

The Practice, Purpose and Power of Prayer (1 Timothy 2:1-7)

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[0 : 00] 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 1 to 7. I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people.

For kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. And for this purpose, I was appointed a herald and an apostle. I am telling the truth. I am not lying. And a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.

Good afternoon, church. Afternoon, Julian. Thanks. Good afternoon. It's good to be here with you all today.

[1 : 12] And today I'm going to share about the second chapter of 1 Timothy. And we're going to go over some pretty practical but powerful stuff. So, like it says in the passage, you know, Paul urges us.

Let's ask God together to soften our hearts and accept his teaching. So, why don't we pray before we jump in? Father God, we thank you that your word is so straightforward sometimes.

Lord, we thank you for instructions, the encouragement, and the guidance that it gives, Lord. Would you just forgive us when we've turned to other things, when we've believed in more complicated things.

Help us to accept your grace freely given. And may our lives be changed as a result. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Amen. So, today we're just going to go over three points in 1 Timothy, chapter 2, verses 1 to 7.

[2 : 19] And I just call it the practice of prayer, the purpose of prayer, and the power of prayer. Pretty nice three Ps. And along the way, I'll give us some suggestions for application.

And I'll give us a time to reflect and pray at the end of it as well. And it's pretty exciting. So, let's jump in. If you've been here over the last couple of weeks, you might remember Pastor Albert and Pastor William speaking about the truth.

So invested in the truth in chapter 1. And fighting against what wasn't sound doctrine. So, he was fighting against all the things that were false. And then Paul now moves on and he encourages Timothy and everyone reading this letter to continue to fight the battle well.

He's condemned people that are shipwreckers of faith that he calls them. People that have been ruining Christianity or the name in the church. These two guys, Hymenaeus and Alexander.

And now, after he's talked about those things, he's giving a couple of recommendations. What you should be doing. Timothy, he says, now, keep the first things first.

[3 : 31] Remember this to be of most importance. Paul reminds Timothy that the most important thing is to talk to God.

He calls out four different types of communication. He says to petition, to pray, to intercede, to give thanks. And while you can define these all things differently, slightly differently, depending on the translation.

I think Paul's intention is clear. Give everything to God. Petition him. Ask him for things. Pray to him. Tell him things. Intercede on other people's behalf. Pray for other people. And to give thanks. To count your blessings. You may give your worries, your fears, your future to God.

You may want to give him your praise, your worship, your thanks. You pray for the people you love. But Paul's also saying you should also pray for the people you hate.

[4 : 38] Pray for all people. People you love and people you don't like. Really, Paul? Like, all people? Every single one? Surely God doesn't mean pray for everyone, right?

I mean, that might be okay for Paul back in the day when he's surrounded by godly Christians and being super godly people. You know, that's Paul. But God, you might say, you know, Paul doesn't have enemies like I do.

Paul doesn't have unreasonable parents. Paul didn't have backstabbing friends. God, Paul doesn't even have the colleague or the teacher or the church member that's just so toxic.

Surely all peoples doesn't mean them, God. But I think that's exactly who Paul was talking about. He specifically mentions kings and those in authority.

Those in a higher place, a higher power that you may not necessarily agree with. You see, Paul was writing in a time where much of the ancient world was ruled by the Roman emperor.

[5 : 47] A bit of background. We all like our history. This letter was written around 64 AD. Okay? So it's about 30 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, give or take.

So Christianity had grown a little bit. But Christians were still being heavily persecuted. In fact, during this time, back in Rome, in ancient Rome, the emperor was this guy called Nero.

Handsome guy. Who we learn from history, unfortunately, wasn't such a great guy. There was a massive blaze that occurred in 64 AD known as the Great Fire of Rome.

It was a big tragedy when nearly a third of the city burnt down. And it was thought to have been caused by this guy right around the time that the letter of Timothy was being written.

And now some people think that Emperor Nero actually caused the fire, burned down the city, so he could build his summer palace on top of the ruins. People caught on and they started blaming this emperor for this big tragedy.

[6 : 57] And what did the emperor do? He, in turn, went and blamed the Christians for it. Here's a group of people I can shift the blame onto. This kick-started even more hatred and persecution for the early church.

So, yeah, Nero was not very much a great guy. He was also recorded to throw these massive, big, lavish parties in his palaces.

There's drinking and dining and big outdoor spectacles. He would have these parties at night, and to provide light and warmth, he would hang these big torches.

And for fuel, he would put in Christians, burning them alive. So, yeah, Nero was a very, very not-so-great guy. And I believe Timothy and the Ephesus church, at this point, while reading this letter, would have been asking maybe the same questions that you have.

Really, Paul? We were to pray, to petition, to intercede, to give thanks for all the people, for all kings and those in higher authorities, like Emperor Nero?

[8 : 06] Even though they've done such evil towards us, hurt us, killed us, tortured us, our brothers and sisters? I believe Paul is challenging us here that, yes, the practice of prayer demands us to come to terms with the fact that we could have been the ones committing those crimes.

Nero, Hitler, Isaac. I could have been one of them. I have the same twisted nature, the same sin, the same imperfection inside of me that makes me unholy to a detestable, sinless God.

I could have been one of them. But for the grace of God, for his love and his mercy, you, me, Paul, as he writes just earlier in 1 Timothy 1, we are the worst of sinners of whom Christ Jesus came into the world to save.

Praying for all peoples, for all things, helps us to remind us of the gravity of our sin and the perfect, perfect grace of God. The practice of prayer reminds me that I have done nothing to deserve this life.

I don't even deserve being able to talk to God and having him hear me. But for the grace of God, for this love and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That's why we should practice prayer.

[9 : 31] But Paul goes on and he tells Timothy, he gives him a purpose for prayer as well. And it's funny, it's almost a selfish reason for asking Timothy and the church to pray for all peoples.

He tells them in chapter 2, in verse 2, to pray for kings and authorities so that we may live, what? Peaceful and quiet lives.

In all godliness and holiness. You see, one of the purposes of prayer is that we get to live peaceful, quiet lives. How is that possible?

I think one thing that happens is when you pray for these people, when you pray for people in powerful positions, authorities, that aren't like you, that you might consider your enemy, you remind yourself that you aren't God.

Prayer does this funny thing to your inner being, the one that's constantly screaming out, me, me, me, me, me. It reminds you that you aren't God of this universe.

[10 : 34] You can't control other people. I mean, it's hard enough controlling yourself, isn't it? God is in control. And that's what we realize when we pray.

Jesus reminds us in Matthew 6 to not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes?

Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you, by worrying, add a single hour to your life?

When you trust the God that looks after the birds in the sky and the flowers in the fields to provide for all your needs, you'll find that it becomes much easier to not worry.

God will look after you. You will live quiet and peaceful lives. Paul himself has experienced this. In Acts 16.25, it records him and his friend in prison, chained up, but still praying and singing hymns to God.

[11 : 45] If Paul can have peace in prison, then you and I can have peace and quietness in our everyday lives. But while you trust God to provide for your every need, I think something else happens.

You'll find that as you pray, lives start being changed. You see, two things can happen. Either God changes them, or God changes you.

Yep. God has the power to change the hearts of evildoers, of sinful people, to stop them from hurting others, from carrying on in their sin.

But then God could also change you. To see things from a different perspective. To be more forgiving, more meek, more merciful. Yes, God has the power to heal those close to you that may be suffering.

This might be one of your prayers. He is God, and nothing is too difficult for him. Or God could change you. To cause you to empathize. To use opportunities to love.

[12 : 51] To comfort. God also has the power to change our country, right? Our world. The power to radically transform people like Trump, like Putin, like Luxon.

And we should continue to pray for these people. That they may choose peace instead of violence. That they may choose the good of many instead the selfish good of a few. But also, God can change you.

To be the one that brings peace to those around you. To show the holiness, the godliness of our Father in Heaven to the people and the situations around you. So that we can live quiet and peaceful lives.

That's the purpose of prayer. And as we read through these instructions to Timothy, how many of us have thought to ourselves, Does God actually care?

Does he actually hear us? I believe he does. Scripture tells us over and over again, these are just a couple. God hears the prayers of the righteous, like in Proverbs 15, 29.

[13 : 58] And in Psalms 55, it says, I call to God, and the Lord will save me. Evening and morning and at noon, I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.

I believe God hears every single one of our words that you cry out. Whether in words out loud, or your inner groaning.

Even when nothing seems to be happening. When we pray again and again. We are like a friend who goes to another in the middle of the night. A knock on his door.

A guest has arrived. I've got no food. And Uber Eats isn't working. Can you give me some food to feed my friend? Give me some bread. Your friend, he replies, no, no, no.

It's too late. You keep knocking. You say, give me some bread. Give me some food. They say, I'm already in bed. I'm comfortable. I'm not going to get up and open the door for you. But you keep knocking and you yell, give me bread.

[14 : 58] And even though he doesn't wake up because you guys are good friends. He does. He gets up and gives you as much as you need because of your shameless audacity.

Your persistent prayer. This is how Jesus taught us to pray. Prayer is powerful when it is persistent. Charles Spurgeon, a famous preacher in the 1800s, put it this way.

Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence. God is all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present. And prayer has this special ability, like a nerve in your body, to ask God to work, to move the muscles of his mighty hand.

That is the power of prayer. Even when we don't have the words, Romans 8 reminds us that we have the Spirit who himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

In the same chapter, Paul reminds us that Jesus himself is sitting at the right hand of God, interceding for us. Even when it seems like nothing is happening, when what we want doesn't come to pass, we are encouraged that our prayers are pleasing to God.

[16:12] That's not just empty words. When we pray, something happens in the spiritual realm. Revelation chapter 5 verse 8 tells us that before the throne of God, there are golden bowls, which are the prayers of God's people.

Each time we pray, we fill these golden bowls with a pleasing smell, something that God delights in. Much like Mary pouring fragrance onto the feet of Jesus, our prayers are never wasted.

They never fall on deaf ears. Paul himself reminds us in verse 3 that prayers please God. They please our God, who wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

They please our God, who wants all people to come to know the mediator, the ransom of all people who stood in the middle between us and God, his Son, Jesus Christ.

Paul now takes his time to reiterate the truth of the gospel in these short few verses. The love of God for all people meant that Jesus Christ, his Son, fully God, fully man, became the mediator.

[17:23] The one who restored the mediator. The one who restored the relationship between the Father and us, mankind. Jesus Christ, the one who stood in the middle, taking all the shame, all the punishment that sin deserves.

He did so, so we would not perish. That's the truth of the gospel. We no longer need to follow the long list of rules that Israelites did in the Old Testament of sacrifices and commands before you could come and speak to God.

Or going through the high priest, the only one who would access. Common people couldn't. Christ died to give us that access. To mend that relationship. And you know how relationships start?

By talking. So I encourage you, church. Start today. Build a habit. Bring everything to God and know that that relationship with him will continue to grow and deepen.

The younger ones here, you may not remember, but back in my day, we used to have these things called landlines, right? Or home phones. And the internet wasn't really accessible.

[18:34] Communication was difficult. Texting costs 20 cents per text. Calling people was like 70 cents a minute or something crazy. So what you would do if you were poor like me, but you also wanted to talk to friends, is you'd stay up really, really late into the night and hope that no one else was using the phone.

You'd sneak the phone past your mom and dad into bed, and you'd talk. You'd chat with friends.

The more you talked, the closer you got. The closer you got, the more you talked.

And the more you talked, guess what? The closer you got. Is that you? Is that your desire? Is that how badly you want a relationship with God?

That you would stay up into the middle of the night and just chat? Because if you do, when we do this, when we pray, while we recognize the truth of the gospel, something special happens.

God starts to align our heart with his. We start to see what he sees. Feel what he feels. Certainly for Paul, he believes it is for this very reason that he was called to be an apostle, a teacher to the Gentiles.

[19:55] Let the reminder of the gospel transform the way you pray. I know I pray so often for things that may have no eternal value. I want a more comfortable life, so I pray for my health and our finances.

I want to have control of my life. You know, I hate not knowing what comes next. So I ask God to reveal his plans for me, his will for my future. But how would my prayers change if I remember that God's plan is for all people to be saved?

Would it change the way I approach prayer? Maybe would I first pray for a renewal of my heart to understand the love and the grace of our God?

Would I ask God for the Holy Spirit, who he promises to give, instead of a better paying job or an easier life? Would I beg God to change our leaders, our pastors, our government, to pray for those in authority that they may carry out the will of God?

Many times we ask what God wants. How do we please him? Maybe the answer is, like it says in Timothy 2 verse 3, maybe the answer is just to talk to him.

[21 : 09] Everything else comes out of the relationship. The practice of prayer is to pray for all peoples, giving thanks, interceding on their behalf, petitioning to God.

The purpose of prayer, for one, is to bring peaceful and quiet lives, but also for all to be reconciled to God, all peoples, everywhere, because that's who Jesus Christ came and died to save.

The power of prayer is that it pleases God, our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

So now, I'm going to invite the worship band up, and in a few minutes, we're going to sing through a prayer that Jesus actually gave to his disciples.

Even if you don't know how to pray, you might have never done it before, you can use these words, given to us by our Savior.

[22 : 10] But just before that, I'm going to give us all a couple of minutes, just to spend in prayer. I urge you, even if you've never done it before, try. Just talk to God.

Even if it feels weird, even if it's your first time, just try. You can pray through these suggestions on the screen, or just close your eyes, and give up whatever's in your heart or your mind.

I know he really wants to hear from you. Ask him to change your heart. Ask him to reveal himself to you. Tell him about your worries, your fears, your hopes, your dreams.

Thank him for his faithfulness, the way that he has never let you down. I know he really wants to hear from you. Thank you.