

What Does Jesus Pray for You?

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

So John 17, I'm going to begin reading in verse 11, halfway through verse 11, that's where the break is, through 19.

Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

When I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost, except the son of destruction, that the scripture may be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

[1 : 11] I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

And for their sake, I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. This is the word of the Lord. You know, there are few things more palpable in our culture right now than anxiety. Among the young, less than half of Gen Zers, that is those born between 1997 and 2012, believe their mental health is not good.

[2 : 18] Nearly 10% of kids right now have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. In his new book, *The Anxious Generation*, Jonathan Haidt, best-selling author and psychologist, has noted an over 100% increase in the diagnosis of depression, anxiety, and anorexia among the young.

But it's not just among the young. In 1963, one in five women were taking medication for their unhappiness. Now the number is more like one in four, and the percentage is no doubt continuing to climb.

Recently, one of my friends sat in a room with 150 educators. A psychologist asked everyone in the room to close their eyes and raise their hand if they were taking some sort of antidepressant.

Out of 150 educators, four people kept their hand down. 146 out of 150. Jonathan Haidt believes this mental crisis is brought on largely by the mass adoption of smartphones, along with the invention of social media and online gaming platforms.

Whatever the cause is, we are more anxious than ever before. We're safer than we've ever been, and yet more anxious than we've ever been. We could say there are a few things more palpable in this upper room than anxiety.

[3 : 46] Several years ago, the Lord called the disciples to follow him while they were casting fish nets and collecting Roman taxes. And they had been with him, like disciples are called to be with the Lord.

Can you imagine the security they felt being with the Lord as they realized this was not just another teacher or a prophet, a man of God, but the Lord himself.

And yet now the Lord has said, I must leave and go to the Father. And where I am going, you may not come. They will be left behind.

They will be left alone. They will face a temptation to anxiety that no one in the history of the world has faced since, and no one will face in the future.

The Lord is leaving them. What are they thinking and feeling? Are feelings of panic clutching their throat, as it often does among us?

[4 : 47] Are they plagued by this general sense of unease? Is the unknown that awaits them leaving them with an overwhelming sense of dread?

You know anxiety left unattended leaves us in a panic. It's as if there's a riot in our mind. Everything that seems so certain is insecure, unsafe, and uncertain.

Can you imagine the way the disciples feel on this night? And yet the Lord is still with them and is praying for them.

After beginning the prayer, praying for the Father to kind of accept the work that he's done, now he turns and prays for his disciples. Several weeks ago we talked about kind of what qualified his prayer.

Well, now he moves into his actual quest for his disciples. And for the church. As they come to grips with the great unknown, the Lord prays for them and roots them and grounds them.

[5 : 52] And these truths that are unchanging will hold them for all time. Where we're going in a word is do not be anxious. You're more valuable to God than you could imagine. And you're more purposed by God than you could dream.

Do not be anxious. You're more valuable to God than you could imagine. More purposed by God than you could dream. We're going to break this out. Three simple points. Actually, it's going to be the three requests that I think he makes in this passage.

The first one is keep them faithful in the world. Keep them faithful in the world. After those several statements of building up these requests, the Lord begins to pray specifically for his disciples and for us.

His first request, keep them faithful. Look in verse 11b. Keep them, Holy Father, keep them in your name. We've seen this emphasis on the Father.

So we're seeing this window into Jesus' relationship with his Father. He says, Holy Father, because of where these requests are going. Setting apart people for his name.

[6 : 56] He says, keep them in your name. The appeal for Jesus in this moment is based on the reality that trouble awaits. He said this in numerous different ways.

He's made clear they will soon be thrown out of the synagogue. They will soon weep and lament. They will soon be scattered. Jesus said, in the world you will have trouble.

Famously in John 16. But the appeal for the Father to keep them now is because he is no longer in the world. Look at what it says.

Keep them in the name which you have given me. Right before that, I am no longer in the world. But they are in the world. And I am coming to you.

And so I ask you to keep them in your name. Now what does this mean? Keep them in your name. It could be a way of saying keep them in your power. Keep them in your grip.

[7 : 55] Keep them in complete control. And surely that is true biblically. But it seems more likely that keep them in your name is a way of saying keep them faithful to what they've learned.

Keep them in the good of the truth. Keep them in your name. You know, we use names very different than Hebrew culture. One recent headline in the satire site, the Babylon Bee, said, Kid in baseball game.

Unsure whether fans are cheering for Aiden, Brayden, Caden, or Jaden. Doesn't know what to do. Your names. We name our kids because of some way of expressing something we like or a name we like.

Or often because a name has become popular. But names in Hebrew refer to one's character. We remember that. We think of Jacob. One who grabs at the heel.

One who cheats. Well, the same is true with God. Keep them in your name as a reference to the character of God. Jesus has just said, I manifested your name to the people.

[9 : 05] I didn't just walk around shouting who you are. Yahweh, Yahweh, Yahweh. I came and manifested it. I came to show the world what you like, what you hate, what you love.

The task of revealing who God is and what he is really like is only given to Jesus. Jesus. No one has seen God, the only God. But Jesus has made him known.

Twice he said in this little passage. Look in verse 11 again. Keep them in your name which you have given me. When I was with them, I kept them in your name which you have given me.

Red says, forget. Andy says, yes, forget that there are places in the world that are not made of stone. That there's something inside that they can't get to, that they can't touch.

That's yours. Red says, what are you talking about? Andy said, hope. Hope. That's the joy and the hope that Jesus is giving his disciples right now.

Even though it's going to get much worse before it gets better. There's a security he's given them that no one in this world can take away. There is a world that is not made of dust.

[15 : 39] There is a world that is permanent, that is fixed, that will not be taken away. And after the resurrection, one of the things you see all throughout the book of Acts is the disciples are overtaken by joy.

What is it? Suddenly, these men that scattered into the night are the ones proclaiming the gospel, rejoicing in prison, standing before the chief priests and scribes without fear.

And so throughout the age, Christians that have gotten a taste of this are just unstoppable. C.S. Lewis once said, they have a gay, almost mocking courage.

You know, they just have this irrepressible courage and joy. And that's the security Jesus wants to give you. It's not enough to stand in these things with an angry face.

What he wants to give you is so much more. I remember years ago reciting the Heidelberg Catechism. Now, you may or may not be into those sort of things, but I was beginning to get into those and lead our church in reciting the Heidelberg Catechism.

[16 : 49] Just a great summary of the faith, and particularly question one, one of the most memorable statements on the Christian life. One of my friends was dying of leukemia. I'm standing up there leading us in the reading, and he's lost all his hair, or most of it.

He's reduced, a big guy, a strong guy, reduced to a wheelchair. We're reading this reading, and I asked the question, and we decided together, what is your only comfort and hope in life and death? And he said, but I'm not my own is the answer. I belong with body and soul both in life and death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He's fully paid for all my sins according to his precious blood.

That's what we rejoice in. And it set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head.

Indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. He told me that after they recited that confession, after we recited it together, his five-year-old daughter grabbed the back of his head and said, that means even your hairs, Daddy, even yours can't fall.

[18 : 17] That's what Jesus is talking about. This is the joy that sustains us through anything. Sustains us through suffering.

It strengthens us for opposition. If you're a Christian, just like these disciples, Jesus has been very clear there's a cost to following Christ. It's not what Joel Osteen preaches every Sunday.

There are so many preachers throughout this land. They don't lay out the cost, but there's a cost. If you conform yourself to Jesus Christ, it'll mean you will not conform yourself to this world.

And all you have to do is refuse to be conformed and you'll be hated. But it's this joy that allows you to do it. And to do it with faith.

It's not a surprise to God when the church faces opposition. It's not a good time for Christians to whine either. Remember what happened.

[19 : 20] We follow a crucified Messiah. Why should we expect anything different? Point two. Keep them from the God of this world. Keep them from the God of this world.

Jesus continues to pray. His second request is keep them from the God of this world. His second request begins not so much that the Father to do something, but that the Father not do something. The contrast between the disciples and those in the world is something we have seen throughout these final words of Jesus. Threading throughout it all.

We see this again in verse 14. I've given them your word and the world has hated them because they're not of the world. So there's contrast between the disciples that are called out of the world and those who are still in the world.

Not that they have a residence in this side of heaven, but the idea is that they're among those in rebellion against God. And so those who are of the world hate those whom he's given this word because they're not of the world.

[20 : 25] And the dangers the disciples will face are real and continue to be within view. Look in verse 14. He qualifies this. He says, the world has hated them because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world.

Verse 16, literally the exact same. In the original language, they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. This part of the prayer is not for the Father.

The Father knows those whom he's given to the Son. The Father knows where they reside. This is for the disciples. It's for us. Jesus is reminding them and us.

He's urging us to continually remember that this world is not where we belong. This world is not our home. G.K. Beal says, worldliness is whatever any culture does to make sin seem normal and righteousness to be strange.

It's so hard. It's so hard to not let the definitions the world brings to life and to sin and righteousness and the things of God.

[21 : 31] Not overtake the definitions of the word of God. It's so easy to drift. You know, the danger of worldliness is not in the first exposure.

The danger is when we live and work and play in the world. Lest we forget what is normal and what is right. I heard of an old Scottish preacher telling the story of taking his horse to get refitted for a new horseshoe back in the days of the horse and buggy.

And so taking care of his horse was just like we would take care of the maintenance of our cars.

And so he's taking his horse to the blacksmith. And as he started making his way to the blacksmith's house, he heard the blacksmith striking the anvil, forming a shoe or whatever blacksmiths do.

I don't know, you know, but striking the anvil. And every time he hit the anvil, a dog that he had, a new dog that the blacksmith had would just yelp out, yelp out every time.

The pastor said he came back a couple months later and the dog was asleep beside the anvil.

That's what happens.

[22 : 48] It's the slow drip. Gas doesn't kill you on the first intake. It lulls you to sleep slowly.

That's what Jesus is alerting these disciples to. I think the repetition is just to hold this reality in your head. Regardless of what you feel, regardless of what they're telling you, you are not of the world.

Just as I am not of the world. I called you out of the world. You're not of the world. Hold on to these truths lest you get caught up in the rat race for applause and approval. Lest you join the chase for the accumulation of more and more possession.

Yes, lest you find the teaching of the Bible about sexuality and modesty and generosity increasingly strange and undesirable. And worse still, lest you become a sitting duck for the enemy.

And so, Jesus, all that, he does not, with all that in view, he does not pray that the Father take them out of the world. Look at that in verse 15. I do not ask that you take them out of the world.

[23 : 49] Sometimes we think, surely, with all the trouble in this world, with all the sorrow and grief, all the brokenness and emptiness, all the hatred and persecution directed against those who follow Christ, it would be better if we were out of the world.

I got a plan. Lord, let's just end this. If you haven't felt, I don't know how to relate to you. You don't feel that way or battle that thought.

Isn't that what we often think? And if we cannot be taken home immediately, we assume it would be better if we withdrew from the world. If we got our little house on a few acres, well, we could hide away.

But Jesus, if Jesus says, I do not ask that you take them out of the world, we shouldn't take ourselves out, surely?

Shouldn't withdraw, shouldn't huddle up. We should continue to live, play, and work in the world.

[24 : 57] With discernment, going out like sheep among wolves, but nevertheless in the world. So he prays. Look in verse 15. I don't ask you to take them out, but I do ask you to keep them from the evil one.

That's the second request. Took a minute to get there, but that's the second request. Same verb used in verse 11. Keep them in your name.

So also, Father, keep them from the evil one. Who is this evil one? It's the devil. It is the God of this world.

It is the one who blinds the minds of unbelievers, who keeps unbelievers in bondage to his will. 2 Timothy 2, 25 says, God may perhaps, through the preaching of the gospel, he may perhaps the opponents of the gospel, may grant perhaps the opponents of the gospel repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth.

They may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil after being captured by him to do his will. What's going on in the world according to that passage?

[26 : 10] The world is ensnared. Their wills are ensnared to his will. Not free, but bound.

The devil is the one who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking believers to devour. He is the one who accuses us, opposes us. The one who continually seeks to disturb and overturn our rest in the gospel.

I do believe, based on Ephesians 6 and Revelation, it seems to me there's nothing the devil seeks to destroy more than our peace in Jesus Christ, our rest in Jesus Christ.

Often we get into spiritual warfare, and we start doing all sorts of things that the Bible does not come in. I think we get into wrong places, but I think, and most often, what is this devil?

Well, he's the accuser of the brethren. He's the one who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy what God is building. The one who opposes the gospel.

[27 : 11] The Puritan Thomas Brooks once said, the devil seeks us to be always pouring and musing about sin. You think somebody's telling you to always pour and muse about sin.

It's not the Lord. He continues to mind our sins more than our Savior, and so to mind our sins so as to forget and neglect our Savior.

The devil can get you to dwell on your sin, to think on it, to dwell on it, to distract you from your Savior, to lead you into doubting the forgiveness he's provided in Jesus Christ, and the devil will slowly gain.

You know, it's so wonderful, because the gospel presents to us a message that so often does not make sense, you know. What we see every day is how we continue to stray, but the gospel presents to us a righteousness that is outside of us.

The old guys would say, it's an alien righteousness. That does not mean it came from Star Wars or E.T. or something like that. The idea is it is outside of us. So wonderfully, we can say to the devil, you're right, you're right, there's a lot of sin in me, but thanks be to God, I'm not saved by my righteousness, but my righteousness is in heaven, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

[28 : 31] So you want to do some spiritual warfare? Arm yourself with the alien righteousness of Jesus Christ, and proclaim it again, and again, and again, and that's what I offer to you.

If you'll come to Jesus, you can be saved by a righteousness that does not come by works of the law, but the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

I love this. What led to the undoing of the first Adam? The serpent slithered into the garden, the evil one, and now the second Adam, Jesus Christ, prays for his disciples.

Father, keep them from the evil one. Keep them alert. You know, if Jesus is praying, Father, guard them, then the implication is, we must be alert.

We must be ready. In season, out of season, aware of the devil and all he is seeking to do.

[29 : 39] Amen. There's so much in this prayer that, that almost feels like echoes of the prayer that we call the Lord's prayer.

Father, hallowed be your name. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. And so he's calling us to be aware, to wake up.

Every day you can wake up and say, they're the vicious battle against me and for my life. The Satan is out for me.

Nevertheless, we're not anxious because we're entrusting ourselves continually into the hands of the Lord. More valuable than we can imagine, more purpose than we could dream. Point three, send them into the world.

The Lord essentially says, Father, send them into the world. This is the third request. Look in verse 17. Sanctify them in the truth.

[30 : 42] Your word is truth. This word sanctify points in two directions. Jesus is praying for them to be personally devoted to the truth and to be publicly devoted to the mission.

He's praying for them to be personally devoted to the truth and publicly devoted to the mission. That word sanctify, you know, we think of it often in the Old Testament, this idea of separating or setting apart, you know, because God is holy.

His people must be set apart from all the nations. But it's not just the people that are set apart in the Old Testament. Much like your grandmother might set apart certain bowls and plates for special occasions.

The people are commanded to set apart certain vessels, all that was in the temple or in the tabernacle was set apart. It was made holy. It was consecrated to the Lord.

And so the Lord is saying the same thing about his people. He's saying the disciples and all who follow him are set apart. We've seen this theme throughout. They're chosen out of the world.

[31 : 45] They're no longer of the world. Even though they're in the world, they no longer belong to the world, but belong completely to him. And so they're to be personally devoted to God. You know, they're supposed to be personally holy for God.

This idea, we often think of holiness in these stodgy old puritanical terms, but it's not that way at all. It's just this idea of personally and completely devoted to him, whose name is holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty.

J.C. Ryle says, more holiness is the very thing to be desired for all servants of Christ. Holy living is the great proof of the reality of Christianity.

Jesus says, bad trees bear bad fruit. Good trees bear good fruit. Holy living is the great proof. Men may refuse to see the truth of our arguments, but they cannot evade the evidence of a godly life.

Jesus was not just trying to throw a cloak on somebody and send them out. He was calling them to live unto him, to be devoted to him, to have a distinct life. And so he says, sanctify them in the truth.

[32 : 53] What is truth? Pilate asked. We live in a culture ready with an answer. The new single by Lenny Kravitz. Maybe none of you ever listened to Lenny Kravitz, but I cut my teeth on let love rule.

Back in the day, Lenny Kravitz says in this new song, which you don't need to listen to it, but he says, when all of my days are done, a pleasing, but he does have a wonderful voice.

And so that's what draws you in. Yeah. Like, what am I listening to? But, uh, when all of my days are done, all right, a pleasing everyone. So that's a good thing to put behind you.

I'll finally have begun. Our time on earth ain't gonna last. Forever. I'm on my journey, and I won't be afraid.

No more confusion or aggravation. What is this life for? I'm gonna win. So he's on the precipice of something extraordinary. He says, I'm gonna live my truth in this life.

[33 : 52] I'm not gonna live a lie, because I came here to be alive. I am here to be human.

Theologian, Lenny Kravitz says, to be human is, everyone's a theologian, as Sproul said.

The only question is whether you're a good one or a bad one, but what is, what does it mean to be human? To live my life, live my truth, to do what I think I am called to do.

The pronouns tell the whole story. It's a world revolving around self. But what's the truth?

Jesus quickly adds, your word is truth. Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. Jesus is not saying, truth is sentences and periods.

Jesus is saying, truth is all that Scripture has revealed about me. All that God has revealed about himself in the pages of Scripture. The world, the word sets us apart and increasingly sanctifies us for God.

[35 : 08] What is truth? It's all that God has said about himself and it is that which sanctifies us for him continually. Now we live in a culture that continually denigrates and disparages truth.

What is truth? Who can know what is true? How can you say one thing is true and say another thing that someone else believes is true is not true? To say what you think is true and what someone else thinks is true is not true.

It's just narrow-minded and unloving. And if that's truth, then truth is so restricted. It's a prison. It's a straitjacket. But the reverse is actually true.

The reality is it's truth that causes us to flourish and thrive because it's truth that leads us to relate properly to God and properly to others in this world.

And our culture has all but discarded, revealed truth. truth is the realm. It's a universal agreement in morality. And with this loss, our culture has not gotten more free.

[36 : 11] It's gotten more vulnerable, more breakable, not more content, more restless, not more carefree, but more anxious. Truth is the realm. If we could say it that way, truth is the realm in which we are to grow and obey.

That's why Paul says, what is the church? The church is a pillar and buttress of truth. It's a place where truth is upheld. Truth is proclaimed. Truth thrives and does all that it is called and sent to do.

G.K. Chesterton, fabulous book, captures our culture so well. He says, in our relation to truth, he says, we might fancy some children playing on the flat, grassy top of some tall island in the sea.

So he's using a little illustration for us. We might fancy some children playing on a flat, grassy top on top of some tall island in the sea. So long as there was a wall around the cliff's edge, they could fling themselves into every frantic game and make the place the noisiest of nurseries. But the walls were knocked down, leaving the naked peril of the precipice. They did not fall over. But when their friends returned to them, they were all huddled in terror in the center of the island and their song had ceased.

[37 : 35] Our culture has said, the key is to break down the wall. And what has it given us? Is there a more vivid picture of our culture than a bunch of children huddled in the center of the island, scared to death?

We are the anxious generation. Let's mow down some more truth. Jesus is holding out something different for us.

Sanctify them in the truth. He continues, personally devoted to truth, but publicly devoted to the mission. Look in verse 8, as you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. That sanctify, as I said, points in two directions. This idea of set them apart, but set them apart unto something. Set them apart unto a mission.

Jesus prays in verse 19, consecrate and sanctify. It's the same root word that runs through all these words. The idea is that Jesus said in John 10, 36, as the Father sanctified me and sent me into the world, so I sanctify you and send you into the world.

[38 : 44] The connection is apparent. It is only by being set apart and different from the world that we can be sent into the world to do anything in the world. It goes back to the, to the Sermon on the Mount where the Lord said, you are the light of the world.

You are the salt of the earth. Now salt, if it loses its saltiness, is no help at all. Same thing if light is covered and put under a chair, under a table or something like that.

It doesn't give light. Well, so it's the distinguishing and the difference between us and the world that gives the world a message to hear. The task of the Christian is not therefore to withdraw from the world, nor to be confused with the world, but to live in the world and witness to truth.

Jesus says, I consecrate myself. Now that's a strange way of talking, but he is the great high priest and that's why we call this the high priestly prayer. He's saying, just like the Old Testament priests would offer a sacrifice for themselves to sanctify themselves, so I consecrate myself and I consecrate you.

And we know he'll consecrate himself himself and us, or not consecrate himself, but he'll consecrate us ultimately through his death. There's no forgiveness of sins apart from the shedding of blood.

[40 : 08] So if truth is a realm in which we're to be personally devoted to him, the world is a realm in which we are to be publicly devoted to him. Until he calls us home, we're to be on mission.

If I could expand it a bit, we're to be on mission right here. Right where he's placed us.

While we planted a church. You know, the God who created the heavens and the earth and arranged the Milky Way galaxy and every grain of sand on the seashore did not get your address wrong.

Why are you here and not there? Or anywhere else? Because God has placed you. Most of the time we live as if place doesn't matter.

We close the garage and close out the life or put up a fence and keep people away. You know, we live like place is incidental to our existence, but God does not view place that way and he's placed us here to live.

[41 : 18] You know, mission is not something we do. What he's saying, I consecrate you, I send you out. Mission is not something we do. It is who we are. If we're not doing it, we're not living in conformity with who he has called us to be, to be the light of the world, saw the earth.

Last month, as you know, I went to Korea to visit our dear church there. It was my sixth visit on those 14, 16 hours across the pond. And over the week, I just very much enjoyed my time and being with our sister church, Lord's Grace Church, and particularly enjoyed a new translator that has joined the church in the last two years and it helped that his English was better than mine because he learned it the right way, you know.

I learned it through Cliff Notes. And he was a faithful member of this church, been saved, and now is faithful.

When I was leaving, the translator asked me that dreaded question, will you come back? I've been enough times to know I can't answer that question in that moment, start making commitments that I can't always keep.

I said, I don't know. He said, if you do, I'll be here. I said, man, that's it.

[42 : 45] I said, there's nothing you could say to me that would encourage me more. What's he saying? He's saying, I know where I am. I know where God has placed me.

I know where he's called me to live for him. I know where he's called me to serve him. And that's where I'll be until he calls me home. I wonder if we relate to a place in the same way.

I'll be here. I'm not going anywhere. He's placed me to witness to the world the saving news of Jesus Christ.

So don't be anxious. You're more valuable to God than you could imagine and more purposed.

Your life is held by eternal purpose by God than you could dream.

Father in heaven, we come to you sincerely and completely. We don't want to play fast and loose with these truths. We want to sink into them.

[43 : 55] But we want to be upheld by the precious truths of our eternal security in Jesus Christ.

And armed with that, we're going to show the world the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Would you continue your mission here in Athens, Tennessee? But we thank you that of all the places in the world you could have placed us, you placed us here.

Thank you. You've armed us and given us the words of eternal life. Let us be an aroma unto life.

Proclaim it to move in this community with a mission. We thank you. We praise you. We rest in you this day and always. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.