

The Way to Spiritual Unity

By: Carolyn Moore

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 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. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:20-23)

This prayer is the last thing to happen in the book of John before the writer begins to share the story of Jesus getting arrested, crucified, and resurrected. There is a locker-room feel to this scene. Jesus and his followers are in a room together and this is the last conversation they'll have before he is arrested. This is like the huddle before the fourth quarter, and Jesus is giving his team that talk you give when you want the team to stop playing "old man football" and start playing for real.

He tells them that from this point forward, they are to live by a new rule: Love one another, in the same gracious, generous, unselfish, mature way he has loved them. He beseeches them to love one another and then he prays for them. He prays lavishly and deeply, from the heart. If you want to learn how to pray like Jesus, study this prayer in John 17.

Jesus not only prayed for his followers, but also all those who would believe in him in the future. Jesus prayed for the ones who haven't heard, but eventually would hear. He prayed for all who would believe, in every age. Which means that Jesus prayed for us. And he also prayed for the people of Haiti. And for the people of India, for the people of Brazil and Venezuela and China and Pakistan. Jesus prayed for us!

I've been reading a little book called: "The Hidden Life," written in 1895 by J.R. Miller. One of the chapters has this title: "The Sin of Not Praying for Others." It picks up on the story of Samuel, a priest in the Old Testament who had poured his life out for the Israelites, only to be basically fired by them in his old age. Miller says that our natural tendency when we are rejected like this is to do immature things. We get all emotional. We get bitter. We get vindictive. We don't think to pray for people who hurt us or frustrate us or reject us, even though that lesson is all over the Bible. Unless we're asking God to rain fire down on their heads, we don't tend to pray for people who aggravate us.

But Samuel was a man of God, and these were his people and even when they rejected him, he said he would keep praying for them because it would be a sin to stop praying. Given their choices, Samuel believed prayer was the only sane thing to do.

He is right. **Prayer is the only sane thing to do.** When Jesus prayed for the ones in front of him and for the ones who didn't yet know him, and also for the ones who would not know for centuries to come, he was doing the most sane thing. Even while his detractors were breathing down his neck, he prayed for them, and he

prayed that those who belong to him would be protected from the evil one, while he also prayed that they would learn to love one another. He prayed that all of us would be one, as he is one with his Father.

Yes, Jesus prayed for unity — “that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me.” This teaches us something important about unity in the Kingdom. As it turns out, the nature of Christian unity is not agreement on a set of issues. It is not everyone getting along, no matter what differences we must ignore in the process. That isn’t unity. That is tolerance, and the Bible never commands us toward tolerance. To tolerate someone is not the same as loving them.

The nature of spiritual unity is agreement **in Christ**. Christian unity is rooted in Jesus. In other words, Jesus teaches us that the way to true spiritual unity is to gather at the foot of the cross and find our unity in all that Jesus died for. In our prayers, unity means bringing those who are on the heart of Christ to the foot of the cross and agreeing **in Christ** over their lives.

Lord, hear our prayer, not that we will learn to tolerate each other, but that we will learn to love even those with whom we disagree. And give us grace to pray **in Christ** over the lives of those you have given us to shepherd and love into the Kingdom.

A Suggested Pattern of Prayer

As you pray through the following prayer points, invite the presence of the Lord into your time of prayer. Each day’s prompt has a Scripture reference for you to pray through. As you pray allow time also to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to you. When you have prayed through the Scripture and prayer point, you may be led to add your own prayers. Pray and consider what action steps you might take in response to the Lord’s leading. Repeat this prayer pattern weekly for the month.

Prayer points:

Sunday: With Jesus, we pray for all those in our lives who do not yet know Christ, that Jesus will see them in Heaven. (Hebrews 7:25)

Monday: With Jesus, we pray for those God has given us to shepherd spiritually. We pray that they will see God’s glory in and through the way we treat and pray for others. (1 Peter 5:2)

Tuesday: With Jesus, we pray that the Father’s love will be in us, and with all who follow Jesus. We pray that the love of God will dictate our every decision and guide our every thought, word, and deed. We pray for grace to love well and to forgive as we have been forgiven. (Matthew 6:14-15)

Wednesday: With Jesus, we pray that his people will be one, and that our unity will go deeper than tolerance toward genuine passion for seeing souls saved, lives restored, and holiness embraced. We ask Jesus to show us as a church how to live maturely as citizens of the Kingdom of God so we can witness to his greater realities. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Thursday: We ask Christ to pour out the gift of spiritual healing along with a desire to pray boldly even for those with whom we disagree. (1 Peter 2:23-24)

Friday: Pray that we will see wonderful salvations in our midst, and that the Holy Spirit will unleash a greater gift and passion for evangelism among us. (Acts 1:8, Acts 4:29-31)

Saturday: With Jesus, we pray that his followers would always have him with them. We ask the Lord to bring unity and stability to our movement, to restore the soul of Methodism, and to guard it against the kind of division that challenges our ability to live holy lives. (John 10:14-16)

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