

His Prayer

John 17

(verses 1-5)

1. **Definition: Eternal Life**

- John 3:16; Matthew 25:46; John 3:36, 4:14, 5:24;
Romans 6:23; Galatians 6:7-8; 1 John 2:25

2. **Deity: Father and Son**

- Psalm 90:2; 1 Timothy 1:17; Isaiah 44:6;
Deuteronomy 33:27; John 17:3, 14:6, 1:14, 17:3

3. **Discernment: Knowing God**

- James 2:19; Habakkuk 2:14; Hosea 4:6; Proverbs 3:6;
1 John 4:8; Genesis 4:1; Philippians 3:7-14

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Have you ever eavesdropped on somebody? You know – you listen in on someone else's conversation? When I was a young kid – about 7 or 8 – my eavesdropping ended up making my brother really embarrassed and mad at me. Let me explain what happened. It was just my brother and I (there were only two of us. There still is only two of us!), we had shared a room with bunk beds right up to before this particular time. But then he got to move into the spare room and got a room of his own. My brother was 3 ½ years older than me (he still is!), so that meant I had to go to bed earlier than him. So I was in bed but still awake, and I could hear him telling my parents that he kind of missed sharing a room with me. That was a huge revelation to me, because every indicator I had ever gotten from him was that I was too little and annoying and he hated me.

Well, since newly discovering that he actually missed me, I hatched a plan. While he was in the other room talking to my parents, I snuck into his room and hid under his bed. I figured I'd wait until he came to the room, then I'd come out, and we could secretly play without my parents knowing it.

My brother came into the room to start getting ready for bed. Then I thought, "I need to let him know I'm under here!" So I reached out from under the bed to tap him on the foot and let him know that his long lost little brother was under the bed, waiting to play with him.

My plan backfired. After I reached out, and he felt me touching his foot, my brother screamed bloody murder – something about this giant hairy hand reaching out from under his bed! My seven-year old hand was neither giant nor hairy. And to make matters worse, my brother was changing into his pajamas, so just as I was reaching out to touch his foot, his pants dropped around his ankles. Which immediately led to my brother trying to *run* screaming from his room, but he kept falling because, well, his pants were down around his ankles.

I guess I misunderstood what I overheard. I thought he said he missed bunking with me. I guess he said he missed his bunk bed. But if my brother *had* wanted to be with me before that, I can tell you he sure did not *after* that, or ever again, really. So it just goes to show you: eavesdropping can get you into all kinds of trouble!

¹ Resources: William Greathouse, "Beacon Bible Commentary: Vol. 8." Kenneth Chafin, "The Communicator's Commentary." William Barclay, "Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John, Part One." John Barry, "Faithlife Study Bible." Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997)

Well, we are going to eavesdrop today, and for the next three Sundays. But unlike my disastrous eavesdropping with my brother, this is some eavesdropping that we are actually *supposed* to do.

Let me explain: We are beginning a series today called “His Prayer,” looking at John 17. The entire chapter records Jesus’ prayer. It’s often called “The High Priestly Prayer,” because Jesus, our high priest, is praying for himself, and his disciples, and us.

This prayer, in John 17, really ought to be called “The Lord’s Prayer,” because that is exactly what it is. What we typically call “The Lord’s Prayer” from Matthew 6 is not really Jesus praying a prayer as much as it is Jesus teaching us an outline for how we ought to pray. But *this* prayer in John 17 is actually a record of Jesus’ praying. So we are eavesdropping on Jesus’ prayer.

But it’s okay – no one is going to get scared or upset or run out of the room with their pants around their ankles (at least, I hope not!)

Not only is this prayer recorded in Scripture for us to eavesdrop on, Jesus was praying *in front of* his disciples; he actually *intended* for them (and us) to overhear what he was praying about. We know this because on almost every other occasion in Scripture of Jesus praying, we are told that Jesus went off to a private place to pray, but we are not told what he prayed about. Or, in a few places, like in the Garden of Gethsemane, we are given a sort of summary of what Jesus was praying. But in *this* case, we are allowed to overhear the *entire* prayer. Jesus wanted to make sure that the disciples, and we, overheard it.

In this prayer, Jesus is praying, declaring, modeling, and teaching – all at the same time, all in one prayer. So we are going to eavesdrop.

Also, this sermon series is an excellent journey for us to take as we prepare for Easter, because John records this prayer as the last actual thing that happened before Jesus was arrested, tortured, crucified, killed, buried, and then rose from the dead. In every way, this is an important prayer for us to eavesdrop on, to learn from, and to allow it to change our lives.

Today and next week we are going to try to understand what is going on in the first five verses of this prayer, and on the other two Sundays we will look at the remainder of the prayer. But there is so much going on in the first five verses that we really need to break it into two parts, and for today we are going to hone in on just one verse. Let me read the first five verses and then we’ll zero in on verse three. Would you join me in honoring God’s Word by standing as I read it to us?

“After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: ‘Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. *Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.* I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.’” (John 17:1-5, niv *italics added*)

Thank you for standing - would you please be seated.

Now you probably noticed that the passage begins by saying, "After Jesus had said these things..." so you might wonder what those things are that Jesus said. If you are asking that question, then well done! You are asking the right questions as a student of the Word. Hang onto that, because those things he said, and the rest of these five verses, are what we will look at next week. For *this* week, we are looking specifically at verse three, because that verse is what all the rest of the passage is for. So let me remind you again what verse three says:

"Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (John 17:3, niv)

Oh my goodness there is a lot packed in this one verse! So let's begin by seeing that Jesus is giving us a...

1. **Definition:**

There is something really important that Jesus gives us in this verse, and it is a definition of...

Eternal Life

This is an incredible statement here – Jesus is going to give us a definition of what eternal life is; he says, "This is eternal life..." and then he goes on to explain it. But before we get too far ahead of ourselves, it's important that we see something. The Greek word for "life" is "zoe" (zo-ay), which means life: it is your substance, your being, your vitality, your aliveness. Okay? But then you add the word "eternal" in front of that and it takes on a whole new meaning. The word for "eternal" is a Greek word, "aionios" (ay-o-nee-os).

When we think of the word "eternal," what do we think of? We think of forever, right? We think of length of life. But think about this: for the people living in Jesus' day, life really stunk. They were poor, they were oppressed, they occupied a geographical area that comprised the Promised Land, but the promise was long gone because the cruel, greedy, hedonistic Romans now owned their "Promised" land. The Jews occupied space in occupied territory. For the Romans, the Jews were merely a means of income and entertainment – a convenient inconvenience. But the Romans could just as easily wipe the Jews off the face of the earth, and often attempted to in some provinces. So the Jews lived in this oppressive reality of life that at any moment they could be disposed of, either as individuals or as an entire people. So to tell them that their life would now go on forever was the *last* thing they wanted. They wanted *out* of this life; they didn't want to be stuck in a horrible existence forever. But here's the thing: that's *not* the primary meaning of the word "eternal." *Do* we live forever with Jesus? Yes, but that was *not* the main emphasis of the phrase, eternal life. It wasn't about *duration* of life as much as about the *quality* of life.

The word is all about the *quality* of our lives, and only secondarily is it about the duration.

There is only one Being to whom the word “aionios” can be properly used to describe, and that is God. ONLY God is aionios. Eternal life, then, is nothing other than the life of God! Eternal life is God! Say that with me: Eternal life is God! Think about that! For instance, so many of us are familiar with the verse in John 3:16 –

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, niv)

Eternal life is God’s life, so let me read that verse again, but by plugging in this definition. Listen to it again:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have *God’s* life.” (John 3:16, niv)

Every time in the New Testament that it talks about eternal life, you can plug in that change, and it is totally accurate and correct. Try it! Try it with **Matthew 25:46**, and **John 3:36** and **4:14** and **5:24** and **Romans 6:23** and **Galatians 6:7-8** and **1 John 2:25**. They are listed for you on your notes, and that’s just a few. Try plugging “God’s” for “eternal” and it will make sense every time. In fact, it will make *more* sense.

You see, the thing is that *all of us already have* an eternal duration of life. Did you know that? We *all* will live forever. *All* of us are resurrected after we die. And then *all* of us face judgment. The question is not “if” we will live forever – we ALL will live forever. The question is, “where”? Where will we live? The Bible tells us that for those who have trusted in Christ, we will live forever in heaven with him and all those who have been saved by his grace. But for those who have rejected his grace, or simply not accepted Christ’s death and resurrection, they will spend duration life in Hell – a really bad place apart from God and apart from all love, squeezed into that space with the devil and all his demons. It will be crowded, hot, lonely, and tormented.

Jesus knew that we all have *duration* life; what he came to do was give us *quality* life – God’s life – starting right here on earth – not something we have to trudge through for eighty years, to hope to get to heaven someday. In fact, when we die, it only gets *better*.

So what is eternal life? It’s not a timeline, and it’s not a place, it is a...

2. ***Deity:***

We’ve already said that the only Being with this kind of quality life is God, and so eternal life is to have God quality of life in us. But then Jesus goes into more detail about God – God is...

Father and Son

Let’s see what Jesus is saying.

The Bible teaches the eternity of God, without a shade of doubt. God has always existed. His existence extends endlessly in the past and in the future. There was not a time when God did not exist. God never came into being, and He will never cease to exist. Let me cite just a few examples:

“Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” (Psalm 90:2, niv)

In the New Testament, it says:

“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Timothy 1:17, niv)

Here’s another from the prophet Isaiah:

“This is what the Lord says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: ‘I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.’” (Isaiah 44:6, niv)

And here’s a really good one – keep in mind what we said about living in God’s quality of life:

“The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” (Deuteronomy 33:27, niv)

So there is no question that God is eternal, and eternal life – God-quality of life – is only found in Him and him alone; he is the “one true God,” as Jesus pointed out. That reminds us of the many god-substitutes that were available in that day, and in our day. Jesus is insisting that life-giving truth has but one source, and that is God himself.² But then Jesus adds something. Let’s go back and look at it again:

“Now this is eternal life (*God Quality life*): that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3, niv)

At first glance, “and Jesus Christ,” looks like its sort of a clumsily tacked-on afterthought. But it only takes a moment’s reflection to remember that the very heartbeat of the Gospel of John can be seen here – that only Jesus is the “way to the Father” and that, by His true light, we are led to the only true God.³

Eternal life also involves “Jesus Christ, the one (God) sent.” Jesus uses both his given name, Jesus, but also his title: Christ – the Messiah, the sent one, the one who is from God and who is God. Jesus knew exactly who he was. Some people might attempt to say that Jesus never claimed to be God. My answer to that is, “You’ve never read the Gospels. He does it all the time!” And here is another place that he does so. And he made it clear – if we want to have God’s quality of life, it’s going to come through Jesus Christ, the One God sent:

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” (John 14:6, niv)

² Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), 201.

³ Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), 201.

The *only* way to know God the Father is through God the Son, because first, Jesus revealed God to us:

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14, niv)

But Jesus did more than simply reveal a clearer picture of God to us, and that is evident in one simple word in that verse: “know.” Jesus said (see it again):

“Now this is eternal life: that they *know* you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3, niv)

So eternal life involves an important level of...

3. ***Discernment:***

What is it that Jesus means when he tells us that eternal life comes from...

Knowing God?

He’s saying it is not enough to simply *know* that God is eternal. Eternal life – God – quality life – involves also knowing Jesus Christ, whom God sent. James wrote in his letter:

“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.” (James 2:19, niv)

In other words, just acknowledging God’s existence does not bring about God-quality life. In fact, the demons of hell are smarter than us because they are aware and it causes them be very, very, afraid. But I can promise you that the demons have duration life, and NOT God-quality life.

There is more to the word “know” than we might realize.

To *know* God is a characteristic thought that runs through the Old Testament. The prophet Habakkuk dreamed of a time when everyone would know God:

“For the earth will be filled with the *knowledge* of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” (Habakkuk 2:14, niv)

Hosea, another prophet, heard and quoted God’s lament:

“My people are destroyed from lack of *knowledge*.” (Hosea 4:6, niv)

Proverbs reminds us:

“*Know* him in all your paths, and he will keep your ways straight.”
(Proverbs 3:6, ceb)

So when Jesus said that eternal life comes from *knowing* God, there is a part of it that involves *intellectual* knowledge – knowing who God is, knowing about God, and knowing what God’s Word says. That is a *part* of what the word, “know” means, but not the most important part.

It includes knowing that God is not angry and cruel, but that God is love (1 John 4:8). And knowing that God is love was something that Jesus Christ revealed.

But there is something else to this word, “know” besides intellectual knowledge. The Greek word here, “ginosko” (Gee-no-sko), is used regularly in the Old and New Testament to mean “sexual knowledge.” Genesis says:

“The man Adam *knew* his wife Eve intimately. She became pregnant and gave birth to Cain, and said, ‘I have given life to a man with the Lord’s help.’”
(Genesis 4:1, ceb)

When the Bible uses this word *gnosko*, it is telling us that the knowledge of a husband and wife is the most intimate there can be. Husband and wife are no longer two, but one. The sexual act is not the important thing; the important thing is the intimacy of heart and mind and soul, which in true love comes before the act. To know God is not just to have intellectual knowledge of him; it is to have an intimate, personal relationship with him, which is the nearest and dearest relationship in life.⁴

And the word in the original language is a “present tense” verb, so it means a continual, growing knowledge.⁵ It is a continual, more deeply intimate relationship.

I remember standing in a back room with the Pastor and my best man, waiting for our wedding ceremony to start; the music on the organ would begin that would cue us to walk out and begin the wedding. I remember standing back there and thinking, “Soon, at the end of this day, Shelly and I are going to ‘know’ each other in a way we have never known before. But more than that, no matter how well I know Shelly as a person, I will never know everything there is to know about her. In fact, at this moment, I hardly know her at all.” Now you’d think that, by realizing that, I was getting cold feet or getting scared of what I was about to do.

But the fact is, it was just the opposite. I was excited! I thought, “no matter how long we live together, there will always be more things to learn about her, more things to discover and realize, more ways I can become better by knowing her.”

It’s the same way with God, through Jesus Christ.

We have this incredibly profound privilege, because of Jesus Christ, to know God intimately, and to enjoy an ecstatic, moment-by-moment God quality of life because we are *in* his life, and we will never, ever, run out of new things to discover about him, to know him better, to know him more deeply and intimately.

I want you to listen to what the Apostle Paul said about this. I’ve shared a lot of Scriptures with you, but this one really sums them all up. This is an important passage as it relates to Jesus’ prayer, so I’m going to ask you to stand again as I read it. Remember, He’s talking about *knowing* Jesus and being *known* by him, so keep in mind what that word “know” means when you see it, okay? It means a deep, intimate, loving relationship:

⁴ Barclay.

⁵ Greathouse.

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of *knowing* Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to *know* Christ—yes, to *know* the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:7-14, niv)

Isn't that powerful? Is that your prayer? Because THAT is Jesus' prayer for you!

You can be seated. I want you to hear that passage again, but this time from a different translation of the Bible:

But whatever former things I had that might have been gains to me, I have come to consider as [one combined] loss for Christ's sake.

*Yes, furthermore, I count everything as loss compared to the possession of the priceless privilege (the overwhelming preciousness, the surpassing worth, and supreme advantage) of **knowing** Christ Jesus my Lord and of progressively becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him [of perceiving and recognizing and understanding Him more fully and clearly]. For His sake I have lost everything and consider it all to be mere rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (the Anointed One),*

*And that I may [actually] be found and **known** as in Him, not having any [self-achieved] righteousness that can be called my own, based on my obedience to the Law's demands (ritualistic uprightness and supposed right standing with God...), but possessing that [genuine righteousness] which comes through faith in Christ (the Anointed One), the [truly] right standing with God, which comes from God by [saving] faith.*

*[For my determined purpose is] that I may **know** Him [that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly], and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection [which it exerts over believers], and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed [in spirit into His likeness even] to His death, [in the hope]*

That if possible I may attain to the [spiritual and moral] resurrection [that lifts me] out from among the dead [even while in the body].

Not that I have now attained [this ideal], or have already been made perfect, but I press on to lay hold of (grasp) and make my own, that for which Christ Jesus (the Messiah) has laid hold of me and made me His own.

I do not consider, brethren, that I have captured and made it my own [yet]; but one thing I do [it is my one aspiration]: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

I press on toward the goal to win the [supreme and heavenly] prize to which God in Christ Jesus is calling us upward.

I'll ask you again: is that your prayer? Because Jesus is wanting that with you; you've eavesdropped on his prayer and you've overheard him praying that very thing for you.

Closing benediction: May you have eternal life – the life that knows God and the One he sent, Jesus Christ – that you may know him more deeply and intimately every day of your life. And may those around you learn of eternal life through you.