



Christ's Prayer & the Church's Mission

John 17

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If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open me to John 17. Let me just say it is a total honor to be here. I've been so blessed, encouraged and challenged. It's just an honor to be here—albeit, a bit of an awkward honor. Before today, I had never heard of a doily. I've learned all kinds of things.

Love is a strange thing and it makes you do strange things. My wife Heather is the only girl I ever dated, which sounds noble until you realize I was just socially awkward growing up and was afraid to talk to girls. God in His mercy provided a girl who would talk to me, so I figured I needed to keep talking to her. We recently celebrated our anniversary and I was reminded of a gift she gave me one year. She had taken a variety of letters and notes I had written her over the course of our relationship and put them into a scrapbook.

I want to risk any semblance of reputation I might have by sharing just a small portion from one of those letters—a very small portion. When I wrote this letter, she had just moved off to college. I was still in high school—she's a year older than me—and technically we were just friends at this point, but you know what that means. I wanted to be more than friends. Apparently we had just talked on the phone when I wrote this letter to her: “Dear Heather, Dude, I am so glad you called tonight.”

What kind of opening is that?! When a guy writes a letter like this, he pores over every word. I have no clue what possessed me to think that the first word out of the chute should be “Dude.” The letter continued, “I have wanted to call you Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and today, but I just figured you were too busy.” You're not supposed to say that! You're supposed to say you've been really busy. Apparently, I was not. It goes on—this is so painful: “When I heard your voice, it was so awesome that I can't explain how I felt. You sounded so awesome.” Is this not the most lame thing you've ever heard? Awesome—twice! It got worse. It got three pages of worse.

I want to jump to the end for my rousing conclusion: “Dude...” I wish I was making this up—I'm not! “Dude, I'm not just wasting ink when I say this.” Can you tell I'd never had a girlfriend? Is it

obvious? “My life isn’t the same without you around, and I miss having you to talk with and spend time with. I miss you something fierce.” Really? “Praying for you, Dude.” So, for those counting, that’s three Dude mentions in a total of eight lines. “In Christ”—don’t blame this on Him. This is U His fault. “In Christ, David.”

That is the letter I wrote to my....oh, no, don’t clap. Don’t clap. There’s no reason for you to clap right now. You’re just clapping because you feel sorry for me. No, I know. You’re clapping for my wife, thinking, “Man, she’s a special girl to be married to that guy.” Or maybe you’re just clapping in worship, like, “O God, only You could cause a man like that to be married. Glory be to Your name.”

So, love. One truth that I feel has been woven into this entire gathering is that God really loves you. I hope you’ve heard that. I hope you have felt that God loves you so much. I’ve been studying John. What’s the most famous verse in it? John 3:16. God loves you so much that He sent His only Son to live the life you could not live, to die the death you deserved to die, to conquer the enemy you cannot conquer—sin and death itself. God loves you so much that He sent His Son so when you believe in Him, you will not perish but have everlasting life.

That’s the greatest news in all the world. It’s the gospel and I believe it’s been clear throughout this conference. I want to remind you that God doesn’t just love you; He loves the world so much that He gave His only Son. There are a lot of people in this world right now who don’t know how much God loves them—and a lot of those people live right around you.

So I want to speak for a few minutes on behalf of the people whom God loves. As I prayed about what God would have me say to you on their behalf, three exhortations have just sprung from God’s Word and they’re going to lead us to a story that Jennie mentioned from Nepal. These exhortations are specifically in and around John 17. So I’ll put them on the table, and then I’ll unpack them very briefly. These are the three exhortations I believe God is giving from His Word to every woman in this gathering. First, I believe God is saying, “Recognize the unique place where I have put you.” Second, “Realize what’s at stake in the lives of those around you.” And third, “Remember the simple purpose I have given you.”

1. Recognize the unique place where I have put you.

I believe God is saying to each of you, “Recognize the unique place where I have put you.” One of the things I love about John 17 is the way Jesus describes how God the Father had uniquely designed the details of Jesus’ life for the spread of the Father’s love. Jesus is recounting His life and ministry, and I want you to hear how He describes the Father’s sovereignty over all of it. In verse one He says, *“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.”*

Then watch this in verse two: *“...since you have given him authority over all flesh.”* So the Father is the One Who gave authority to the Son, to Jesus, to give eternal life *“to all whom you have given him.”* Jesus says, “Father, You’ve given Me these disciples.” Verse four, *“I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.”* He’s saying, “Father, You gave Me this work.” Look at verses six to eight: *“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me.”*

Do you see what Jesus is praying here? He’s saying, “Father, You sent Me. You gave Me authority. You gave Me these men, these disciples. You gave Me the words to say to them. Now they’ve received Your love and they believe You sent Me.” He’s saying, “Father, You did all this. You sent Me, You put these men around Me, You gave Me Your word to give them—You did it all, so that now they know Your love for them.”

It’s so simple. God so loved these 12 disciples that He sent His Son to share His Word with them so that these disciples might know God’s love for them. Simple. So now, in light of that simple truth, let these words in verse 18 soak in, where Jesus says to the Father, *“As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”* Did you hear that? In the same way the Father sends the Son, so the Son sends us. Jesus sends us. Realize what this means. Jesus sends you and me in the same way the Father sent Him. Just as the Father gave the Son authority, the Son gives us authority.

This is why Jesus begins the Great Commission not only by saying, “Go and make disciples of all nations...” He begins it with, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me. So with My authority, do this. Go and baptize them and teach them to obey the Word I’ve given to you. Just as the Father gave the Son His word to share, so I’m giving you My Word to share.”

Just as the Father providentially gave the Son people to share His love with, so Jesus providentially gives us people to share His Word with. Jesus does all of this for the same purpose that He was sent: so the world might know that the Father loves them.

Please hear this, sister in Christ. Jesus has providentially put you in a unique place. Each woman in this gathering is in a unique place—in this home or in that neighborhood, in this apartment building or that dorm, in this school or that workplace, in this community or that city. Every one of you is in a unique place and Jesus has you there for a purpose. There are unique people around you who don’t know how much God loves them.

Many of them are women who have the same fears you do, but they don’t know the God Who will protect and provide for them. They walk through the same struggles you do, but they don’t know the God Whose voice is able to still the storm. They have the same insecurities that you do, but they don’t know the God Whose love never, ever fails His children. They don’t know how much God loves them. But here’s the

deal: He does love them. Do you know how much He loves them? He loves them so much, but not just that He sent His Son. God loves them so much that His Son sent you to share His love with them, so that when they hear His Word from your mouth with His authority, they might believe in Him and receive His love and be saved from their sin forever and ever.

See this, women of God. The sovereign God of the universe has this whole thing rigged. He has designed your life uniquely for the display and declaration of His love to people who don't know it. So I plead with you, sisters in Christ, to spend your life making His love known to them. Don't keep this love to yourself. Privatized Christianity is a profound curse across our culture and the church. Across our culture, people say, "Believe whatever you want—just keep it to yourself." That cultural pressure is silencing the church. Multitudes of Christians who believe—or at least live like they believe—"Jesus has saved me. Jesus' teachings work for me and my family. But who am I to tell my neighbor or my co-worker what he or she should believe?" Let's take this a step further. Who am I to tell someone else that if they don't believe in what I believe, then they will spend eternity in hell? Doesn't that seem a bit bold or brash or arrogant? Our culture would even say it seems hateful.

I'll never forget the first time God really brought this home to my heart. I was in college and was giving a speech on Christianity one day in my speech class. I shared the gospel in this speech. As soon as I was finished, they got to ask questions.

The first person to ask a question, sitting in the back. Jane raised her hand and said, "Yeah, I've got a question. Are you saying that if we don't believe what you just said about Who Jesus is and what He did, that we're going to spend eternity in hell when we die?" I had never had it put quite that way in front of quite that many people. I began to sweat profusely, trying to gather my thoughts. I looked back at Jane and said, "We all have sinned and that separates us from God. If we die in our sin, then we die separate from God. So, yes, in answer to your question: if you don't turn from your sins and trust in Jesus, then you will spend eternity in the guilt and condemnation of your sin."

Needless to say, I was not the most popular guy in class that particular day. Sighs went up across the room as the arrogant Christian stood in front of them. She made a bee-line to me right after class and said, "I just want you to know, that's the most arrogant, hateful thing I've ever heard, telling us that just because we don't believe what you believe, we're all going to be damned forever." And she walked away.

Well, in the days that followed, she came to me with question after question. We had so many different conversations, and in every one of those conversations I felt like I was just trying to share from the Word, but everything I said was just bouncing off a brick wall. I remember distinctly walking away from one of those conversations and thinking to myself, "Do I even believe this? I don't want to be arrogant or hateful. Do I really believe this?" I began wrestling with that in a whole new way. We left school at the end of that semester and were gone for the summer.

When we came back the next semester, I walked into class and sitting there in the front row was Jane. She turned around, saw me and said, “I want to talk to you after class.” I said, “Okay.” But inside I thought, “Oh, great. Here we go again.” I waited for her outside in the hall. She came up to me and said, “I just want you to know that this summer I found out that Jesus is the only way to have my sins forgiven. I put my faith in Him and now I know that when I die, I’m going to heaven.”

I remember listening to her share this, and it hit me. It would be arrogant and hateful to tell someone that if they don’t turn from their sin and trust in Jesus, they’ll go to an eternity in hell —unless it’s true. If that’s true, then the most arrogant, hateful thing I can do is keep this to myself. Right? I mean, how much do you have to hate someone to know how they can be saved from sin and eternal death and not say anything to them?

2. Realize what’s at stake in the lives of those around you.

Sisters in Christ, realize what’s at stake here. God is saying in His Word, “People’s lives are at stake for eternity.” John 3:16: “*God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*” If you keep going to the last verse in the chapter, Jesus says, “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*”

Are we hearing this? There are people around us who haven’t believed in the love of God and as a result, right now, are under God’s wrath. Unless somebody shares His love, they will stay under His wrath. If nothing changes, they will die under His wrath. This is all over Scripture. I happened to be in Mark 9 this morning in my time with the Lord and I just got stuck on Jesus’ warning about hell. He talked about a place of unquenchable fire. I stopped as I was reading. People ask, “Do you think that’s literal, or is that just a symbol?” Well, maybe. But even if it’s a symbol, what is it a symbol for? A winter retreat? A nice summer vacation?

No, unquenchable fire is not a symbol for a nice place to be. It’s a symbol for a terrifying place to be. Sisters in Christ, this is the Bible beckoning us to realize what is at stake right now for people all around us who don’t know His love—faces you and I can see right in our minds—in addition to people around the world who have never even heard of His love. So for a moment, lift your eyes and see that there are over 2.8 billion people in the world today who’ve never even heard the gospel, the good news of God’s love in Christ. It’s not that they’ve heard about God’s love and rejected it. It’s that no one has ever even told them how much God loves them.

We call them “unreached” which means more than just being lost. People are just as lost in Austin as they are in Afghanistan. The difference is access to the gospel. There’s access to the gospel in Austin.

There are churches that are preaching the gospel in Austin. But there's not access to the gospel in Afghanistan. There are people who are born, live and die and don't know any Christians. They don't know a church. They never hear the gospel from someone else.

I think most Christians in the church believe that those people will go to heaven, even though they've never heard the gospel. That's the only explanation I have for why we're not sacrificing more of our resources in our lives and churches to get the gospel to them. I think we believe they're okay, that somehow by nature of the fact that they've never heard the gospel God will bring them to heaven. After all, they didn't have a chance to hear, so surely God will let them into heaven.

But sisters in Christ, think about this with me. If that's true, if people who've never heard the gospel automatically go to heaven because they've never heard the gospel, then what's the worst thing we could do for their eternity? Take the gospel to them, right? Before we got there, 100% of them were going to heaven. Now that we got there, there's a chance they're going to hell. "Thanks a lot, Christian. Keep the gospel to yourself."

That misses the whole point. There's a reason Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all the nations" because the nations—the peoples of the world—their eternity depends on hearing this good news. So what Jennie referenced was a trip I was on to Nepal not long ago, where the Lord did an unusual work in my heart and life. I know these things. I preach these things.

We'd flown into Kathmandu and took a small group of people by helicopter up into the Himalayan mountains. We were dropped off there and spent about six days hiking. It was five days before we even met somebody who had heard the gospel before we talked with them. We'd talk to the people we'd meet on the trails and we'd say, "Do you know anything about Jesus?" And they'd say, "Who's that?" We saw massive physical poverty. We saw little girls being trafficked out of these villages. We saw the effects of sin and suffering in the world.

There was one moment that was most poignant. No one prepared me for what was about to happen. When we rounded the corner, we came to a Hindu holy site called Pashupati. I stopped in stunned silence. It's this holy river, and the person beside me started to explain what was going on. They had funeral pyres set up on top of the river. Their custom is that within 24 hours of a friend or family member dying, they'd bring the body to the river, place the body on the funeral pyre, then set it ablaze. As the ashes then go down into the river, they believe it's helpful in the process of reincarnation.

As I was listening to this and watching this scene—the river, bodies burning, people wailing—it hit me. I was looking at a physical picture of a spiritual reality. These people were alive 24 hours earlier. I was watching their bodies burn, but then I realized that right now these people were in hell—and they're going to be there forever and ever and ever. Then, if that wasn't heavy enough, something else hit me. Most

if not all these people who were alive 24 hours earlier had never even heard how much God loves them and made a way for them to go to heaven. Nobody ever told them.

What will it take for the concept of unreached people to become totally unacceptable to us in the church? What does this mean for half a million women in this conference? Does this mean we all need to move to the unreached? Do we need to raise our kids to go? Do we need to go? For many, I believe that answer is yes.

Now don't miss the point of John 17. Of all people, Jesus had a heart for the lost in the world. So what did a heart for the lost look like in His life? He spent the majority of His life in one isolated geographic location. He got to the end of His ministry and in John 17 He's summarizing His work on earth. And notice that not one time does He mention all the places He traveled. Not one time does He mention all the miracles He performed. Not one time does He mention the masses of people who came to hear Him preach. He didn't mention any of those things.

Instead, 40 times He mentions the small group of men—the disciples—whom He had spent most of His time with. They were His life. These few men would become the means through which the gospel would go into all the world. It was the genius of Jesus' strategy and it's so unlike the way we think, which is, "If I'm going to make a difference in the world, it's going to happen when I do big things, organize big initiatives or even have big gatherings."

But not Jesus. With the task of getting the gospel to the whole world, what did He do? He wandered through the streets and byways of Israel, looking for a few men. Don't misunderstand. Jesus was anything but casual about His mission. He was initiating a revolution. But His revolution didn't revolve around the masses or the multitudes—His revolution revolved around a few men. He made a few disciples. Then He died on the cross, rose from the grave and He said to them, "Now, you do the same thing. Go and make disciples." Do you see it? With a passion for the world, for the glory of the Father, Jesus focused His life on a few people. He affected the hearts of a few, then they would affect the history of the world.

3. Remember the simple purpose I have given you.

Sister in Christ, make disciples. Make a disciple. Take the time to share the good news of God's love in Christ with one other woman whom God has sovereignly put in your path, so she might know how much He loves her. Be bold. Be courageous. I know it's countercultural. I know it feels strange to say to someone else, "I want to share with you what I believe and I want to urge you to believe it." I know that feels strange. But love makes you do strange things.

Share the gospel and keep sharing it until somebody comes to Christ. When one of those women whom God has put in your life comes to Christ, then teach her the things Christ has commanded her. Teach

her about Who God is and how God loves. In doing this—with God’s Spirit, God’s power, God’s Word, each of you doing this in each of your churches—you will be affecting the world.

Just think of it. What if half a million women in Christ, or however many are listening to this, did this simple thing over the next year: make one disciple? That’s half a million people whose lives over the next year would be transformed for eternity. That is an awesome thought. You don’t have to start a huge ministry. You don’t have to invent a new organization. You don’t have to launch a new initiative. You don’t have to write a great book or start a great blog. Just make a disciple—right where you live.

Recognize the unique place God has put you. He’s put people around you. He’s given His Word to you. You have the greatest news in all the world. He’s given you authority to share it with the power of His very Spirit. So recognize the unique place where God has put you, realize what’s at stake in the lives of those around you and give your life to the simple purpose God has given you: making a disciple, right where you live. Then wherever God leads you in the world, let’s do this.

One day soon, we’re not going to be talking about sin and suffering anymore. We’re not going to be talking about fear and anxiety anymore. We’re not going to be talking about loneliness and insecurity anymore. We’re not going to be talking about slavery and sex trafficking anymore. We’re not going to be talking about unreached people anymore. Instead, we’re going to gather around our God’s throne, with people from every nation, tribe and tongue, then together we’re going to worship Him for the love He has shown to us.

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