

# DAY EIGHTEEN:

# PRAY FOR UNITY

## INTRODUCTION

There is one other specific revival prayer I would like to focus on. In John chapters 14 to 16, Jesus is giving his final instructions to his disciples before his crucifixion. He mainly focuses on how the disciples will live by the Spirit once he has gone. After these directions, Jesus prays. He prays for himself first and then he prays for his disciples, particularly for God's protection over them when he has gone. Finally, Jesus prays for all those who will believe in the future. We are included in that prayer. Jesus prayed specifically for us. And the heart of his prayer is instructive. Under the shadow of the cross, Jesus asked for one major thing for his future followers. It strikes me that this must be extremely important.

## SCRIPTURE: JOHN 17:20-23

*"My prayer is not for them [his disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—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.*

## DEVOTION

Jesus knew that the impact of his future church would rely on its unity. That makes sense. As fellow members of God's family, Christians have a huge amount in common and will naturally be drawn together. Our unity and love for each other is the major sign that God is at work within us – saving us and transforming us. Jesus prays that as God indwells their lives, future believers will become like he and his Father. Different persons, yet completely one.

In some ways, the unity of the church is totally natural – we are clearly drawn together by the Spirit. But in practice, Jesus knew that real unity in his church would be incredibly difficult. Roman culture was strongly stratified. Everyone had their position and role and this was constantly reinforced. You had to accept it. There was no stepping outside the bounds of your place in society. So when Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and Roman citizens, rich and poor all became Christians and met together in small church groups, unity was a huge struggle. It was vital as Jesus said, but it was a colossal challenge. Almost all the New Testament letters deal with aspects of this call to unity. It was probably the most difficult issue in the early church. No wonder unity was the thing Jesus prayed for at the end. Unity was so important and so challenging.



# DAY EIGHTEEN: PRAY FOR UNITY

It still is. While our culture is more egalitarian, largely due to the influence of Christianity, there is the constant temptation to retreat into tribes. That is, to interact with and support and love and respect the people who are like us and to exclude others. Our tribe is the people who think like us, who see the world the way we do, who have the same values and beliefs, who prize the same priorities. Tribalism is both natural (of course we find it easiest to value the people like us) and incredibly dangerous. It reduces our love for believers who are different from us and destroys the unity of God's church. It seems that the pull of tribalism increases as digital media give us easy access to our tribe and the opportunity to ignore, even reject, others.

So we need to join Jesus in praying for unity. A divided church will never see revival. It cannot be a clear witness to the world. It cannot reflect the love and grace of the gospel. It cannot show the reality and beauty of Jesus. It will be stuck with its judgements and disagreements and arguments and splits. It will be clear evidence to the lost that the church is no different from the world. With Jesus, we need to pray and pray for unity among believers in preparation for revival. "May we be one."

## PRAYER RESPONSE

Lord please grow my love for and grace towards other believers, especially those who are different from me. May I see your presence in their lives. Protect me from judging others – that is your job. May I not retreat into tribalism but grow in grace as you fill my life. Help me to link arms with those who I tend to judge.

## PRAYER FOR REVIVAL

Division destroys the power and witness of your church Lord. Please break down the tribalism that is invading our churches. Forgive our judgmentalism. Bring conviction. Bind us together in unity in preparation for your revival. May we all be one Lord Jesus. Bring us to real unity.

