



Pastor Michael O'Neill
May 28, 2017

Ashes to Fire, Easter Week 7
With Jesus Preparing for His Ascension
John 17:1-11
Hebrews 7:23-25; Romans 10:17

1. **Praise**
- John 17:1-5

2. **Purpose**
- John 17:6-8

3. **Petition**
- John 17:9-11, 15-19

love.learn.live.
westvalleychurch.com

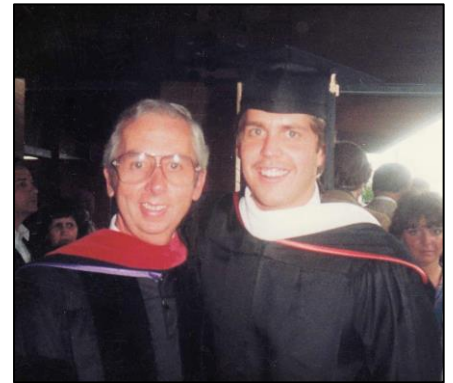


West Valley Church
Michael O'Neill
5/28/17

A2F
Easter Week 7:
With Jesus Preparing for His Ascension
(John 17:1-11)¹

How many of you, when you were growing up, you knew that you had a mom or dad or a grandparent that were praying for you? I wish I had that! I did not have that – at least not as far as I know. How many of you are like me – that as far as you know, you did *not* have a Christian parent or grandparent praying for you? I'm grateful that I have that now – my parents became Christians and I know that they pray for me, but I wish I would have known that when I was growing up – it probably would have saved me from some really stupid choices!

It means so much when you know that someone is praying for you. I understood that in a new way a few years ago. My mentor, who was also my major professor, was Dr. Irving Laird from Northwest Nazarene University. We called him "Doc." Doc taught me in several college classes preparing me for ministry, and he disciplined me in Christ through college, and then continued to be a mentor to me through my ministry career. Some of you know that Doc started what we called the

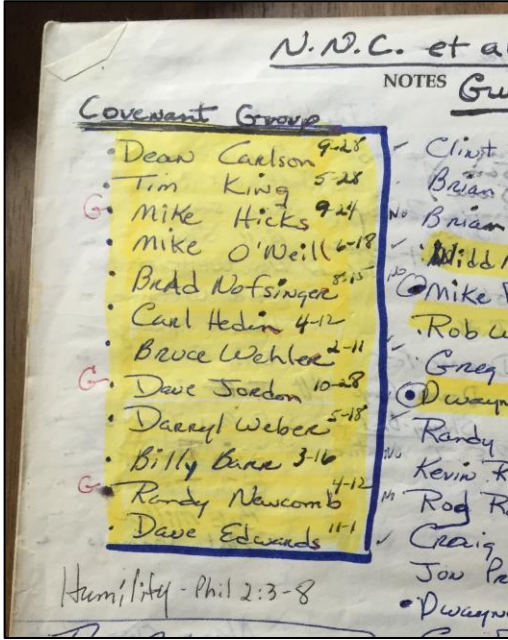


"Covenant Group" – a group of twelve college guys that committed to each other to be truthful, to hold each other accountable, and to help and pray for each other. We met together for 3-4 hours every week, and we did it for the remainder of my college years – three years. After I graduated, Doc continued the Covenant Group, adding new guys as others would graduate, and he did it for over 20 years. There are over 200 guys who were in the covenant over the years.

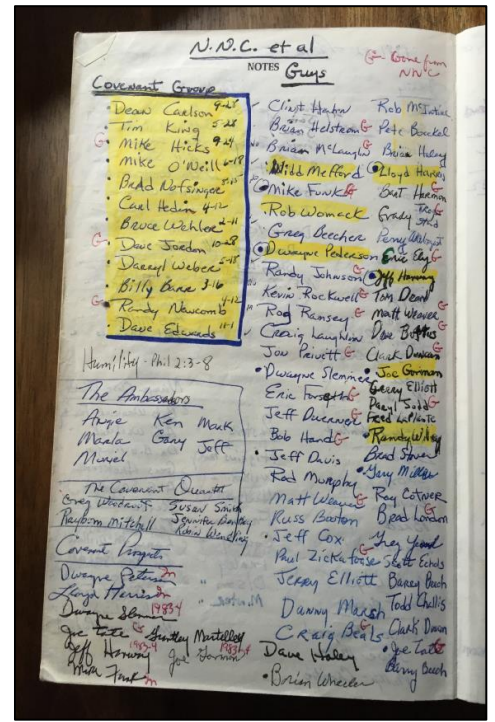
Two years ago, Doc passed away from cancer. I went back to meet up with his family and several covenant brothers and to speak at his funeral, and I had the privilege of looking through Doc's Bible. Doc read through the Bible at least once a year every year of his life, and he had a prayer list that he wrote in his Bible of the names of people he prayed for.

¹ Primary research sources: Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, ID: Welsey Publishing House, 1997), and *Faithlife Study Bible*, Lexham Press.

I took a picture of just one of the prayer pages that he would pray through each week; here's a picture. Those are the just *some* of the people he prayed for every day. Here's a close-up. This list is the names of the guys in the very



first covenant group. Doc wrote this list in 1981. Doc died in 2015. That means that for 34 years Doc prayed for me every day. *Every day!* I'm still trying to take in the enormity of that kind of love, and I can't even begin to imagine the impact it has had in my life - in so many known and unknown ways. I would have loved to be able to listen in on his prayers just once; I would have loved to know what he prayed about for me.



It is an incredible thing to think that someone like that would pray for me. It is even more incredible to think that Jesus himself prays for us. The Bible says that after

Jesus rose from the dead, he became the one through whom we can have a relationship with God, and now he lives forever to save us and pray for us. The Bible says:

“The others who became priests are numerous because death prevented them from continuing to serve. In contrast, (Jesus) holds the office of priest permanently because he continues to serve forever. This is why he can completely save those who are approaching God through him, because he always lives to speak with God for them.” (Hebrews 7:23-25, ceb)

I was amazed that Doc prayed for me once a day for 34 years. How much more amazing is it that Jesus has been praying for me every moment of every day for roughly 2,000 years - and he will continue to do that forever! And more than that, I can actually know what Jesus is praying about for me! I can listen in on Jesus' prayers for me; it's been recorded in the Bible, in our reading for today from John 17. This chapter has been called "The High Priestly Prayer," because Jesus, the Great High Priest, is praying for us. It is a part of our Scripture reading for today from our Journey from Ashes to Fire. We've been reading Scriptures together every morning and evening for the last few months. We started together on Ash Wednesday back on February 10th, and we will conclude our readings next Sunday, Pentecost Sunday, June 4.

Let's listen in on Jesus' prayer for us from this section of John 17. Keep in mind that Jesus has just finished the last two chapters giving his disciples a whole bunch of important last instructions, getting them ready for the fact that he would soon be

crucified, buried, then rise from the dead and ascend into heaven. When he finished that, he began praying for them – and for us. As I read it, I'd like to ask you to stand with me. The Bible tells us in Romans 10:17 that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. So please listen carefully so your faith can grow:

When Jesus finished saying these things, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that the Son can glorify you. You gave him authority over everyone so that he could give eternal life to everyone you gave him. This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent. I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I shared with you before the world was created.

"I have revealed your name to the people you gave me from this world. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. This is because I gave them the words that you gave me, and they received them. They truly understood that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

*"I'm praying for them. I'm not praying for the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours. Everything that is mine is yours and everything that is yours is mine; I have been glorified in them. I'm no longer in the world, but they are in the world, even as I'm coming to you. Holy Father, watch over them in your name, the name you gave me, that they will be one just as we are one.
(John 17:1-11, ceb)*

Thanks for standing and listening; let's be seated.

When Jesus began praying, he did it right in front of his disciples; he wanted them to hear what he was praying about, and that means he wants us to hear what he prays for us about. In his book entitled *Prayer*, author Philip Yancey writes:

"As Jesus once prayed for Peter, now he prays for us... In fact, the New Testament's only glimpse of what Jesus is doing right now depicts him at the right hand of God 'interceding for us.' In three years of active ministry, Jesus changed the moral landscape of the planet. For nearly two thousand years since, he has been using another tactic: prayer."² So it would be good for us to make sure we understand at least this section of Jesus' prayer for us. It starts with...

1. *Praise* (1-5)

We can see the priorities that Jesus had by the things he prayed about, just like it would be for us. Although for us, I think you can learn the most about our priorities by seeing our bank statement; how we use our money shows our priorities. But for Jesus, prayer showed his priorities and they teach us how to pray as well. And he begins with a focus on the glory and the praise that is the Father's.

² Philip Yancey, *Prayer* (Zondervan, 2006), p. 88; submitted by Lee Eclov, Lake Forest, Illinois

Jesus starts off his prayer by demonstrating his trust in God through the very first word: “Father.” Out of that word flowed everything for Jesus. That’s why Jesus taught us to pray by beginning with that, right? The Lord’s prayer, in answer to the disciples’ request for Jesus to teach them how to pray, starts with “Our Father, who is in Heaven...” (pray it with me if you know it...) When we begin prayer this way, it reminds us who God is, how much he loves us, and that we can trust him with whatever it is we are praying about. This is one of the most vital things we must recognize about prayer: *prayer is not a perfunctory practice in order to fulfill a religious duty; prayer is a relational exchange with a Holy God who loves us. (repeat)*

When Jesus focuses on the issue of the glory of God, his first prayer is that the Father would glorify the Son. Now, you might think that at first glance that prayer seems sort of self-serving and vain, but if you look at it a little more closely, you’ll see that it’s just the opposite. The fact that Jesus asked to be glorified indicates that glory comes only *from* the Father, so the more Jesus gets glorified, the more God the Father gets glorified, since God is the source of it. This prayer of Jesus’ was actually entirely *selfless*, not selfish at all; Jesus gave the reason he asked God for more glory: “so that the Son can glorify you.”

The prayer for glory, so that the Father can get greater glory, is tied directly to the authority that the Father gave the Son; Jesus says it was all part of the Father’s plan to save the world through the Son. This is important: in asking for glory, Jesus was fully submitting in obedience to the Father’s will, being the One through whom God would give life to the whole world. That’s why Jesus prayed, “This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent.” It’s in this prayer that we realize that for Jesus to receive glory, it’s not going to be by sitting on a radiant throne for the entire world to see his shining glory. When Jesus prays for glory – meaning for him to be able to complete the Father’s plan that will give life to the world – it is only going to come through his obedient death on the cross. “Glory would show itself in blood and shame”³ and death. Do you see how profound this prayer is? Jesus is asking God to be glorified by completing the plan for Jesus to save the world through his crucifixion and death. That’s why Jesus goes on to say, “I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.”

Can *we* pray this kind of prayer? Can *we* pray that God would be glorified by accomplishing his plans for and through us? Far from being selfish, this is an incredibly *selfless* way to pray.

In this prayer Jesus is also recognizing that he’s soon going to be back to his former glory – “the glory he shared with the Father before the world was created.” This also shows that Jesus is nearing the completion of his task, because the story of his life in this Gospel starts out with a description of Jesus:

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning.” (John 1:1-2a, ceb)

³ Dongell, *ibid*

So we see that the Jesus' glory is evident in his intimacy with the Father, his obedience to the Father, and his transcendence over the world (or his position that is greater than the creation of this world). But still, the glory that Jesus has, comes from the Father – so the glory of Jesus is entirely wrapped up in his relationship to the Father. And it's the Father God who loves us and sent Jesus to save us.

But something else that's important to realize is when Jesus said he would return to his glory, it did NOT mean that he would no longer be human. One of the deepest mysteries of our faith is that the Word became flesh, that God became man, and it wasn't for a limited time – it was for ALL time. Right now, within the Godhead of the Trinity, there is a human face of a resurrected Lord whose body still bears the scars from the torture that WE subjected him to, wounds that WE inflicted, that brought his death for us. Right now, in the Godhead, is a scarred up body that was sacrificed for us. Right now, in the Trinity, there is a physical representation of how much it took to save us. This kind of love is beyond our ability to comprehend, but we sure need it and how we thank God for it!

So this prayer for glory is all about the Father's love for you and me. That, my friends, is a powerful, wonderful, amazing prayer. Aren't you glad you get to hear that prayer for you?

Next, Jesus prays a summary of his...

2. *Purpose* (6-8)

What is striking to me about this portion of the prayer is that Jesus is simply "reporting" or affirming what he has accomplished in obedience to the Father. Often we think that prayer is synonymous with *asking*; that prayer means that we are supposed to ask God for things. But if prayer is based in our relationship with the Father, then prayer is conversational more than it is supplicational. It is more about talking with God than it is about asking of God. It is based on relationship more than requests. I'm not saying we don't ask the Father for things, I'm just saying that asking isn't the primary thing we do in prayer.

Jesus says that he has revealed the Father's name to the people. But wait – didn't God already give his name to the people way back in the Old Testament? Remember when Moses was being sent by God to Pharaoh to set his people free, and Moses asked what God's name was so he could tell people? God said that his name is "Yhwh" – or "I Am." (Exodus 3) So the Jews had known God's name for over a thousand years by the time this prayer was prayed. What was Jesus talking about? Throughout the Bible, a person's name and a person's character are bound together.

That's why when Shelly and I were expecting each of our boys, we prayed about what their names should be, because we wanted their names to represent their character. We didn't know what sex they were going to be, so we had both a boy's name and a girl's name picked out. Sean is an Irish version of "John," which means gift of God. We weren't able to conceive for several years, so he truly was a gift. But we also knew God wanted him to be a gift to the world around him. Ryan means

“little king” because we knew God wanted him to represent King Jesus. Brenden means “brave,” and it also means “prince,” because we knew God wanted him to be brave and influential.

There wasn’t anything magical about how we named our boys; we just wanted to do what was common practice in the Bible, even though it’s not so common anymore.

So when Jesus said that he revealed the Father’s *name*, what he meant was that he was revealing God’s *character*. Jesus called God “Holy Father,” showing us the two key aspects of God’s character: holiness, and love. This holy love is the foundation of the entire gospel. Holy love is what motivated the Father to send the Son into the world to save us from sin and from the inevitable hell and destruction that we were destined for.

Not only did Jesus declare God’s name, Jesus demonstrated God’s character. In everything Jesus did, he revealed to us what God the Father is like. That’s why in verse 11 Jesus says:

“I watched over them in your name, the name you gave to me...”

– in other words, in everything Jesus did and said, it was in keeping with the character and nature of God the Father’s holy love. Jesus was the very presence of the Father in this world, because he is part of the Trinity. He demonstrated the presence of the Father. Then Jesus prayed that this demonstration was enough for the disciples to believe that God the Father sent Jesus.

Can Jesus pray that prayer for you? In Jesus’ conversations with the Father, does he talk about how you have truly believed that God sent Jesus? Does your life and character reflect Jesus’ name – his character?

As I listen in on Jesus’ prayer for me, I want him to say that about me – I want him to say, “I gave Mike the words that you gave me, and Mike received them. Mike truly understands that I came from you, and Mike believes that you sent me.”

My prayer is that in Jesus’ conversations with the Father he says that about you, too. In this final section, Jesus moves to his...

3. *Petition* (9-11, 15-19)

As Jesus prays for the disciples – and for us – he says, “I have been glorified in them.” For the same reasons that the Father was glorified in Jesus, Jesus was glorified in the disciples. Just as the Presence of the Father was in Jesus, so the presence of Jesus is to be in you through the Holy Spirit – the other person of the Trinity. That’s what Jesus was talking about in the passage we looked at last week – about how after Jesus was buried and resurrected, we could receive the Holy Spirit, the advocate.

Just as the Father is revealed and glorified in Jesus to the disciples, Jesus wants to be revealed and glorified in *your* life to the world. Now, Jesus knows that this world is a dangerous place to be a Christ-follower, to be a Christian (which means “little

Christ”), so he prays for our protection. He wants us to continue to be *his presence* in this world, and not to be diluted and polluted by the world around us.

J. Wilbur Chapman was a pastor around the end of the 1800s and into the early 1900s, and he wrote about this as it relates to Jesus’ prayer for our protection: "It's not the ship in the water but the water in the ship that sinks it. So it's not the Christian in the world but the world in the Christian that constitutes the danger."

Jesus prays that we would be unified, because our loving each other and being unified is an incredibly strong witness to the world of the reality of Jesus. Think about it: if Jesus loves each of us, and Jesus is in us, then can you imagine Jesus *not* loving us? But when we don’t love each other, we are trying to force Jesus in us to *not* love us. Each of us has the presence of the Spirit. If we are angry at each other, gossiping against each other, slandering each other, disrespecting each other, it ruins and invalidates our ability to demonstrate the character of Jesus’ love to the world. Maybe the reason more people are not Christians isn’t because of *their* disbelief in God as it is because of *our* disunity with each other...

This is so important to Jesus that he prays about this – and he wants to make sure we hear this prayer. Because our purpose – what Jesus prayed for, for us – (listen!) our purpose is to be the presence of Jesus in the world so that others will receive our words and believe that Jesus came from the Father.

That’s why you and I are presently still in this world. If the sole purpose of our faith were just to get heaven, we’d already be there! But there is a reason we are still here – because as long as we are here, Jesus prays that we will be the presence of the love of God in this world so that others will believe it and receive it. That’s why later in this chapter Jesus prays this for us:

“I’m not asking that you take them out of this world but that you keep them safe from the evil one. They don’t belong to this world, just as I don’t belong to this world. Make them holy in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. I made myself holy on their behalf so that they also would be made holy in the truth.” (John 17:15-19, ceb)

God wants you and I to be the holy presence of Jesus in this world. That’s why he has given us his Holy Spirit to live in us in this world.

I don’t know what Doc prayed for me. I hope that he would be pleased that his prayers for me are being answered. I think if I had heard Doc’s prayers for me, I would have felt an enormous responsibility to live into what he prayed. But here in John 17 – you and I are hearing the prayer of Jesus himself for you and me. Oh my friends, we must feel an enormous responsibility to live into what he not only prayed in the Bible but what to this very day, at this very moment, Jesus prays for you and me.

Pray