

The Jesus Prayer: Intercession

From a customer service website, here is **Myth #21: People can tell you what they want.** Here are two examples: the infamous New Coke and the Aeron office chair. Despite thousands of sip-tests and taste-based customer feedback, when the New Coke was rolled out in 1985, it was an instant disaster. People hated the taste. The old Coke was back within three months.

Conversely, when the Aeron office chair was tested with various potential buyers, it received very low ratings. The company, Herman Miller, went on to manufacture it anyway, and it became one of the most iconic and best-selling chairs in office furniture history.

What's behind this fact that people don't seem to know what they want? One researcher wrote, "There's a lot of research out there suggesting you have no idea why you act or think the way you do. It feels awful to accept such things, so you create narratives to explain your own feelings and behavior." ¹

So, is it equally true that we don't know what we really want from God? Or, put it this way, is it possible that what you say you want from God isn't what you really need?

In the next section of John 17, we hear Jesus pray for His disciples and for us. If today you were going to ask God for three things, what would they be? Jesus asks the Father to give you three things. Does your list match His list? Whose list do you think represents what you really need? Let's check His list. First...

I. Jesus Reveals to You the Father's Name.

Now, if you have the NIV translation, you need to read the footnote. This is critically important. By reading the footnote, you'll see that what Jesus actually prayed was...

"I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world..." (John 17:6)

I don't know why the NIV doesn't translate it this way because the Greek word for 'name,' *ovoma*, is right there and it's central to the understanding of this verse. Let me see if I can properly explain what Jesus is doing here.

In the Old Testament, a person's name isn't just what you call them. It describes their whole character. When God changed people's names, He was confirming or predicting the character that that person would have. So, when God changed Jacob's name to Israel, He was noting that a change had taken place in his character. Jacob means 'one who deceives or trips you up.' Israel means 'one who interacts or wrestles with God.' Ps. 9:10 says this of God:

Those who know your name will trust in you...

Ps. 20:7 says:

Some trust in chariots and some in horses,

But we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

So, this isn't just talking about being able to recite the various names of God, like Yahweh or Adonai or Elohim. No, it means that you know His nature, His character and His characteristics. So, when Jesus prays, "I have revealed your name to those whom you gave me..." He's saying, "I have enabled them to see your real nature." And when Jesus says, "if you

ask for anything *IN MY NAME*, I will do it;” He isn’t saying, “If you say the magic word, I’ll do it.” No, He’s saying, “If you ask for anything *ACCORDING TO MY NATURE*, I will do it.” And what is the Father and Son’s true nature? They are fully God!

All-knowing, all-powerful, present everywhere; full of grace, truth, compassion, patience, mercy, love, justice, and on and on and on...

Then, secondly, look at how Jesus applies this...

“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me... Holy Father, protect them (how?) by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe (how?) by that name you gave me....” (John 17:9, 11, 12)

Let’s stop here and consider something. What if last Christmas, you wanted to help out a friend, so you splurged and bought them a laptop computer because they were going to be taking some classes and you knew that the laptop would make life so much easier for them. Now, a couple months later, they have you over for dinner and to your horror, you see them using the laptop as an oven pan. They’re cooking dinner rolls on it in the oven and then washing it in soapy water and storing it in drawer. What would you think? They’re completely misusing a very expensive and intricately designed piece of technology.

So, let me ask you, is that not what some of us are doing with the Name of God? We throw it around as a means of expressing our surprise, or worse, our disgust. “Oh My _____!” Do you know what the word ‘blaspheme’ literally means? It’s a Greek word derived from Hebrew words that dispute God’s powers and depreciate His abilities. It’s using words or actions that disrespect the character of God. You can use a laptop computer as a baking pan but to do so is to disrespect its powers and depreciate to nothing its abilities. And, if you use it as a baking pan, it will be totally useless as a computer. You’re free to disrespect and depreciate the name of God but if you do, it will be useless for its real purpose – to protect you, to heal you and to make you one with Him and with those who DO respect it.

Satan is deceiving people all over the world into using spiritual ‘computers’ as baking pans. Don’t fall for his deception! The various names for God should be your most prized possessions. If they are, you’ll use them with great respect and experience their incredible power. The second thing Jesus asks of His Father is that...

II. He would Sanctify Them (Disciples) and Give them His Joy.

I’ve already mentioned, before we celebrated communion, the importance of verse 19 but now let’s combine it with verses 17 and 18. Jesus asks His Father:

“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” (John 17:17-19)

We said earlier that to ‘sanctify’ someone is to ‘set them apart for sacred use or for ultimate purposes.’ Did you know that when you became a follower of Jesus Christ you were ‘set apart for ultimate purposes’? Yes, you were and you still are! I Cor. 6:11 affirms it:

...But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

And this process of being sanctified, being ‘set aside’ or being prepared for ‘ultimate purposes’ is still going on. (I Thess. 5:23)

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And how exactly are we 'sanctified'? Jesus' prayer tells us:

"Sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth." (John 17:17)

Do you battle with any habitual sins? Actually I should say, which habitual sins are you battling? We all have them, but over our lifetime they should gradually be falling away. Why? Because that is what it means to be sanctified. You're becoming more and more like Jesus, and the more you are like Jesus, the more useful you are for 'ultimate purposes.' And what's the most effective tool for removing habitual sins? The Word of God! That's not my idea, that's what Jesus just said. **The truth of God's Word is God's tool to remove habitual sin from your life.** So, how much exposure is your life getting to God's Word these days?

Let me give you a disgusting example. I have toenail fungus on one of my big toes. I've tried all kinds of things to get rid of it, but the last time I was in Israel, I went to the Dead Sea and I walked out into the water for about 20 minutes. Two days later I noticed the fungus was dying. On the way home, I bought some Dead Sea salt crystals at the airport and I've got the fungus on the ropes now, baby! It's going, going, gone!

Isn't that disgusting? Well, so is sin. The Word of God is a fungus killer. But you gotta soak your soul in it. How? Get a Bible reading plan and start soaking for 15-20 minutes a day. You say, "Where do I start? What do I do?" You know what? Have you ever been to the Dead Sea? It's a big body of water. But it wouldn't have mattered if I had walked in at the north, south, east or west side of the Sea. Once I stepped in anywhere –BOOM! – the fungus started to die! We've printed directions in the bulletin on how to access the Bible reading plan that Liz and I have used for 20 years. If you've got nothing else, use that.

And what's the result of this sanctification, besides being less plagued with fungus? Verse 13, Jesus prayed:

"...I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them." (John 17:13)

Do you have that joy yet? This isn't the same as being happy. This isn't necessarily a feeling. Remember, Jesus said He had this joy just hours or even minutes before He sweat drops of blood while He prayed in the garden. **This joy is a certainty that you're in the right place and whatever happens, it will contribute to God's ultimate plan.**

How do we get this joy? Back in chapter 15, which is part of Jesus' same conversation with the disciples, in thirteen sentences He used the word 'remain' 11 times. Remain, remain, remain, remain, remain. Remain in what? Remain in Jesus, like a branch on a vine. Toward the end He says:

"...Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." (John 15:9, 10)

What do we need in order to obey? We need to know His Word. *"Sanctify them by truth; your word is truth."* Soak in the Word, the Spirit will teach you His commands, the Spirit will then help you obey His commands and guess where that leads? (John 15:11)

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

Bingo! That's how the Father will sanctify you and give you His joy. Finally, there's one more thing that Jesus requests from His Father for us all. He asks...

III. That We Would All Be One.

In verse 20 and 21 Jesus prays...

“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.”

(John 17:20, 21)

Once again, we have a profound request here. A request that actually has two parts. First, Jesus is asking that the Father would cause His followers to have such a oneness that it rivals the oneness of the Trinity. Wow! What a request! Did you know that Jesus is still making that request today and every day until He returns? Look at verse 26 which I have re-translated because the NIV leaves out the word ‘name’ again. Jesus actually said: (John 17:26)

“I have made known to them your name, and will continue to make it known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Has this been your experience in every Christian group you’ve ever been part of – oneness like the oneness of the Trinity? Francis Schaeffer, a Christian philosopher and pastor of another age who traveled all over the world, made this observation:

What divides and severs true Christian groups and Christians – what leaves a bitterness that can last for 20, 30 or 40 years – is not the issue of doctrine... Invariably it is lack of love – and the bitter things that are said by true Christians in the midst of differences. These stick in the mind like glue... It is these things – these unloving attitudes and words – that cause the stench that the world can smell... And the world is called on to look upon us and see whether we have love across... party lines. Do they observe that we say, “I’m sorry,” and do they observe a forgiving heart?

...if the world does not observe this among true Christians, the world has a right to make the two awful judgments which these verses (from John 17) indicate: That we are not Christians and that Christ was not sent by the Father. ²

So, where does the power come from again, for creating a supernatural oneness within the Body of Christ? It comes from the ‘name,’ the very nature of God. In fact, this is exactly what Jesus said back in verse 11 when He spoke about His power to protect us:

“...Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one.” (John 17:11)

What an incredible gift we have in knowing the Father through the Son. But we must use His supernatural power to overcome what is natural to us, which is to remain separated from one another by refusing to say, “I’m sorry. I was wrong.” If we truly ‘know’ the name, the nature of the Father, we’ll do what’s necessary to restore oneness with a brother or sister in Christ.

Finally, the second part of this request for oneness is sort of the ‘elephant in the room.’ There are 26 verses in this prayer. Only the first five benefit Jesus. The other 21 benefit others. Three-fourths of His prayer time is about others and what they need. This last sentence, again, illustrates that:

“I have made your name (the source of power) known to them, and will continue to make it known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them (this power is released through relationship). (John 17:26)

Heb. 7:25 makes it clear that today, the risen Christ, continues to pray for us:
Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Did you catch that? Jesus '*lives to intercede for us.*' What do you live for? If we're Jesus followers, if we are being sanctified, then we should increasingly be joining Him in this precious privilege of intercessory prayer, praying for others.

So, here's how we're going to close our worship time. We're going to do three minutes of intercessory prayer. We're going to join Jesus in praying for others. Here's how -

When I say, "Go!" you're going to stand and make a circle with three to five other people. Someone's going to say, "Who has a prayer request you're willing to share?" After two or three have been mentioned, you're going to pray. You can pray out loud or silently, I don't care. Jesus doesn't care. Just pray! After three minutes, I'll stop you. Got it?

- Stand, form a circle of 3-5
- Ask, "Who's got a prayer request?"
- Pray

Ready? Go!

¹ UX Myths, Zoltan Gocza, "Myth #21: People can tell you what they want," 2014

² Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the 20th Century* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971), p. 145-146