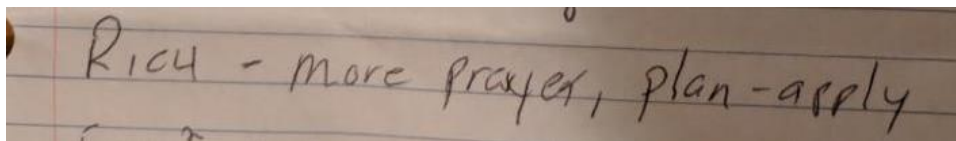


### John 17:1-5

Ryan just finished his second week of Physical Therapy studies. They are enjoying their new home in Minneapolis and we enjoy any chance we get to see them. Since this is our first foray into have in-laws, Karen and I will always be grateful that Ryan married a Hart. We were with them this past New Years Eve when the four parents pulled an epic prank on all of our kids. We made up this fake card game which was a little like spoons but played with steak knives. It was amazing and we happen to have a video.

But it wasn't all fun and games. We also made New Years resolutions together. I actually hate New Years resolutions as a general rule, but this was a special moment where we each decided to work on a spiritual goal for the next year. Mine was easy.



And I was serious this time. I had often vowed to myself to pray more but I always fall short of making progress. This time I made a vow before both combined families. It's easy to say I need to pray more so I knew I needed a plan and needed to work that plan. And I have. I'm not the best prayer on the block but I have made progress. I have reads two books on prayer. The first was JC Ryle's *A Call to Prayer*. This book was written in the 1800's and has become a classic on the subject. Allow me to read the opening paragraph so you can get a taste for where he is headed.

I have a question to offer you. It is contained in three words, Do you pray?

The question is one that none but you can answer. Whether you attend public worship or not, your minister knows. Whether you have family prayers in your house or not, your

relations know. But whether you pray in private or not, is a matter between yourself and God.

I beseech you in all affection to attend to the subject I bring before you. Do not say that my question is too close. If your heart is right in the sight of God, there is nothing in it to make you afraid. Do not turn off my question by replying that you say your prayers. It is one thing to say your prayers and another to pray. Do not tell me that my question is unnecessary. Listen to me for a few minutes, and I will show you good reasons for asking it.<sup>1</sup>

This is more of a long pamphlet than it is a book. It can be read in about an hour and I plan to read it at least once per year. The other book that helped me a lot is Don Whitney's *Praying the Bible*. It's also a short book with a very simple concept. When you read the Bible, pray through the Bible. It's not a new idea but Whitney has a simple and helpful way of explaining it and applying it. So I do this with some routine now. The added benefit of this book is that it means that you must also read your Bible, which many people struggle with anyway, so you can really do two things at once.

A few years ago I read *Praying with Paul* which encourages you to become familiar with and to pray the prayers of the apostle Paul. Paul has a lot of prayers in his letters to churches and because I memorized the book of Ephesians, I had the privilege of memorizing two of these prayers.

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (Ephesians 1:16-21)

You could pray this prayer for your children or for anyone. The same is true with any of Paul's prayers. Reading the Bible can help you pray more and pray better. There's no question about that. And nowhere is this more true than in John 17. This chapter is usually called the High Priestly prayer of Jesus, and rightly so because Jesus is our High Priest and this is his longest prayer. We can learn how to pray, why to pray and what to pray. Let me read the first five verses and we'll jump into this amazing passage of Scripture.

*When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup> since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup> I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup> And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*

The gospels often record Jesus praying. He was always going off on his own to pray, but most of the time we are not given the content of his prayers. Only a few times are we told what he actually prayed and it's always a very brief prayer. He prays continuously but we are not privy to his conversation with His Father. That is interesting all by itself. As I said, there are many recorded prayers of Paul but almost none of the Lord Jesus. I'm not sure why this is the case, but we can only conclude that we did not need to know this information.

You realize that, don't you—that Scripture tells us everything we need to know, but not all that can be known. The gospel of John ends this way. *Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.* This is somewhat of an exaggeration because while he lived in the flesh on earth, Jesus did a limited number of things. If it would have been possible to have recorded every last thing Jesus did in his life, it still would not have filled the earth with books. Jesus is infinite and unlimited, but he did a finite number of things during his 33 years of life on earth.

However, the end of chapter 20 gives us further insight.

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Even during his three and half years of public ministry, Jesus did many things that no one wrote down. We understand that the gospel writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, picked and chose what they would include and then they left everything else out. And John tells us why that was so. *but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* You see, we only need to know certain things—the most important things. All of Jesus' signs were not recorded. Everything he did was not recorded. All that God has done throughout human history has not been recorded and the world literally could not contain those books. Then when you consider that God is omniscient, if he were to share all knowledge with us, we would have to be omniscient.

The conclusion is that he tells us only that which we need to know. The problem is that our flesh wants to know more than we do. We want to know why we are suffering. We want to know why God allows hurricanes, floods, cancer and divorce. Single people want to know when they are going to get married. College students want to know how they will find a job. Our flesh wants to know all of these things and more. But our Spirit wants to rest in the fact that God has told us exactly what we need to know. We can't even handle that which we already know. Imagine if we were given all of this knowledge. We think it would be a blessing but it would actually be a curse. *These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* 2 Peter 1:3 tells us that *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to[a] his own glory and excellence.*

We are not told all that there is to know but we do have access to all we need to know. And the same is true for Jesus' prayers. We don't need to know every word he ever prayed to His Father.

And in reality, that makes what we do have all the more valuable. Think about it. What if a billionaire said this to you. “I care so much about you that I scoured the world for the perfect gift. I searched high and low, over yonder and over dale. I left no stone unturned and price was no object. I’d like to present this gift to you.” Do you see the impact of this? This billionaire could have afforded any gift you wanted—houses, cars, cash—anything. And out of an almost infinite number of choices he chose the very best gift for you, which means he rejected everything else. Most of those other things may not have been bad but they were not the best.

And so it is with Scripture. Out of God’s infinite knowledge, he gave us the words on these pages. He chose exactly what we needed—no more and no less. This is what makes the Word of God so valuable. It’s not just God’s Word but it is his Word perfectly chosen for you and me. Chosen to bring us a knowledge and belief in Jesus. Chosen to give us everything we need for life and godliness.

We will never know all of Jesus’ prayers but as we come to John 17 we get to read Jesus’ longest prayer—longest by a lot. The entire chapter is one long prayer and it’s no surprise that it comes the day before his brutal crucifixion. Let me give you the outline of the prayer first. There are three basic parts to it.

1. Jesus prays for himself (1-5)
2. Jesus prays for his disciples (6-18)
3. Jesus prays for the church (19-27)

This morning we’ll get started on part one—Jesus praying for himself

### **1. Jesus prayed.**

This is so blatantly obvious. but it has profound implications. Jesus prayed. You’ve heard it since you were in Sunday School, but it bears repeating. Jesus prayed. Slow down and chew on that puppy. The Creator of the universe prayed. All by itself this fact should have a huge impact on our prayer life. If Jesus thought prayer was important than so should we. But it’s not just that he thought it was important. It was his connection to His Father. For Jesus, prayer was like breathing. Prayer was not a discipline that he had to learn. Unlike me, he didn’t have to make a New Years resolution and have a plan of action. He never had to confess to anyone that he didn’t pray enough. Those sorts of issues with prayer could never have occurred to Jesus. Prayer was simply his relationship with His Father. The ease and naturalness with which Jesus approaches prayer should be a model and encouragement to us.

### **2. Jesus finished his work.**

The first thing Jesus prayed was, “Father, the hour has come.” “The hour” is not just one hour but the time of fulfillment of Jesus work. You may recall Jesus well known response to his mother when she asked him to help with the wine at the wedding in Cana.

“And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). This is recorded in John chapter two, so it took place at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry. It makes sense that the hour was not yet upon him.

A similar thing was said of him in chapter eight. “These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come” (John 8:20). Do you see, you can’t arrest Jesus, you can’t throw him off a cliff, you can’t demand anything from him because his hour had not yet come. He had work to do and until he finished that work, nothing could stand in his path.

So “the hour” was associated with his work of salvation. And notice what he said in verse four. “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.” This is interesting because his crucifixion was one day in the future and his resurrection wasn’t going to happen for three more days. And since Jesus’ work that he came to accomplish was his death and resurrection, in what sense had he already accomplished it?

If you want to look at the math, the resurrection was only three days away which means that out of his three and half years of public ministry, he had accomplished 99.2% of the work. Or if you include his whole life it’s more like 99.9999% of the work. Even though the next twenty-four hours were arguably going to be the most difficult of them all, he had, in effect, accomplished the work the Father has given him to do.

The approaching hour could have been an excuse for resignation. It’s kind of like being at the top of the rollercoaster. Once you reach the top, all that is left to do is hang on and enjoy (or not enjoy!) the ride. Jesus could have resigned himself to the Father’s will, that he was, if you will, metaphorically, at the top of the rollercoaster. His Father was in control and he had submitted himself fully to His Father’s will. What was going to happen was going to happen. Jesus was going to the cross. He would be beaten, crucified and resurrected. That was going to happen. He knew the hour had come so why not just resign himself to the plan? In many ways, it was a downhill ride and nothing could stop the outcome.

Jesus could have resigned himself and given up. But he did not do that and his prayer is the prime example of trusting in the sovereign will of God while you also pray. Jesus obeyed the Father and fully submitted to the Father but not in a passive, fatalistic sort of way. He forged ahead in the Father’s sovereign plan—“the hour” had come. But he forged ahead through the avenue of prayer.

This can help to answer a common objection that we have with prayer. If God is sovereign over all things, then why should we pray? How can my puny little prayer have any impact on God’s sovereign, unchangeable plan? I might as well stand in the face of Hurricane Florence and start blowing really hard to turn her back into the Atlantic. That’s how much impact our prayers have, right? At least that’s the way it can feel sometimes—like blowing against a hurricane.

Haven’t you felt this way at times? Like all of your prayers are hitting the ceiling and don’t seem to be making a difference? Granted, some of our prayers do hit the proverbial ceiling because they are hindered by our own actions. Here are a few examples.

- Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, **so that nothing will hinder your prayers.** 1 Peter 3:7
- For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, **but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.**” 1 Peter 3:12
- **You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives,** that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. James 4:2-3
- If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. **That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord:** he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. James 1:5-8
- They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.” Luke 20:47
- But your iniquities have separated you from your God; **your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.** Isaiah 59:2

Any of those reasons may be why sometimes your prayers feel like you are blowing into a hurricane. God opposes the proud. He is under no obligation to answer our prayers if we do not pray according to these and other guidelines. It would serve us all well to filter our prayers through this grid to see if any of them are reasons why your prayers may not be answered. But other times we just get stuck on the idea that what we pray doesn’t matter anyway. God will do what he wants to whether or not I offer my measly little petition to him.

J.C. Ryle has an answer to this problem in his book.

Of course I do not say we have a right to expect a miraculous grant of intellectual gifts; but this I do say, that when a man is once converted to God, his progress in holiness will be much in accordance with his own diligence **in the use of God’s appointed means.** And I assert confidently that the principal means by which most believers have become great in the church of Christ is the habit of diligent private prayer.<sup>2</sup>

The key phrase here is “God’s appointed means.” God appointed that prayer is a vital part of Christian lives and growth. Even if it occasionally doesn’t make sense. Even if it may feel like your prayers are blowing against a hurricane, God has appointed that we pray. God has appointed that prayer is the means to talk with God. God has appointed that prayer is the means to cry out to him, to thank and praise him, to beg him to intercede on your behalf. God is sovereign, but God also appoints prayer to do its work in our lives. Jesus is the perfect example of this.

I will conclude with J.C Ryle’s same question. Do you pray?

**Rich Maurer**  
**September 16, 2018**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.chapellibrary.org/files/9513/7643/2894/ctpr.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*