



Sala Anayoendelea Kuomba

*Returning to John 17 and the Unity
Jesus Prays For.*

Kiswahili

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THE BECOMING GREAT SERIES

Timilehin Idowu

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THE PRAYER HE STILL PRAYS

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Returning to John 17 and the Unity Jesus Prays For



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THE PRAYER HE STILL PRAYS

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The Prayer He Still Prays

Returning to John 17 and the Unity Jesus Prays For

by Timilehin Idowu

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To the Body of Christ — every tradition, every tribe, every expression of the one faith.



You were prayed for together.



The prayer has not expired. The Saviour who prayed it still lives.

And the answer is still ours to give.

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5 BEFORE WE ENTER THE UPPER

ROOM

(Or: Why the Most Important Conversation in History Deserves More Than a Footnote)

It was the last night of His life, and Jesus spent it teaching.

Not resting. Not making final arrangements. Not composing one last sermon for the archives. Teaching. For five chapters — John 13 through 17 — Jesus sits with His closest friends and pours out the deepest, most intimate, most theologically concentrated teaching in the entire Gospels. And then, at the end, He prays.

John 17 is that prayer. Twenty-six verses. The longest recorded prayer of Jesus in Scripture. And unlike the model prayer He gave His disciples in Matthew 6 — which was a framework for their praying — this is Him actually praying. This is what the Son of God says to the Father when the door is closed and the hour has come and everything is about to happen.

It should stop us completely.

Here is what Jesus prayed for on the night before He died.

Not for His own safety. Not for comfort in what was coming. Not even primarily for the disciples in that room, though He prays for them too. He prayed for you. He prayed for me. He prayed for every person who would believe in Him through the message of those disciples — which is every genuine follower of Christ who has ever lived, including every person holding this book.

And at the centre of that prayer — repeated, insisted upon, returned to with the urgency of a man who knows He will not be here to enforce it — is one thing:

That we would be one.

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6 (Let that land for a moment. On the night before His crucifixion, with everything the Incarnate Son of God could have prayed for, He chose to spend a significant portion of His final prayer asking the Father for the unity of the Church. The Church that, two thousand years later, has approximately forty-five thousand denominations. The Church that has divided over baptism methods, worship styles, which translation of the Bible is most anointed, whether to have pews or chairs, and — in at least one documented historical case — which direction to face when saying the Creed. The Lord must be doing something that requires considerably more patience than most of us have.)

This book is built on a single, non-negotiable premise: John's Gospel contains the last and most complete teaching of Jesus.

And that teaching ends with a prayer for unity.

Therefore, any division in the Body of Christ is not just an organisational inconvenience or a theological disagreement or a cultural preference. It is an unanswered prayer. It is the reply "not yet" to the last thing Jesus asked for.

That is the weight this book carries. And it carries it not with accusation — because every one of us, in some way, in some season, in some posture of pride or fear or tribalism, has contributed to the fracture. It carries it with hope. Because if Jesus prayed it, the prayer is not unanswerable. It has not expired. It is still rising from the lips of the One who ever lives to make intercession (Hebrews 7:25). And a prayer that the Son of God is still praying is a prayer that the Father has every intention of answering.

This book is a companion to *Selah: Growing Up to Be a Child*. That book is about recovering our individual identity as children of God.

This one is about recovering our collective identity as His family.

They are written to be read together, in either order.

We are going to walk through John 13 to 17 together. We are going to sit in the Upper Room as John reported it. We are going to hear what Jesus said, in the order He said it, with the weight the context

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7 gives it. And then we are going to ask ourselves — honestly, without the defensive reflexes of denominational loyalty or theological tribalism — what it would actually cost us to give Jesus the answer He prayed for.

(Spoiler: it will cost us something. It always does. But the question is whether what we are protecting is worth more than what He asked for. I suspect, if we sit with that question honestly, most of us will discover the answer is no.)

Let us enter the Upper Room. Take off your shoes, metaphorically speaking. The ground in this chapter of history is holy.

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8 CHAPTER 1



The Last Classroom



What kind of teacher spends his final night giving his longest lesson?

"Before the Passover feast began, Jesus was fully aware

that his hour had come to depart from this world and to return to his Father. And how he loved his dear ones who were in the world! He loved them fully and at the very end he expressed it completely."

— *John 13:1, TPT*

John begins Chapter 13 with a sentence that has been breaking people for two thousand years.

'He loved them fully.' The Greek is *eis telos* — which carries the double meaning of 'to the end' and 'to the uttermost.' To the last moment and to the last depth. Both. Simultaneously. There was no part of His love that was held back, no reserve capacity He kept for Himself, no ceiling on what He was willing to do for the people in that room — or for the people who would come after them.

And then He got up and washed their feet.

On the night before the crucifixion, with the full knowledge of what was coming — John specifically notes that Jesus knew who was going to betray Him, knew where He had come from and where He was going — He picked up a towel and knelt before twelve men whose spiritual track record was, at this point, frankly mixed. He washed the feet of Peter, who would deny Him three times before sunrise. He washed the feet of the disciples who had spent the last week arguing about which of them was the greatest. He washed the feet of Judas, whose heart had already been settled.

He washed all of them.

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9 (The foot -washing is a masterclass in the kind of love Jesus is about to teach, because it is completely impractical from every angle. Feet were the most servile washing assignment in the ancient household — the job given to the lowest -ranking servant. No one of any standing washed feet voluntarily. And here is the Son of God, the one through whom the universe was created, with a towel around His waist, demonstrating in the dirt and callus of twelve pairs of travelled feet

exactly what He is about to say with His mouth for the next four chapters.)

The Upper Room is not just the location of the Last Supper. It is the location of the Last Lesson.

John's Gospel, you must understand, is structured differently from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Those three — the Synoptics — give you the Jesus of the roads and the crowds, the parables and the healings, the confrontations with Pharisees and the feeding of multitudes. John gives you the interior Jesus. The conversations. The long dialogues. The 'I AM' statements. The deep, slow, layered teaching that requires more than one reading and rewards a lifetime of returning.

And the crown of John's Gospel is these five chapters. Chapters 13 to 17 are the most extended, uninterrupted teaching of Jesus in any of the four Gospels. He is alone with His disciples. There is no crowd to manage, no Pharisee to answer, no sceptic in the audience. Just Jesus, His closest friends, a table, a meal, and a few hours before everything changes forever.

He used every minute of it.

What He Chose to Teach

When a great teacher knows they are dying, what do they choose to leave behind?

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10 Jesus chose to leave behind love. He chose to leave behind the Holy Spirit — the Comforter, the Counsellor, the One who would continue and complete everything He had begun. He chose to leave behind the vine and the branches — the image of the only kind of fruitfulness the Kingdom recognises, the kind that comes from staying connected rather than straining independently. He chose to

leave behind His peace. His joy. His promise that they would not be abandoned.

And He chose to leave behind a commandment so radical, so counter-cultural, so impossibly demanding in its full implications that most of us have quietly converted it into a niceness guideline rather than confronting what it actually requires.

"So I give you a new commandment: Love one another.

Just as I have loved you, love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

— John 13:34 –35, TPT

'As I have loved you.' Those four words are the most demanding four words in the entire New Testament, and we walk past them every Sunday.

He is not saying: love each other with the natural affection that people feel toward those they happen to like. He is saying: the standard of your love for one another is the standard of My love for you. The towel and the basin. The washing of feet you did not deserve to have washed. The cross you were supposed to have been carrying yourself. That is the benchmark.

This commandment is not a standalone instruction. It is the root of the vine, the ground of the prayer, the thing that all the teaching is pointing toward and depending on. The unity He will pray for in John 17 cannot exist without this love. It is not the unity of an

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11 organisational merger or a theological compromise. It is the unity of people who love each other the way He loved them.

(We have, as a Church, spent enormous energy on the unity of agreement — everyone believing the same things, worshipping the same way. Jesus spent His last night pointing to a completely different kind of unity: the unity of love. And the difference between those two is the difference between a committee resolution and a resurrection. One you can produce with enough meetings. The other requires the Holy Spirit and a willingness to die to yourself.)

Why John Alone Recorded This

It is worth pausing to ask: why did John record these five chapters when the other Gospel writers did not?

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all cover the Last Supper. They record the institution of the bread and the cup. They mention the singing of a hymn, the departure to Gethsemane, the arrest. But none of them — none of them — capture the teaching of John 13 to 17. The most extensive, most intimate, most theologically rich teaching Jesus ever gave is preserved in a single source: the disciple Jesus loved.

John was the one leaning against Jesus at the table. He was the one close enough to ask whispered questions. He was the one who stood at the foot of the cross — the only male disciple to do so. He was the one to whom Jesus, from the cross, entrusted His mother. John was the closest. And the closest always hears the most.

He was not teaching because it was Tuesday and a lesson was scheduled. He was teaching because He loved them — fully, to the end — and He wanted them to have everything they would need for what was coming. Not just after His death. After His ascension.

After the Church was born and began to spread and began, inevitably, to fracture.

He saw all of it. And He taught toward all of it.

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12 ■ SELAH ■

Sit for a moment in the room. It is evening in Jerusalem. Twelve men are reclined around Jesus, none of them fully aware that this is the last time everything will be like this. They do not know about the garden, the arrest, the trial, the nails.

But Jesus knows. And He is still there. Still present. Still teaching. Still loving them fully, to the end. This is the Jesus who speaks in John 13 to 17. Not a hurried Jesus, not a distracted Jesus, not a Jesus who has given up on His imperfect, arguing, competitive disciples. A Jesus who looks at everything that is broken about the people He is leaving His mission to — and says: I am going to give you everything you need.

The least we can do is listen.

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13 CHAPTER 2



He Went Out. And It Was Night.



What the departure of Judas tells us about the depth of everything that followed

"And after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately

went out. And it was night."

— *John 13:30, TPT*

Four words that carry the weight of the universe: and it was night.

John is not simply reporting the time of day. John never simply

reports anything. For the writer who opens his Gospel with 'In the beginning was the Word' and who structures his entire narrative around light and darkness, the notation that Judas 'went out' into the night is a theological statement of the first order. Judas stepped out of the Light of the World and into darkness. And in doing so — in making the choice he had already settled in his heart — he inadvertently set the stage for the most extraordinary evening of teaching in human history.

Here is the thing about John 13 to 17 that most readers miss entirely: the deepest, most intimate teaching Jesus ever gave was delivered after the betrayer left the room.

Jesus waited. He knew who Judas was. He knew what Judas had decided. He washed Judas' feet. He handed Judas the bread.

And then, when Judas went out into the night, Jesus turned to the eleven who remained — the imperfect, confused, deeply loved eleven — and opened His heart to them.

This is not a small detail. It tells us something essential about how Jesus teaches and who He teaches it to. The most profound revelations of the Kingdom are not given in the open marketplace of

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14 religious performance. They are given in the inner room — to those who have, however imperfectly, chosen to stay.

And it tells us something about John 17 specifically. The prayer for unity that Jesus prays later in that same evening is not a prayer for the superficial togetherness of people who merely occupy the same religious space. Judas occupied the same religious space as the twelve for three years. He ate with them, travelled with them, performed miracles with them. And he was never truly one with them, because his heart was never with the One at the centre.

(The prayer 'that they may be one' is a prayer for a unity that goes far deeper than institutional affiliation, shared doctrine, or common worship style. It is the unity of people who have, at the moment of ultimate decision, chosen to stay in the room with Jesus. That is the only unity worth praying for — and it is the only unity Jesus prays for.)

The Night That Made Room for Everything

When Judas went out, something shifted in the atmosphere of the Upper Room.

There is a moment in John 13:31, immediately after Judas' departure, that deserves close attention: 'When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.'" Now. The word has urgency, relief, arrival. Now the hour is fully present. Now the disclosure can begin.

What follows — John 14, 15, 16, and 17 — is Jesus speaking without concealment to those He has called His own. No parables to filter the meaning for the mixed crowd. No holding back because of who might be listening and misusing what they hear. The door has closed behind Judas and the lamp burns only for those who remain. This matters for how the Church reads and applies this teaching. The intimacy of the Upper Room discourse is not the intimacy of a public

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15 manifesto. It is the intimacy of a father speaking to his children on the last night before a long journey. The words were given to those who belonged. And belonging — not religious proximity — is the prerequisite for receiving what Jesus is about to say.

"I am not praying for the world, but for those whom you

have given me, for they are yours."

— *John 17:9, TPT*

He prays for those the Father has given Him. The ones who remained. The ones who, despite their imperfection and their failure and their not -yet-understanding, were genuinely His. Judas' departure does not make the remaining eleven more worthy. They will fail in their own ways before morning. But it clarifies the question that the rest of the evening is answering: what does it look like for people who genuinely belong to Jesus to live with each other in the world?

That is what John 13 to 17 is about. Not religion in the abstract. Not institutional Christianity. The lived, embodied, love -demanding, Spirit -sustained reality of people who have given themselves to the same Lord and now must learn to give themselves to each other.

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The departure of Judas is not just a narrative event. It is a mirror. Not to identify 'the Judas' in the communities around us — that way lies self -righteousness and paranoia. But to ask the more personal question: in my own heart, in my own life with God, have I stayed in the room? Or have I been physically present in Christian community while having walked out in the deeper sense — my heart already decided, my allegiance already elsewhere, my participation a matter of habit rather than genuine belonging?

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16 The door is still open. The eleven were not perfect. You do not need to be perfect to be in the room. You just need to be genuinely His. And if you are — genuinely, imperfectly, sometimes -stumblingly His — then what Jesus is about to teach is for you.

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17 CHAPTER 3



The Comforter Is Coming



Jesus teaches about the Holy Spirit — and why the Church desperately needs to remember this

"And I will ask the Father and he will give you another

Comforter to be with you forever — the Spirit of Truth."

— *John 14:16–17, TPT*

Jesus is leaving. He knows it. And the disciples, when they begin to grasp it, are terrified.

John 14 opens with an instruction that is both pastoral and revealing:

'Don't let your hearts be troubled.' The fact that He has to say it tells you exactly what is happening in the room. Hearts are troubled. Questions are multiplying. Thomas, bless him, voices the one everyone is thinking but was too afraid to ask: 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' (John 14:5, TPT). Which produced one of the most extraordinary sentences in the Bible:

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to

the Father except through me."

— *John 14:6, TPT*

But the question behind all the questions in the room is not theological — it is relational. They are not asking 'what is the nature

of the divine route to the Father?' They are asking: what happens to us when You leave? How do we do this without You?

And then Philip asks the question that unlocks one of the most important statements in the entire Farewell Discourse.

'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' (John 14:8, TPT). Philip has been with Jesus for three years. He has watched the

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18 miracles, heard the teaching, seen the transfiguration in the company of Peter and John. And still — still — there is a longing in him that has not been satisfied. Show us the Father. That will be enough.

Jesus' response carries a note of gentle, tender grief: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.' (John 14:9, TPT).

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. Pause on that. Jesus is not saying He is the Father — the Trinity maintains the distinction of persons throughout this entire discourse. He is saying: the Father's nature, the Father's love, the Father's way of moving in the world — all of it is visible in Me. To encounter Jesus is to encounter the Father.

(This is one of the most direct statements of the unity of the Father and the Son in all of Scripture, and it is spoken in a private room to a small group of confused disciples the night before the crucifixion. Its implications for John 17's prayer are enormous: the unity Jesus prays for the Church is the same unity that exists between Himself and the Father. The same nature. The same love. The same will. Not uniformity of method — but oneness of heart.)

Jesus says: I am not leaving you alone. I am sending Someone else.

The Greek word Jesus uses — and John preserves it carefully — is

parakletos. Translated variously as Comforter, Counsellor, Helper, Advocate, one called alongside. The breadth of translation options is itself instructive: this is a word that does not reduce to a single English equivalent because the Person it describes does not reduce to a single function.

The Paraclete is the One who stands beside you when you are in court — advocating. The One who stands beside you when you are overwhelmed — helping. The One who stands beside you in the dark — comforting. The One who stands beside you in confusion —

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19 counselling. The same Person, the same presence, in every circumstance. Always alongside. Always sufficient.

"And I will ask the Father and he will give you another

Comforter to be with you forever — the Spirit of Truth.

The world is unable to receive him because it doesn't see him or know him. But you know him, because he is always with you and will be in you."

— John 14:16 –17, TPT

The Spirit of Truth

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit 'the Spirit of Truth' three times in John 14 to 16. John does not include repetition casually.

The Spirit of Truth does not deliver a different message from Jesus. He illuminates the same message more deeply. He takes the words of Jesus and makes them alive, specific, personal, and present in the life of the believer. He does not speak on His own — Jesus makes this explicit: 'He will not speak on his own authority, but will speak whatever he hears.' (John 16:13, TPT). The Spirit is the living,

continuous presence of Jesus in the believer's life. He is not a substitute for Jesus. He is the means by which Jesus is present in every generation, every culture, every language, in every believer simultaneously.

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you

into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you."

— John 16:13–14, TPT

'He will glorify me.' This is the Holy Spirit's own job description as Jesus gives it. And it is the cleanest test available for discerning genuine Spirit activity from its imitation.

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20 When the Spirit is genuinely at work, Jesus is glorified. When a ministry, a movement, a prayer meeting produces an outcome where people leave knowing Jesus better, loving Jesus more, following Jesus more faithfully — the Spirit has been at work. When the outcome is that people primarily know about the spiritual gifts, or know about the leader, or know about the movement — something else has been going on.

(The Church has had a complicated relationship with the Holy Spirit across the centuries. Some traditions have treated Him as the shy member of the Trinity — present in theory, rarely invited to do anything specific in practice. Others have overcorrected and made the Spirit's activity the entire point, sometimes losing sight of the Father and the Son in the process. What Jesus describes in John 14 to 16 is

something different from both: a Spirit who is fully and permanently present, who leads into all truth, who glorifies the Son, and who makes the Father known. The Spirit's job description, as Jesus gives it, is stunning in its scope and completely unthreatening to the centrality of Jesus.)

The Spirit and the Unity Question

The Holy Spirit and the unity of the Church are inseparable in Jesus' teaching.

Jesus does not promise that the disciples will achieve unity through better organisational frameworks, more careful theological dialogue, or the right denominational structures. He promises the Holy Spirit. And it is the Spirit — the same Spirit, dwelling in every genuine believer regardless of tradition, geography, language, or background — who is both the source and the substance of the unity Jesus prays for.

Walk into a charismatic prayer meeting in Lagos and a Reformed worship service in Edinburgh and a Catholic mass in Rome and you will encounter, in each of those places, people in whom the same

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21 Spirit lives. The Spirit does not have a denominational affiliation. He has a Person: the Lord Jesus Christ. And He lives in everyone who belongs to that Person.

(This is one of the most uncomfortable truths in Christian theology, because it means the person whose worship style makes you want to leave the room and the person whose theological framework makes you nervous and the person who claps on every beat when you are a second -and-fourth -beat person — that person has the same Spirit living in them that lives in you. The Spirit of God recognises them even if your tradition does not. And the question John 17 is going to

ask us is: should we not also recognise each other?)

■ S E L A H ■

Philip asked: 'Show us the Father.' And Jesus said: 'You have been looking at Him.' The Father is revealed through the Son. The Son is made present through the Spirit. The Spirit lives in every genuine believer. Which means: every genuine believer is a carrier of the Father's revelation.

Have you been looking at your brothers and sisters in the faith — across every tradition and expression — and seeing that? Or have you been looking at the tradition and missing the Presence within it?

T H E P R A Y E R H E S T I L L P R A Y S

22 CHAPTER 4



The Vine and the Branches



Jesus teaches the only kind of fruitfulness the Kingdom recognises — and it has nothing to do with trying harder

"I am the sprouting vine and you're my branches. As you

live in union with me as your source, fruitfulness will stream from within you — but when you live separated from me you are powerless."

— John 15:5, TPT

John 15 opens with eight words that should end most of our strategic planning meetings early.

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.' (John 15:1, TPT).

Jesus introduces the last great 'I AM' statement of His ministry not as a declaration of power but as an invitation to connection. I am the vine. You are the branches. The relationship between us is not optional, peripheral, or something to graduate out of once you have developed sufficient spiritual strength. It is biological. It is the difference between alive and not alive.

A branch that is not connected to the vine does not gradually become less effective. It dies. Inevitably, without exception, regardless of how healthy it looked before the separation. Because a branch has no independent life. Its life is entirely sourced from its connection to the vine.

Jesus is not being poetic here. He is being precise.

The Greek word for 'remain' or 'abide' — *meno* — appears ten times in John 15 alone. Ten times. John writes with extraordinary intentionality; he does not repeat a word ten times in a single chapter without meaning the reader to feel the weight of it. Remain. Stay connected. Do not leave. Do not drift. Abide.

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23 This is the non-negotiable infrastructure of Kingdom life. Not activity. Not output. Not the impressive metrics of religious productivity. Connection. The kind of ongoing, attentive, dependent relationship with Jesus that produces fruit the way a branch produces grapes — not by straining, not by strategy, but by staying in the vine and letting the life of the vine flow through it.

(The Church has spent considerable energy trying to produce fruit through the branch's own ingenuity. We have systems and programmes and conferences and strategies and campaigns and branding exercises and social media content calendars. And Jesus looks at all of it and says: have you tried simply staying connected to

me? Because the branch that stays in the vine does not need a content strategy. It just needs to not leave.)

What Abiding Actually Looks Like

Abiding is not a spiritual advanced degree. It is a posture of continued dependence.

It is the daily prayer that is not a religious performance but an actual conversation. It is the habit of bringing decisions to the Father rather than making them and informing Him afterward. It is the willingness to remain in the difficult season without detaching from the Vine when the season gets hard — because the branch that abides does not only abide when conditions are favourable. It abides in winter as well as summer, in drought as well as rain.

"If you live in me and my words live in you, ask for

whatever you want and it will be done for you."

— John 15:7, TPT

Notice the sequence: if you live in me and my words live in you. Both. Not just the devotional warmth of feeling connected to Jesus without the Word shaping your thinking. And not just intellectual engagement with Scripture without the relational reality of living in

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24 Him. Both together. The Word of God and the Spirit of God working together in the life of a believer who is genuinely abiding — this is the condition Jesus describes as producing whatever -you-ask fruitfulness.

The Vine, the Branches, and the Body of Christ

Here is where John 15 becomes directly relevant to the unity question that John 17 will press.

If Jesus is the vine and believers are the branches, then every genuine branch is connected to the same vine. There is one vine. There are many branches. But the branches do not give life to each other — the vine gives life to all of them. And any branch that is genuinely in the vine is therefore connected, through the vine, to every other branch.

The unity of the Church is not something we achieve by working toward each other horizontally. It is something that already exists vertically — in our shared connection to the same Vine. When Christians are divided from each other, they are not primarily missing a human relationship. They are refusing to acknowledge a spiritual reality that is already true: we are in the same Vine.

Pruning: The Part Nobody Puts on Their Vision Board

Jesus introduces something in John 15 that the fruitfulness -and- blessing circuit of contemporary Christianity has largely skipped over: pruning.

"He cuts off every branch that doesn't produce fruit, and

he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more."

— John 15:2, TPT

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25 The Father is the gardener. The gardener prunes. Even the fruitful branches. Especially the fruitful branches. Pruning is not punishment. It is the precise, skilled act of a gardener who knows that a branch carrying too much of its own wood will eventually be unable to support the fruit it was made for. The pruning removes what is unnecessary — not what is evil, but what is not needed for

the purpose.

Every fruitful believer will be pruned. Every fruitful community of faith will be pruned. The question is not whether the gardener will use the shears — He will. The question is whether the branch will trust the gardener's purpose in the pruning.

(For the Body of Christ, this has a corporate dimension that we rarely discuss. Some of our divisions have been the Father's pruning. Some things that felt like endings were the Gardener's hands removing what had served its season so that what remains can carry more of what matters. The hardest pruning is not the removal of what is dead — it is the removal of what was once genuinely fruitful but has run its course. The branch that trusts the Gardener does not hold on to the pruned wood.)

■ S E L A H ■

Where are you in John 15 right now? Are you abiding — genuinely, attentively, dependently connected to the Vine? Or have you drifted into a version of Christian life that runs primarily on the branch's own effort, sustained by memory of connection rather than the reality of it?

And is it possible that the difficulty of this present season is not abandonment by the Vine, but the precise, skilled work of the Gardener who loves you enough to remove what is not serving the fruitfulness you were made for?

The Vine is not going anywhere. Come back. Stay. Abide.

T H E P R A Y E R H E S T I L L P R A Y S

T H E P R A Y E R H E S T I L L P R A Y S

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"This is my commandment: that you love one another just

— *John 15:12–13, TPT*

This is Jesus describing His own imminent death. In present tense. In the same sentence as a command for how we are to love

each other.

He is not offering this as a theoretical philosophical observation about the upper limits of human love. He is saying: I am about to do

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28 this. For you. And this is the standard of love I am commanding you to have for one another. Lay down your life for your friends. Not occasionally feel warmly toward them. Not maintain cordial relations. Not tolerate their theological differences while privately considering yourself more enlightened. Lay down your life.

(The most uncomfortable thing about this commandment is how immediate and specific it is. Loving 'the Church' in the abstract is not actually difficult — the abstract Church has no annoying habits, no history with you, no theological positions that make you want to flip a table. The Church in the abstract is easy to love. The person in the third row who said that thing six years ago and never apologised is where the commandment actually lives. Jesus did not say 'love the concept of your brothers and sisters.' He said love one another. The one in front of you. Including that one.)

Friends, Not Servants

There is a transition Jesus makes in John 15 that is so significant it deserves its own section.

"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not

know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

— John 15:15, TPT

No longer servants. Friends. The Greek word is philos — a friend, a

beloved companion, someone with whom you share the intimacy of mutual knowledge and mutual belonging. Jesus has shared everything the Father told Him. Every mystery He was given to reveal, He revealed. Every dimension of the Father's nature He was commissioned to make known, He made known. He gave them all of it. And He calls them — and by extension, every genuine follower — friends.

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29 Here is the question this raises for the unity of the Body of Christ: if Jesus calls all His followers friends — all of them, from every tradition and theological position that genuinely belongs to Him — how do we justify treating each other as strangers? The person in the denomination you grew up criticising is Jesus' friend. The person whose worship style feels foreign is Jesus' friend. The person whose theological tradition you were taught to be cautious of is, if they belong to Christ, called by the same name you are called by: friend.

Not because all theological positions are equally valid — they are not. But because the friendship Jesus offers is based not on doctrinal alignment but on relationship with the Son. And a person who is the Son's friend has a prior claim on our love that no secondary disagreement can legitimately override.

The World Will Know

Jesus returns, in John 15, to the external witness dimension of the love commandment.

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if

you love one another."

— *John 13:35, TPT*

By this. Not by the correctness of your theology. Not by the impressiveness of your miracles. Not by the size of your congregation or the reach of your media platform. By this. The love among you.

Jesus chose love — of all the things He could have chosen — as the primary apologetic for the Gospel in the world. This means, with a logic we cannot escape, that every act of public Christian division is a negative advertisement for the Gospel. Every time the watching world sees Christians fighting each other, they receive data that

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30 Jesus' claim is false. Because if His disciples are recognisable by their love, then disciples who hate each other are not recognisable as disciples at all.

(The world has been watching the Church's public arguments for a very long time now. They are watching us fight over things that, from the outside, must seem extraordinarily small given the stakes we claim are involved. And in fairness, some of our internal battles have been about things that are genuinely important — truth, justice, the protection of the vulnerable. But many of them have been about power, preference, and the deeply human desire to be the right one. The world, watching those battles, has not concluded that Jesus is real. It has concluded that if He is, His followers have not understood Him. We should feel the weight of that.)

■ SELAH ■

Is there a 'one another' in your life — a specific person or community in the Body of Christ — toward whom your love is currently more

theoretical than real?

The love command is not a feeling to wait for. It is a choice to make.

'As I have loved you' — not as you feel about them right now. As

He loved you. Despite everything. To the end.

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31 CHAPTER 6



The World Will Hate You



Jesus teaches about opposition, grief, and the pain that becomes joy — and why the Church keeps being surprised by all three

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me"

first."

— *John 15:18, TPT*

Right in the middle of the most tender and intimate teaching of His ministry, Jesus pauses and delivers the single most counter-culturally unpopular pastoral message of the entire evening.

The world will hate you.

Not 'the world might find you somewhat challenging.' Not 'certain segments of society may have theological disagreements with your worldview.' The world will hate you. And Jesus frames this not as a tragedy to be avoided but as a confirmation to be expected: 'If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.' (John 15:19, TPT).

The hatred is a side effect of the choosing. You are hated because

you are His, and He was hated because He was the Father's. The branch that is deeply in the Vine will make the same impression on the world that the Vine makes. And the Vine was crucified. (The Church has spent an enormous amount of energy trying to avoid this outcome. We have adjusted our message to be more palatable. We have softened the edges of the Gospel to fit more comfortably with prevailing cultural assumptions. We have, in some cases, essentially relocated the Church inside the world's value system and then expressed genuine surprise that the world no longer hates us. The relief

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32 of not being hated is understandable. But Jesus' teaching in John 15 suggests it may not be a reliable sign of health.)

The Servant Is Not Greater Than the Master

"Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than

his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."

— John 15:20, TPT

The same connection that links us to His rejection links us to His reception. Every person who responds to the Gospel is responding to Jesus through us. Every life transformed by the message we carry is the continued work of the One who sent us. The Church that understands this does not measure its success by the world's approval rating. It measures it by faithfulness to the message and the manner of the One whose name it carries.

The Pain That Becomes Joy

Jesus does something in John 16 that most preachers skip over on the way to John 17. He talks about grief.

"Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the

world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world."

— John 16:20 –21, TPT

The disciples are going to grieve. The cross will feel like catastrophic loss. The world — the same world Jesus has just told them will hate them — will rejoice at what looks like the defeat of everything the disciples gave their lives for. And Jesus meets that imminent grief not by minimising it but by putting it in the frame of a woman in childbirth.

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33 The pain is real. It is not minimised, bypassed, or spiritually explained away. The woman in labour is not told: your pain is an illusion because of what is coming. She is told: the pain has a purpose. The pain is the before. The joy is the after. And the after is so complete that the before is not forgotten — it is absorbed into the wonder of what it produced.

This is one of the most tender things Jesus says in the entire Farewell Discourse, and we walk past it too quickly.

Because the Church, in its pursuit of unity and its grief over its divisions, needs to hear this too. The fractures of the Body of Christ are real griefs. The schisms, the betrayals, the splits, the cold wars — they have produced real pain in real people who loved the Church and watched it break. Jesus does not tell us to pretend that pain is

not there. He does not offer a spiritual formula that erases the memory of the wound.

He says: your grief will turn to joy. Not will be replaced by joy — will turn to it. The grief itself will undergo a transformation, the way labour transforms into birth. The pain of the Church's fractures, carried honestly and given to the One who prays for our unity, can become the very thing that fuels the longing for the answer to His prayer.

(Some of the most passionate advocates for Christian unity are people who have been most hurt by Christian disunity. The wound, surrendered to the Spirit, can become the calling. The grief, turned, becomes the engine. This is how the Lord tends to work — He does not waste the difficult things. He converts them.)

But the Spirit Will Testify

Jesus does not leave the disciples with only the bad news. He never does.

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34 "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father — the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father — he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning."

— *John 15:26 –27, TPT*

The Spirit will testify. And so will you. Both together. The Spirit's testimony and the believer's testimony are not competing but complementary. The Spirit moves internally, in the hearts of those who hear. The believer speaks externally, into the world's air. When both are happening simultaneously, the world's hostility cannot ultimately prevent the message from finding its mark.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have

peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart!

I have overcome the world."

— John 16:33, TPT

He has overcome the world. The Greek is perfect tense — completed action with continuing results. The cross that happens tomorrow is, in the language Jesus uses tonight, already victory. The tomb that will be sealed on Friday has already been surrendered to the One who will walk out of it on Sunday. The Church that lives in this reality — genuinely, not just creedally — is a Church free to love sacrificially, because it is not spending its energy on self-protection.

■ SELAH ■

Is there a grief about the Body of Christ that you have been carrying privately — a fracture, a betrayal, a division that cost you something real? Bring it to the One who told His disciples their grief would turn to joy.

Your wound is not disqualifying. It may be exactly what qualifies you. The woman in labour is not celebrated despite the pain. She is celebrated because she went through it and kept going.

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36 CHAPTER 7



The Night He Prayed for You



John 17 — where Jesus opens the door and lets us hear what the Son says to the Father

"After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed."

— John 17:1, TPT

We are now in the most sacred room inside the most sacred night in human history.

John 17 is not a chapter of the Bible. It is an open window onto the interior conversation of the Trinity. Jesus lifts His eyes toward heaven and speaks to His Father — and John, seated nearby with the attentiveness of the disciple who never missed anything, records every word.

Before we read a single verse of this prayer, we need to feel the weight of the fact that we are being allowed to read it at all. This is not a public address. This is the Son of God, on the last night of His earthly ministry, laying everything before the Father. And we are being permitted to listen.

John 17 divides into three movements. Jesus prays for Himself (verses 1–5), for His disciples (verses 6–19), and for everyone who will believe through their message (verses 20–26).

That third movement — verses 20 to 26 — is the one that should stop every believer in their tracks. Because we are in it. You, reading this book. Me, writing it. Every person who has come to faith through the chain of testimony that began in that upper room and has been passed, generation by generation, translation by

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37 translation, martyrdom by martyrdom, across two millennia — we are the 'those who will believe through their message.'

Jesus prayed for us. Before we existed. Before most of our great-grandparents existed. Before our nations existed. On the night before He died, He already knew our names and already held them before the Father.

(I find it genuinely difficult to sit with John 17:20 without something happening in my chest. Not because it is emotionally manipulative — it is simply a statement of historical and theological fact. He prayed for you. Specifically. Knowingly. As an act of deliberate intercession before the One who could answer. The prayer is still being prayed —

Hebrews 7:25 tells us He ever lives to make intercession. This is not

past-tense religious history. This is your present reality.)

The First Movement: A Son's Confidence

"Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your

Son may glorify you."

— John 17:1, TPT

Notice what Jesus does not pray for in His own section of the prayer. He does not pray for safety. He does not pray to be spared from what is coming.

He prays: glorify Your Son. And immediately: that Your Son may glorify You. The circularity is deliberate and beautiful. He is not asking for the glory of personal triumph. He is asking for the glory of completed mission — the specific, costly, irreversible kind of glory that comes from laying down your life and having the Father raise it back up. This is the first lesson of John 17 for the Body of

Christ: the unity we are called to pursue is not for our own benefit primarily. It is for the Father's glory. The right motive changes everything about how we pursue it.

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38 The First Unity Request: Protecting What Is Already His

Before Jesus prays for the unity of future believers, He prays something specific for the disciples in the room — and it is the first time the word 'one' appears in John 17.

"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, TPT

So that they may be one. This is not the later, larger prayer for all believers. This is Jesus asking the Father to protect the unity of the small, imperfect, soon -to-be-scattered group of disciples in the room. He is about to go to Gethsemane. They are about to scatter. He knows this. And He asks the Father, specifically, to hold them together through what is coming.

The protection of their unity is connected directly to the protection of the Name. The disciples are not unified by their own virtue — they are unified by the Name given to the Son by the Father. When they are scattered by fear and grief and the disorientation of the cross, the Name is the thing that will gather them back. It is the Name that creates the unity and the Name that sustains it.

Sanctify Them in the Truth

"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

— *John 17:17, TPT*

Jesus asks the Father to sanctify His disciples through the truth. Not through religious performance. Not through following a more rigorous moral code. Through truth. The truth about the Father's love, the Spirit's presence, the vine's life, the commandment of love. Truth sanctifies. But truth held without love is not yet fully truth. Truth used as a weapon against brothers and sisters in the Body is

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39 not yet being wielded by someone who has been sanctified by it. The same truth that divides from falsehood is the same truth that commands us to love the Body that has been sanctified alongside us. What Jesus Reports to the Father

"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of

the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word."

— *John 17:6, TPT*

They have obeyed Your word. Jesus says this about the disciples — the same disciples who argued about who was greatest, who fell asleep in Gethsemane, who would scatter at the arrest, who would deny Him before morning. He says this about them. He presents them to the Father not as they are at their worst but as they are in terms of their fundamental direction and belonging: Yours. Mine. Theirs.

This is how the Son intercedes. Not by cataloguing our failures, which would be a very long list. Not by pretending our failures do not exist, which would be dishonest. But by presenting us in the light of our belonging and our direction — people who have received the

word, who know the truth, who belong to the Father through the Son. He ever lives to make intercession. And the intercession He makes is the confident presentation of people He has claimed as His own.

(This should permanently change how you feel about your own standing before God in your worst moments. When you have failed — and you will — Jesus is not suddenly silent in Heaven. He is there. Speaking. Not defending the failure but holding your name before the Father as the name of someone He died for, someone He rose for, someone He is coming back for. The intercession is continuous. The love is uninterrupted.)

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40 ■ SELAH ■

Jesus prayed for you on the night before He died. He is still praying for you. Right now. This moment.

What does it feel like to sit with that? Not as a doctrine to agree with — as a present reality to inhabit? You are held in prayer by the One who defeated death. The unity He prays for is not beyond reach — because the One praying for it is the One for whom nothing is beyond reach.

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41 CHAPTER 8



That They May Be One



The prayer Jesus spent the most words on — and the answer we have been

withholding for two thousand years

"I am not praying only for these disciples, but also for all

those who will one day believe in me through their
message. I pray for them all to be joined together as one
— even as you, Father, are in me and I am in you."

— John 17:20 –21, TPT

Here it is. The prayer. The one that has been the destination of
this entire book.

'That they may all be one.'

Six words in English. In the original Greek, it is even shorter: hina
pantes hen osin. That all of them may be one. It is the heart of John
17. It is, arguably, the heart of Jesus' entire legacy prayer on the
night before He gave everything. And it is the most
comprehensively unanswered prayer in the history of Christianity.
Not because God has not been willing to answer it. The Spirit has
been at work toward it since Pentecost. The prayer is still being
prayed by the risen Christ who ever lives to make intercession. The
answer is not being withheld from heaven's side. It is being withheld
from ours.

Every schism in Church history. Every denominational division.
Every congregation split. Every theological cold war. Every
social media argument between Christians. Every time one part
of the Body has said to another part 'I have no need of you' —
all of it has been the Church's accumulated, collective answer to

the prayer of John 17: not yet. Not here. Not us.

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42 (There are approximately 45,000 Christian denominations in the world as of this writing. Forty -five thousand. Some of them were formed over genuine doctrinal necessity — where truth required separation from serious heresy. But many of them — many, many of them — were formed over worship styles, leadership preferences, cultural allegiances, personality conflicts, and the deeply human inability to remain in the same room as someone who is differently wrong from how you are wrong. Jesus prayed: that they may b e one. We replied: that they may be forty -five thousand. The Lord's patience is, evidently, extraordinary.)

The Standard Jesus Sets for This Unity

Jesus does not leave the unity He prays for undefined. He gives it a standard. And the standard is staggering.

"I pray for them all to be joined together as one — even

as you, Father, are in me and I am in you."

— John 17:21, TPT

As the Father and the Son are one. That is the template. Not the unity of a coalition government, maintaining the appearance of cooperation for strategic reasons. Not the unity of a sporting team, where individuals submit to a shared goal for the duration of the season. The unity of the Father and the Son.

What is the unity of the Father and the Son? It is not uniformity — the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father. They are distinct persons. But they are one in will, one in love, one in purpose, one in nature. What the Father loves, the Son loves. What the Son does, He does because He sees the Father doing it (John 5:19). There is no competition between them, no jostling for position. Complete distinction and complete union, simultaneously.

This is the unity Jesus prays for the Church. Not the erasure of our distinctives — different gifts, different callings, different expressions of the same faith. But the oneness of shared love, shared

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43 purpose, shared submission to the same Father. A unity in which the Methodist and the Pentecostal and the Catholic and the Baptist are as distinct as the Father and the Son and as united as the Father and the Son.

'That They May Be Brought to Complete Unity'

In John 17:23, Jesus adds a word that most translations render

'complete' or 'perfect' — and it is a word that should stop every careful reader of the New Testament entirely.

"I in them and you in me — so that they may be brought

to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

— John 17:23, TPT

The Greek word translated 'complete unity' is based on the root *teleioo* — to bring to completion, to fulfil, to finish. It is the same root as the word Jesus will cry from the cross: *tetelestai*. It is finished. The unity Jesus prays for is connected, linguistically and theologically, to the finished work of the cross. The 'it is finished' of Calvary is the foundation on which 'that they may be completely one' is built.

This means Christian disunity is not merely a failure of organisation or theology. It is a contradiction of the cross. When we fragment the Body, we are fragmenting something that was purchased as a whole.

When we say 'I have no need of you' to another part of the Body, we are in effect saying the cross was insufficient to make us genuinely one.

So That the World May Believe

Jesus gives a reason for the unity He prays for. And it is not primarily for the Church's benefit.

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44 "I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one — as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me."

— *John 17:21, TPT*

So that the world will believe. The unity of the Church is the evidence for the credibility of the Gospel. Which means — let us be slow and honest here — that the Church's disunity is a direct impediment to the world's faith.

When a sceptic looks at forty -five thousand denominations and says 'I cannot take seriously a movement that cannot even agree with itself,' they are not being unreasonable. They are looking at the evidence available to them and drawing a conclusion. The prayer of Jesus in John 17 is a prayer that the Church's unity would be the apologetic that no argument can provide: visible, lived, relationship - evident proof that the love of God has actually transformed the people who claim to carry it.

(The most powerful evangelism the Church has ever done has occurred when believers loved each other with a love the watching world could not explain. The early Christians were remarkable not primarily for their theology — though their theology was sound — but for their visible, tangible, sacrificial love for one another and for those

outside the community. 'See how they love one another,' wrote Tertullian, reporting the observation of the watching world. That sentence should haunt us. The world is still watching. The question is what they are seeing.)

The Glory That Unites

"I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be

one as we are one."

— John 17:22, TPT

Jesus says He has given us the same glory the Father gave Him — specifically for the purpose of unity. Not the glory of human

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45 achievement. The glory of the Son. The weight and beauty of who He is, given to the Church as the ground of its unity. We are united not by our own goodness but by the glory we have been given. The same glory in me that is in you — if we both genuinely belong to Him — is the foundation of our unity that no secondary disagreement can legitimately destroy.

■ SELAH ■

If Jesus' prayer for unity is still being prayed, the question is not whether the Father will answer it. The question is whether we will cooperate with the answer.

What would it cost you, specifically, to take one step toward the part of the Body of Christ that feels most distant from you? Not to abandon your convictions. Not to pretend differences do not exist. But to acknowledge that the person across the divide also belongs to the One who prayed for both of you on the same night, in the same

That step is the answer beginning to be given.

46 CHAPTER 9

[illegible]

"Since we are now joined to Christ, we have been given

— *Ephesians 1:7, TPT*

This is the bond of the Body of Christ. Not shared values. Not common theology. Not cultural similarity. The bond is blood. The blood of the covenant. The blood of the Lamb. The blood that the

writer of Hebrews says 'speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.'

(Hebrews 12:24, TPT).

The blood speaks. And what it says is not conditional on how well the redeemed people treat each other.

Abel's blood cried out from the ground for justice — for an accounting of the wrong that had been done. The blood of Jesus speaks something different: not accusation but advocacy. Not 'where is the justice for My death?' but 'these are mine — I paid for them.'

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47 Before the Father, the blood of Christ is the permanent, unanswerable case for the inclusion of every person it covers. Every genuinely redeemed person — regardless of which pew they sit in, which translation they carry, which style of music moves them to worship, which eschatological position they hold, which ecclesiastical structure they call home — is covered by the same blood. The same advocacy is active for all of them. The same Father receives all of them through the same Son.

(If you need a practical exercise in unity, try this: before you dismiss, criticise, or write off a brother or sister in the faith, stop and say the following three words: purchased by blood. Not your blood — the blood of Someone for whom the price was everything. Before you draw the line that says 'we are the real Church and they are not,' ask yourself: were they purchased by blood? If the answer is yes, the line has to be drawn very carefully and for very serious reasons. Because the blood of Christ does not recognise the denominational boundaries we have drawn. It only recognises what it covers.)

What Has Been Breaking Us Apart

Let us be honest about this — John 17 requires honesty —

because the prayer we are trying to answer cannot be answered from a position of comfortable denial.

What has been breaking the Church apart? The answer is a compound fracture with multiple causes, some genuinely serious and some embarrassingly small.

Truth has divided us. Sometimes rightly — genuine heresy, the denial of the person of Christ, the rejection of the Gospel's non-negotiable content, requires the willingness to draw lines. The Church has known that since Nicaea, since the Reformation, since every generation that has faced a question that actually matters.

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48 These are the divisions that pain us but must sometimes be maintained.

But fear has also divided us. Fear of losing influence, of being absorbed, of being changed. The tribalism that says: if we allow them too close, we will lose what makes us distinct. This fear is understandable. It is also, examined in the light of John 17, a statement of insufficient faith in the Spirit's ability to maintain what is genuinely of God in any tradition.

Pride has divided us. The pride that cannot admit that another tradition has found something we have lost, emphasises something we have neglected, carries something we need.

And power has divided us. Power — the desire to be the largest, the most anointed, the most correct, the most central — has fractured the Body with a precision and a thoroughness that the enemy of the Church could never have achieved from the outside.

The prayer of John 17 does not minimise any of this. Jesus knew what was coming. He prayed into what was coming. The prayer was

not naive — it was desperately, urgently, presciently realistic about the fracture that lay ahead. And He prayed anyway. Which means the only question remaining is the question of our willingness.

Stronger Than What Divided Us

Here is the good news, and it is genuinely good: the blood of Christ is stronger than every division we have built.

Stronger than five centuries of Protestant -Catholic division.

Stronger than the East -West schism of 1054. Stronger than the cultural divisions that have placed believers in separate congregations in the same city for generations. Stronger than the charismatic/cessationist debate. Stronger than the worship wars.

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49 Stronger than the accumulated grievances of church splits and betrayals and power struggles and disappointed hopes.

Stronger. Not because those things are small — some of them represent genuine pain, genuine injustice, genuine theological stakes. But because the cross is the largest thing that has ever happened in the history of the universe. And the unity it purchased is purchased with a permanence and a power that human division cannot revoke.

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two

groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility."

— Ephesians 2:14, NIV

He is our peace. He has made the two groups one. He has destroyed the dividing wall. These are past tense verbs describing a completed action. The wall is destroyed. In Christ, the categories that define

(There are places in the Church where the wall has been rebuilt so thoroughly that it looks load-bearing again. But Jesus did not dismantle it provisionally. He destroyed it. And every act of genuine reconciliation between brothers and sisters in the Body is an act of revealing what is already true: the wall was demolished at Calvary. We are building on ruins when we maintain our divisions. And building on ruins is exhausting work for no eternal return.)

The blood of Christ covers you. And it covers the person in the Body you have been most distant from. The same advocacy is active for both of you. The same Father receives you both. The same Son prayed for you both on the same night, with the same urgency, from the same love.

50 The blood is the bond. And the bond is stronger than the breaking.
Always. Without exception. It has always been stronger.

John 17 is not a prayer that expired — the Son who prayed it still lives, and the answer is still ours to give

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me

where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

— John 17:24, TPT

Jesus ends His prayer not with a lament but with a longing. He wants us with Him. He wants us to see His glory — not the stripped, suffering glory of the cross He is about to endure, but the full, unguarded, pre-creation glory of the Son who was loved by the Father before the world began. He wants us to be where He is. To see what He sees. To inhabit the reality of the Father's love that has been the source of everything He is and everything He has done. This is where John 17 ends. Not in a catalogue of divisions to overcome or a list of structural reforms to implement. It ends in a vision of the final unity — the eschatological union of the Church with her Lord, seeing His glory, dwelling in His love, finally, fully, forever one. That ending is certain. The risen Christ guarantees it. The final unity is not in question. The question is what we do between now and then. And the answer is not complicated, even if it is costly. We answer the prayer. Not perfectly — we are not capable of perfect unity this side of eternity. Not completely — the eschatological fullness waits for His return. But genuinely. Increasingly. With the Spirit's help and the blood's bond and the love command's imperative shaping every decision about how we treat one another.

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52 What Happened After the Prayer

Here is something about John 17 that we must not lose in the theology: immediately after praying it, Jesus went to Gethsemane.

John 18:1 says: 'When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his

disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it.' He prayed the prayer — and then He walked toward the arrest, the trial, the cross.

The prayer for unity was prayed at the threshold of suffering. It was prayed on the way to the cost. Which means that this prayer is not a distant, theoretical aspiration. It is something Jesus was willing to die for. The unity He prays for in John 17 is the unity He purchases in John 18 to 20. The prayer and the price are connected. They are the same movement of the same love.

When the Church takes the unity of John 17 seriously — when we genuinely begin to answer the prayer — we too will find that it costs something. The laying down of institutional pride. The releasing of the need to be the dominant tradition. The willingness to receive from those we have historically dismissed. The humility to be changed by the encounter with the other.

These are small deaths. But they are deaths of the right kind — the kind that the Father raises.

What the Answer Has Looked Like Historically

The prayer has not gone entirely unanswered. Let us be fair.

In Nicaea in 325, bishops from across the empire set aside their local differences and together defended the full divinity of Christ against Arianism. The unity held long enough to produce a creed that the Church still recites across virtually every tradition two millennia

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53 later. It was costly, contested, imperfect — and it was the prayer being answered.

In the darkest seasons of persecution — the catacombs of Rome, the underground churches of every hostile regime, the prisons and labour camps where believers from different backgrounds were thrown together by shared suffering — the distinctions that divide us in comfort vanished in the furnace. Jewish background and Gentile background did not matter in the colosseum. Charismatic and cessationist did not matter in the Soviet prison. What mattered was: do you belong to Him? And if you both did — you were one. The prayer has been answered in the mission field where the luxury of denominational tribalism is unavailable because survival requires it. It has been answered in disaster relief, where the Church from across every tradition serves the same suffering community without asking what worship style they prefer. It has been answered every time two believers from traditions that should be suspicious of each other find, in the course of genuine encounter, that they are looking at the same Lord from different windows.

(These moments are not the end of the answer. They are the beginning. They are signs of what is possible — a down payment on the fullness that Jesus prayed for and the Spirit is still moving toward. The question is whether the Body of Christ will learn to pursue in times of comfort what it has only managed in times of crisis. The prayer does not have a 'except during peacetime' clause.)

A Final Word on John's Gospel

We have walked through five chapters of Jesus' final teaching, and it is worth pausing before we close to ask: why did John write this Gospel at all?

John gives his own answer at the end of his Gospel, in one of the most honest authorial statements in all of Scripture:

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54 "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

— *John 20:31, TPT*

Written so that you may believe. Written so that the life of the Son of God, as John witnessed and recorded and preserved it, would produce faith in those who read it — and through faith, life. The eternal, abundant, Spirit -breathed, vine -connected, Father -loved life that Jesus offered in John 10:10: 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'

John wrote because he knew that these words were life, and that the world needed the life. And the words John chose to preserve more than any other — the section he gave more chapters to than any equivalent teaching in any other Gospel — were these five chapters. The Upper Room. The last lesson. The love command. The Vine. The Spirit. The prayer.

John knew what was most important. He was the closest. He heard the most.

And he gave us John 13 to 17 because he believed — correctly — that this is what the Church most needs and most consistently forgets: that Jesus loved us to the end, gave us everything we need, commanded us to love each other with His own love as the standard, and prayed — prayed, on the night before He gave His life — that we would be one.

The prayer is still being prayed. He who ever lives to make intercession has not moved on from John 17. The question is still before us. And the answer — the beautiful, costly, Spirit -

empowered, blood -bonded, grace -sustained answer — is still ours
to give.

The Final Call

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55 To the Body of Christ, across every tradition, every theological family, every worship style, every cultural expression of the one faith:

You were purchased by the same blood. You are indwelt by the same Spirit. You are loved by the same Father. You were prayed for by the same Son, on the same night, in the same prayer, with the same longing.

The things that have divided us are real. Some of them matter. But none of them — not one — is stronger than what has been given to hold us together. The blood of the covenant is more powerful than the history of the conflict. The prayer of the Son is more certain than the fragmentation of the centuries. The Spirit of unity is more present in every genuine believer than any spirit of division that has worked to keep us apart.

This is not sentimentality. This is John 17.

Jesus taught it. John reported it. The Spirit preserved it. The Father is waiting to answer it.

And the answer begins every time one part of the Body of Christ decides, in the face of everything that would justify maintaining distance, to cross the floor. To reach across the divide. To say: we were both purchased. We are both beloved. We are both in the prayer. And that is more than enough to begin.

"My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as

you and I are one, Father — that just as you are in me and

I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me."

— *John 17:21, TPT*

■ S E L A H ■



T H E P R A Y E R H E S T I L L P R A Y S

56 Pause here.

He prayed for you.

He prayed for them.

He prayed for you together.

The prayer has not expired.

The bond is the blood.

And the blood is still speaking.

Cross the floor.

T H E P R A Y E R H E S T I L L P R A Y S

57 A W O R D T O W H O E V E R I S

R E A D I N G T H I S

And Has Not Yet Stepped In



This book has been addressed to the Body of Christ. But God is not limited by my address list.

If you have read these pages and something in you has stirred — not in your theology, not in your religious habit, but in the deepest part of you — that stirring has a name. It is the Holy Spirit. And He does

not stir without purpose.

Everything Jesus prayed in John 17 is available to you. The love He described. The unity He prayed for. The vine -life He offered. The Spirit He promised. The friendship He extended. All of it. The door into all of it is not a denomination, not a sacrament, not a behaviour modification programme. The door is a Person.

Jesus said it Himself on the night this book has been sitting in: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except

through me." (John 14:6, TPT). That is not arrogance — it is mercy.

Because if there were many ways, you would have to find the right one. When there is one Way who also happens to be the Truth and the Life, all you have to do is come to Him.

He already prayed for you. John 17:20 says He prayed for "all those who will one day believe." If today is your day — if this is the moment you stop observing from the outside and step through the door — then you are in the prayer. You were in it before you knew it existed.

You do not need to be clean before you come. You do not need to have your theology sorted. You do not need to find the right church first. You need to come to Him. Exactly as you are. Right now.

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58 If that is you — say this. And mean it.

"Lord Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God.

I believe You died for me and rose from the dead.

I am not coming to religion — I am coming to You.

Forgive every wrong I have done.

Come and live in me.

Make me Yours.

I receive You now — as my Saviour and my Lord."

If you prayed that and meant it — welcome home. You are in the prayer. You are in the vine. You are in the family.

Now find a church that loves Jesus and loves each other. Stay there.

You have just become part of the answer He prayed for.

Tell someone. We want to know.

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59 ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Timilehin Idowu is a pastor, youth mentor, and transformational writer based in Lagos, Nigeria. He serves as a pastor at Worship Nation International Church, Festac Town, and co-founded Flourish Playhouse — a Creche, Nursery, and Primary School — in the same community where he has spent years preaching the Gospel and investing in the next generation.

His publishing and content work operate under the brand The Kingdom Lifestyle — a conviction lived out loud: that the life Jesus modelled and the prayer He prayed are available in full to every child of God, regardless of tradition, tribe, or season of life.

The Prayer He Still Prays is a companion volume to Selah: Growing Up to Be a Child, which explores what it means to recover our individual identity as children of God before we can recover our collective identity as His family. Both books belong to a growing body of work — the Becoming Great Series — that asks what it looks like to flourish, completely and honestly, in Christ.

Timilehin is married to Oluwakemi. They are raising three children

— Mojolaoluwa, Olaoluwatitomi, and Oluwafoyinfolami — who,
he is the first to admit, pray with a faith and a directness that
regularly convict their father.

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Kuhusu Mwandishi

Timilehin Idowu ni mwalimu, mwandishi, na mhudumu wa Neno. Shauku yake ni kusaidia waamini kugundua kina cha Maandiko na kukua katika utimilifu wa wito wao katika Kristo. Yeye ndiye mwandishi wa Mfululizo wa Becoming Great.