

“YOU EXPECT ME TO PRAY FOR THEM?”

1 Timothy 2:1-8

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I think people are as confused about prayer as about anything else in the Christian faith. Prayer is to ask God to give something to you or to do something for you, or for someone you care about.

If you don't need anything, then you don't need to pray.

Sadly, that's about all there is to prayer for some people

A young boy was going to bed. He said good night to his parents and some visiting guests. Then he added, *'I'm going up to say my prayers now. Anybody want anything?'* There's something very wrong with that picture.

The Apostle James says this: *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* (James 4:3)

Have you ever tried to put a jigsaw puzzle together without seeing the picture of what it's supposed to look like? It's quite a challenge. Worse still, what if some prankster put the pieces in the wrong box? You're trying to put the puzzle together while looking at the wrong picture.

That illustrates the frustrations many have with prayer. It doesn't come together for them, because they have the wrong picture in mind.

· To get the true picture of prayer we must look into the Bible, God's Word. What the Apostle Paul writes in our Bible text today helps us to see clearly what prayer is supposed to be.

2:1 *I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—*

2:2 *for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*

2:3 *This is good, and pleases God our Savior,*

2:4 *who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

2:5 *For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*

2:6 *who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.*

2:7 *And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.*

2:8 *I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.*

In 1 Timothy 2:1-8 the Apostle Paul explains some key **aspects** of prayer that show us how to pray properly.

I. THE PLACE OF PRAYER. 2:1, 8.

That would be first place. The Bible says so:

2:1 *I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—*

· This kind of earnest, no-nonsense praying must be a Christian's priority. It's *first of all!*

John Bunyan said *'You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.'*

But we all have a problem. When we wake up in the morning life is fired at us point blank. A myriad of other matters distract us from prayer.

One of my teachers in elementary school in South Africa threw chalk at us when we didn't pay attention in class. If the blackboard eraser was handy, sometimes it became the missile of choice. In the British system in those days teachers could do that sort of thing with impunity. Learning was number one, so she made us pay attention. Most of us could use an angel to toss something at us to turn our attention to prayer, because genuine prayer demands our undivided attention.

- Paul uses four distinct expressions for prayer in this verse: *requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving*.

Each term is a nuance of prayer that unwraps and reveals prayer as more than just a hasty religious exercise.

- We should notice that in this first verse Paul says nothing about praying for our own needs and wants.

First of all we pray for others, literally, *for all people*.

That includes people who cause problems, people who annoy and disappoint us—people like Hymenaeus and Alexander.

Let us go back to the last two verses of Chapter One:

1:19 (*fight the good fight*) holding *on to faith and a good conscience*. *Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith*.

1:20 *Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme*.

Right after that Paul wrote, *'I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.'*

When Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, he didn't lay it out the way it looks in your Bible with chapters and verses. There was no chapter break in his letter between 1:20 & 2:1.

The chapter divisions weren't put there until 1200 years after Paul wrote this letter.

So Paul was still focused on the tragedy of the shipwrecked faith of Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom he had handed over to Satan so that they may learn not to blaspheme. He didn't tell them to pray for *'all people, except those good-for-nothing reprobates Hymenaeus and Alexander.'*

He wanted Timothy and the church to keep on praying for them. We looked at this last week.

Handing them over for Satan was so that they would come to their senses and repent and be spared.

“ If your heart is broken for someone whose life is shipwrecked, then you know how crucial prayer is.

It's not the last thing you think to pray for. It's first.

- Let's move ahead to the last verse of our text. Here Paul tells us more about the place of prayer in our lives.

2:8 *I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing*.

He starts with the men of the church. The word *'men'* here is not the generic word for mankind. This means the guys.

They needed some special instruction about praying.

- Both men and women prayed in the early church (1 Corinthians 11:4-5).

Why does he deal with them separately?

Because *Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus* (John Gray, 1992). Honestly, I don't know why.

But Paul clearly addresses gender differences. A hindrance to prayer for men may not be as big an obstacle to prayer for women. (Next week we'll see what Paul writes for the women)

- Paul told Pastor Timothy to teach the men to pray with holy hands uplifted, and without anger or quarreling.

Apparently it was the practice in Ephesus for men to lift their hands in prayer. We bow our heads. Some people kneel. In the Old Testament some fell prostrate before God in prayer.

Physical posture is not the issue here. If you have a resentment or bitterness seething in your soul, you don't have holy hands.

Real prayer demands a right relationship with God ('holy hands') and loving relationships with others ('without anger or quarreling').

Ignore this, and prayer is pointless. God won't listen.

- Prayer must be our highest priority and our holiest activity.

II. THE TARGET OF PRAYER. 1 Timothy 2:2

A couple of weeks ago I went up to that shrine to the great outdoors just north of here, Cabela's. Fascinating place! It's mostly about hunting, fishing and camping. I have never seen so many guns of all sorts in one place.

I haven't carried a rifle since I was a teenager and went for hikes in the African bush.

And that was just for protection, not to hunt.

As I understand it, a rifle is designed for accuracy to hit a precise point.

Shotguns are designed to shoot a spread of shot, and it's quite okay if not all the shot hits the target.

- Prayer has a target.

Sometimes you pray shotgun prayers for all the injured and lost in an earthquake or oil rig explosion. You don't know their names.

But most times prayer is like a rifle. You have your sights set precisely.

In verse one Paul says the church should pray for all people (shotgun prayers); then he mentions specific targets, *for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. (2:2)*

I think that in 95% of my praying I am a sniper. I target individuals. Paul tells us to get specific.

- Why did Paul mention national and civic leaders? Probably because they were least-likely to be prayed for by the church.

The Roman Emperor Nero was no friend of the Christian faith.

- I think some of the Christians might have objected to Paul's instruction here: *'What? You expect us to pray for that rascal?'*

They would gladly offer prayers of imprecation—that God would curse Nero and his ilk.

- That's not what Paul had in mind.

When we pray for those in authority, we pray *that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness/dignity. (2:2)*

We pray that those in authority will be agents of good, because they have so many opportunities to do evil.

Mary, Queen of Scotland (sometimes called "Bloody Mary") said, *'I fear John Knox's prayers more than the armies of England.'*

· President Barack Obama has now become a target of our prayers. Be a sniper; pray that during his term as President *we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.*

Most of us don't have the privilege of talking personally about God to people in high authority. But we can talk to God personally about them, and that's far more important. Prayer is the most powerful way to influence anyone.

It doesn't matter whether you agree with the politics of those in authority or not, they all need to become new creations in Christ Jesus.

God's word allows us no way out of praying for them.

· This is a matter on which some Christians need to change their attitude.

The Apostle Paul tells us how his attitude changed: '*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*' (2 Corinthians 5:16, 17)

That's why Paul said our priority is to pray for all people—people who are like us and people who couldn't be more unlike us. They need our Lord!

Thomas Chalmers said, '*Prayer does not enable us to do a greater work for God. Prayer is a greater work for God.*

If you care about people coming to faith in Christ—and every Christian must—then target them in prayer.

III. THE REASON FOR PRAYER. 1 Timothy 2:3-4

We've already seen one reason: so *that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.* (v.2)

Here's another reason to pray for others:

2:3 *This is good, and pleases God our Savior,*
God likes it.

According to Robert Law, '*Prayer is a mighty instrument, not for getting man's will done in heaven, but for getting God's will done on earth.*'

· Why is God pleased when we pray this way?

2:4 (God our Savior) . . . *wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

This world is under the control of evil. People are held captive in the devil's spiritual domain.

That's why prayer for people to be saved is foremost.

God created no one with the express purpose of damning that person to an eternity in hell. God created people in his image and likeness to be with him for eternity.

When sin separated mankind from God, God acted to reconcile us to himself.

That is the central message of the Bible. It's called the gospel. It's about Jesus Christ and his death on the cross to save people from their sin.

· But not all will be saved. We know that God acts sovereignly in saving people according to his eternal purpose.

It is not our prerogative to judge who will or will not be reconciled to God.

God alone can stir people who are spiritually dead so that they are become sensitive to his grace, and respond to his gift of new life.

2 Peter 3:9 '*The Lord . . . is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but all to come to repentance.*'

1 John 4:14, *'And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.'*

· This subject of God's sovereignty and human choice has been the grist of endless debates between some who call themselves Calvinists and others who align with the teachings of Joseph Arminius (who was, by the way, John Calvin's son-in-law and dear friend.)

In his commentary on Paul's letter to the Galatians John Calvin wrote this: *"It is the will of God that we should seek the salvation of all men without exception, as Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world."*

· If Jesus died for the sins of the world and God doesn't want anyone to perish, doesn't that mean all people are saved, whether they repent and believe in Jesus Christ or not?

Definitely not! People must understand the gospel of God's grace and repent and place their trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior.

· Have you been doing your utmost to persuade someone to become a Christian? You appeal, you explain, you provide books to read, but nothing happens and you're ready to give up. Don't! Your influence is greatest when you go to your heavenly Father in prayer.

'Nothing is outside the reach of prayer, except that which is outside the reach of God.'

· This is a compelling reason to get serious about praying for people.

IV. THE BASIS OF PRAYER. 1 Timothy 2:5-7.

How can we know that prayer is not just words and wishful thinking?

Because the effectiveness of our prayers doesn't depend on how well we do, but on what God has done in Jesus Christ our Lord.

The gospel of Jesus Christ plainly says that forgiveness of sins and new life is by faith in Christ alone.

The Apostle Peter told the religious bigwigs in Jerusalem, *'And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.'* (Acts 4:12)

What Jesus Christ did for sinners by his death and resurrection are the basis of our prayers for others.

2:5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus

2:6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.

Jesus is the Mediator between God and people. He said, *'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'* (John 14:6)

· Jesus gave himself *as a ransom for all.*

We all know what a ransom is. It's the price demanded to release someone who is held captive by kidnappers or by political revolutionaries.

In Bible times it was the price to set a slave free.

· The natural condition of people in this world is that they are held captive in the dominion of the devil.

Jesus said that he came to "give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). In the Bible the word "many" is often a synonym for "all."

By his atoning sacrifice Jesus released from the power and penalty of sin all who place their trust in him as their Savior.

· That's why the whole world needs to hear the gospel, the good news of God's gift of a Savior, Jesus Christ.

2:7 *And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.*

The Lord Jesus Christ commissioned the Apostle Paul to go to the nations with this wonderful good news. He had a passion to declare the truth of Jesus to everyone. . He said, *'I am speaking the truth. I am not lying.'* What he was preaching and writing in his letter was the truth from God.

· Now Paul instructed Pastor Timothy at Ephesus to urge the Christians to pray for people as their top priority.

Is praying for people to come to Christ your prayer-priority? I confess that I'm often drawn into praying first for other needs.

Most often we pray for our own needs or for the needs of others. We pray for those who are sick, those who need jobs.

God our Father cares, and he hears those prayers.

But our priority must be to pray for the spiritual welfare of others. God wants them to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth about Jesus who became ransom for all. William Cowper wrote, *'And Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.'*

· Is your heart broken because someone you love is shipwrecked spiritually?

Do you see why you should make prayer for that person your priority?

· Will you pray for the President of the United States and others in high authority? I don't know their spiritual condition. Let's pray that they will be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.