

Date:

The prayers of Jesus

PRAY Ask God for both a greater knowledge and a deeper experience of him as you spend time in his Word.

READ John 17

REFLECT

Wouldn't you like to know if and what famous people prayed before their defining moments in history? Did Winston Churchill pray as he waited for D-day? How did Mother Teresa pray as she began her life's work among the deprived of Calcutta? And what was the prayer of William Wilberforce as he waited for his bill for the abolition of slavery to be voted on? In this passage, we read what Jesus prayed just before the most significant event of his life: death on the cross.

Jesus had just given his confused and anxious disciples their final instructions (John 13–16), concluding with this, often referred to as the 'high priestly prayer', in which he prayed for his disciples and all believers.

Jesus begins by praying for himself (17:1–5). He recognises that 'the time has come' for him to complete his God-given mission. For Jesus, that meant re-establishing a way for humankind to know God and have eternal life.

Jesus then prays for his disciples (17:6–19), asking for three things:

Protection (17:11,15) Anyone who attempts to follow Jesus will face attacks from the devil.

Joy (17:13) He's not talking about a happy feeling. He's talking about the deep satisfaction that comes from being one with Jesus and part of what he's doing in the world, which gives us significance and reason to rejoice.

Holiness (17:17) He prays that his followers be sanctified – set apart or made holy – by the Word of God, which is why Bible reading and prayer make such a powerful combination.

Jesus also prays for everyone who would believe in him as a result of the disciples' message (17:20–26) – and that includes you and me. His main request is for unity. Even though the institutional Church has become divided and weakened over the centuries, the universal Church is still one body.

APPLY How could you promote greater unity among the followers of Jesus you know?

PRAY Spend some time talking to God about any defining moment that looms on the horizon of your life.

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PRAY Father, I'm so grateful that you are willing to accept me as your child. How wonderful to know that the all-powerful Creator of the Universe knows and cares about me.

READ Mark 14:32–42

REFLECT

Persecuted Christians around the world live in fear of a knock on the door in the middle of the night. We've all faced anxious moments when we know something awful is about to happen, but all we can do is wait. Here Jesus feels 'deeply distressed and troubled ... overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death' (14:33,34) as he waits for his accusers to show up and arrest him. I've always felt this is the most intense prayer Jesus ever prayed.

So how did Jesus pray when he was under such pressure? He starts by simply calling out to his Father (14:36). The word 'Abba' literally means 'Dad'.

When our grandson Noah wakes up in the middle of the night, he calls out in his dark room. Even though he's scared, he knows his parents are nearby. That's how Jesus starts this prayer.

Next, Jesus affirms what he knows to be true: all things are possible for God. It brings assurance to remember that we pray to a God who is all-powerful. Jesus then makes his request: 'Take this cup from me' (14:36); in other words, 'If there's another way to accomplish your plan of salvation without sacrificing me, please do it!' There's nothing wrong with being honest with God in prayer. Jesus concludes by accepting God's will, whatever that may be.

The intensity of Jesus' prayer contrasts with the lethargy of the disciples' prayer (14:37–42). I wonder if Jesus was tempted to give Peter a kick. It's interesting that Jesus rebuked Peter with his old name, Simon; the leading disciple had gone back to his old habits. But, before we condemn the sleepy prayer habits of the disciples, we should admit there are times when our prayers are less than focused. There's a T-shirt I like, showing a man wearing a pair of jeans with holes in both knees. Underneath it simply says, 'Pray hard'. That's exactly what Jesus did at Gethsemane.

APPLY Can you think of a time when you were under intense pressure? What happened to your relationship with Jesus during that time?

PRAY Dear Father, I face situations that overwhelm me at times. But, no matter what happens my heart cry is this: not what I will, but what you will.