop doing and saying those things that

cause any disunity amongst us.

That's what Jesus meant when He said, "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone."

Unity has to begin with us. And it has to begin with our personal relationship with Christ. We have to be one with Christ, first. Our lives have to be knit together with His life through faith. And it has to begin in our Church. As a congregation, our lives have to be knit together in love, through Christ.

And we have to all pull together. I remember a long time ago when visiting the Show, there were Clydesdale horses in a competition to see which horse could pull the most weight. Afterwards they hitched the winning horses together to see how much they could pull when pulling together. Separately, they had totalled nearly 2000 kg each, but when hitched and working together as a team, the winning horses were able to pull more than 5500kg. Almost three times what either one of them could pull alone.

Imagine the powerful force we could exert as a congregation, as a denomination and as the Church in the world, if we all "pulled together as a team." But to do this, we must all be on the same page – have the same goal, purpose and God-given vision. In order for us to accomplish this we have to trust and depend upon God. We have to call upon Christ and live out the love of Christ in all that we do.

A poet once wrote:

"To dwell above with saints we love, That will be grace and glory.
To live below with saints we know; Well, that's another story!"

Unity isn't easy. But Jesus not only prayed for it, He modelled it for us. Scripture records an incident when the disciples came to Jesus, complaining about the people who were preaching and doing signs and wonders in Jesus' name but weren't part of the crowd of disciples. They were ready to run them out of town or call down lightning upon their heads. Jesus told the disciples not to stop them and said, "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit."

Christian unity is not determined by whether we agree with each other about every interpretation of scripture or doctrine or form of church government. Christian unity IS determined by whether we love one another, and whether we reflect the love of God in Christ for the world. There will always be that which separates Christians from Christians and denomination from denomination. But we can still affirm and celebrate God's love for us all and our love for one another.

Gracious Father, what a privilege to read this great prayer which reflects the love that Jesus has for His Church and for us as we persevere in faith.

May we abide in unity and sacrificial love, focusing on the authority of the Bible as we stand firm on the truth God has given us.

I pray that our personal lives and our church lives are meshed together and become infectious so that others in our community who see us might come to know and love Jesus.

Father, I thank you for the membership of this church and the unity that does exist and I pray that this will continue as we grow and thrive together as Your church in the world.