

## Eternally Unified

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As we conclude Jesus' farewell address, his parting prayer, I am inadequate to explain and apply these ineffable, practical realities. The plain fact is we are overhearing a conversation between God the Father and God the Son *about ourselves*—lean in—where Jesus talks about three things every single person longs for—*unity, glory, and love*. Unity, how do I connect meaningfully with other people? Glory, is there something truly great worth living for? Love, can I be known *and* accepted in fully?

### Unity

This is not a time-bound prayer. It is, as one person put it, an eternal intercession. A prayer for all who will believe in Jesus, well after he has died, risen, and ascended to the Father. What will he pray for? He prays, “[I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one](#)” (20). That we be *one*. Unity is a popular idea. It's popular because we all desire connectedness, even if we fear it. When we move to a new city, we immediately look for ways to connect with people. We're chattier with servers, friendlier in the neighborhood, visit churches sizing people up by asking ourselves a question, “Do I connect with these people?” How do we know? Do they share my interests, passions, beliefs? *Unity is the result of a shared belief*. The Women's March bound people together in the shared belief of women's rights. Black Lives Matter unifies people with the shared belief that black people deserve dignity not discrimination. And countless fans unite around their belief that their band is the best. Unity is the result of shared belief. Jesus prays for those who believe that they would be one. Believe what? Believe in me. What about him? That he is the way out of sin and into relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, into *unity of a higher magnitude*. He elaborates, unity “[just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you](#).” There is a way for us to be unified the way the Godhead is unified. And its not by just connecting, Father to Son, but Father interconnected with the Son, and vice-versa. Not connecting but inter-connecting. What's the difference? One puts you next to another, but the other puts you *in* one another. Shared existence. Consider marriage. I once heard a minister preside over a wedding where the vows went something like, I commit to you so long as I find you fulfilling to me. Not till death do us part. In other words, if you start to require too much, or something more interesting comes along, I am free to leave you to find fulfillment. The Christian vision of marriage says, I've found fulfillment in God, so commit to you for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, in good times and bad *but it goes a step further*. It says the two become one flesh. They become, not temporarily connected but metaphysically interconnected. Still individual persons but persons who are “in” one another. A shared existence. Over time, we become so interconnected we can become inter-defining, mutually shaping one another. For example, I used to hate mustard on my sandwiches but after I got married I started eating them with mustard because my wife insisted it was better. Before marriage, I was a nose in the book kind of guy, who carried books everywhere. My wife was a people person, who drew a crowd. I don't quite draw a crowd now, but I learned to put people above books. When we got married I thought family vacations were a waste of money, but now I insist on family vacations every year, they connect our family. She was terrible with money; I inherited a mountain of debt. I was better with money; we paid the debt off. I was law; she

is grace. Now, because of my wife, I have become a more gracious person. You get the idea. This has taken years, but I am a different person because I chose to dwell in her, to live like she lives, to be defined by her and she by me. This is why people who have been married for years, and lose a spouse say, I feel like a piece of me died. Now, we're not any more married than we were on our wedding day, *but we are more unified than I could have imagined*. My being is bound up in her being, like the Son's being bound up in the Father's being. Jesus is praying as a Groom for his Bride, that his church would be one just as he and the Father are one: interconnected, inter-defining, one flesh kind of community. *Unity of a higher magnitude*.

## Glory

So, if this is true why is the church so often divided? We get glory wrong. Jesus prayer for unity serves a higher purpose, a glory not its own. A unity for glory, a unity from glory: “[The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one](#)” (22). The glory shared between Father and Son is given to us *so that we can give ourselves to others*. It's possible to find something so gloriously satisfying, that it frees you from insisting that others people, communities, satisfy you. Instead, others are the object of service. But if you're not taken with that glory, awestruck by God's beauty, power and love, you'll nitpick, judge, divide, and insist that other people fulfill you. A person will come to me and say this community doesn't work for me. They don't ask me enough questions. They don't go deep enough. They aren't sensitive to kids. They aren't reaching the city—and they divide. See people enter communities behind a **wall**. Each individual hides most of themselves behind the wall, but put things into the group they are confident about. The intellectual person always contributes from their intellect; the relational person always contributes socially, the emotional person contributes empathy. The thing you're strong in, you talk about and use but everything else you keep behind the wall. And eventually you insist that everyone else needs to be like your strength: more vulnerable, more theological, more relational. If you insist everyone be like you, you distance others by loving your own glory. Our strengths become a set of expectations that constantly run in the background judging others. A veneer of unity over an iceberg of individuality. So how do we escape it? How do you come out from behind the wall to be connected with others? You have to find a glory so fulfilling that you're willing to forgo your expectations of others. And the wonderful thing about Jesus' teaching is he brings the glory down to us. [The glory that you have given to me](#), he says, [the glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father became flesh and “dwelt” among us](#). Up to this point, the glory of God had only hovered over Israel, typically in a cloud over/in the tabernacle/temple. But now the glory moves into the incarnate Jesus, the glory greatness of the Father unified with the Son, and at the end of his life the glory moves again—[I in them](#). After resurrection, Jesus turns to the disciples and [“he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit”](#) (20:22). The glory cloud moves into us. The Spirit-glory is the presence of God, shed abroad in our hearts to satisfy our every need, a glory so definite, so great it lures us out from behind the wall to approach others with *not judgment but love*. A church united in his glory. Three ways to act on this love. 1) **Show** up. It's very difficult to cultivate unity when you're only around half the time. Prioritize presence in community, in worship. 2) **Surrender** your preferences. Check your expectations running in the background. Move toward others. Ask questions. Minister to others. 3) **Seek** and share God's glorious love.

## Love

Glory, unity, love. Jesus prays for unity-deepening love *that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me*” (23). Twice he repeats this, *that the world may know you sent me* (21). Unity of a greater magnitude cannot keep to itself. It is inclusive. Propelled outward by the all-satisfying communion with Father, Son, & Spirit to invite others into his love. The New Yorker ran a great profile piece on Rod Dreher, author of *Crunchy Cons* and *The Benedict Option*, describing what it was like for him growing up in Louisiana. As a creative, Talking Heads listening, Hemingway reading youngster with a Southern country man for a father. He says, *“I worshipped my dad—he was the strongest and wisest man I knew—but he was a country man and I wasn’t. All that mattered was that I wasn’t like them. It just broke me.”* Unaccepted. Even when his sister was diagnosed with cancer, and he visited frequently, and after he moved back from Philly to St. Francisville to mend family relationships, they still wouldn’t accept him. He tells the story of being home alone one evening, lying in bed, when he sensed a *presence* in the room: *“I felt a hand reach inside my heart and put a stone there,” he said. “And I could see, in some interior way, that the stone said, ‘God loves me.’ I’d doubted all my life that God really loved me.”* A few months later, he stopped by his dad’s house to organize his medications. Ray was sitting on the porch, reading the newspaper and drinking coffee. When Rod leaned down to kiss him on the cheek, his father grabbed him by the arm. Tears in his eyes. Stammering, *‘I—I—I spent a long time talking to the Lord last night about you, and the transgressions I did against you. And I told him I was sorry. And I think he heard me.’* Rod kissed him, and said, “I love you.” Like a stone placed in the heart that reads, “God loves me,” the Spirit is the presence of God’s glory assuring us we are loved. No greater love has a man than he lay down his life for his friends. Jesus hangs for our divisions, between him and between one another to give us his glory and show us his love. We have every reason to invite others into his love. Point to Jesus. Invite others into God’s love. Finally, Jesus closes with a promise of future glory: *“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world”* (24). Like a child tugging at her father’s hand, Daddy, Daddy, come see what I made, Jesus tugs at the Father to show us what he’s made. To be with him, physically, in the place of his glory. A place where every tear is wiped away, everything made new. A beautiful place with colors unseen, a fruitful place with trees that bear fruit year round, a healing place with leaves that heal, a place of unending light where there will be no need for a sun or a moon because the glory of the Father and the Son’s love will burn forever. The place where he is *and the glory he has* will so unite us in adoring his greatness that division will never creep in. Eternal unity, glory, love.