

Title: Pray for Them
Text: 1 Timothy 2.1-7
Theme: Intentional praying
Series: I Timothy
Prop Stmt: Prayer is a gift from God that enables us to express complete dependence on God and genuine love for others all at the same time.

On Tuesday, our nation will vote for our next President which provides each of us an opportunity to find out where our security lies. Is our security determined by the White House or by the White Throne? Is our joy vulnerable to how people vote, or is our joy actually safe with Christ? Put your joy in the vault under the feet of Christ. In other words, put your joy out of the reach of your enemies. If your joy is tied to how others talk about you, how others treat you, or how successful you are, then your joy is not safe from your enemies. If your joy is tied to how much respect you get, or how much you are loved, or how great you feel, or how healthy you are, then your joy is not safe from your enemies. If your joy is tied to who wins the White House then, your joy is not safe from your enemies. Put your joy out of the reach of your enemies. Put your joy in the vault under the feet of Christ. It is safe there.

But, how do you do that? How do you put your joy at the feet of Christ? You do that primarily through prayer. *Prayer is a gift from God that enables us to express complete dependence on God and genuine love for others all at the same time.*

Read Text:

This text is obviously about prayer and I want to encourage us and motivate us to pray effectively. But, in order to do that, there are some things here that are important for us to take to heart. So, my plan for this sermon is to first of all, take this text, like a piece of a puzzle and show you how it fits into the picture. I call that, "the overview". Then, in the main portion of the sermon I am going to make 4 points about prayer. And finally, as we observe the Lord's Table together, I will give us the opportunity to apply some of these. Overview, 4 points and application.

Overview

1 Timothy is a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy. Timothy was sent by Paul to the church at the city of Ephesus to help the church correct some problems and to put into place some necessary practices. This letter is not only instructive to Timothy for the church at Ephesus, but it is instructive for every church that desires to please God and obey him. The first chapter basically recounts the situation and stresses the sacredness and urgency of Timothy's mission.

I do not think, as a general rule that we really understand how important the church is. Do you realize that the local church is the God-ordained means of representing his glory on this earth? The local church is intended by God to be an outpost, or an embassy of the kingdom of heaven on earth. We are here to tell the nations about another kingdom. We

are here to tell the people around us, about another people, a holy nation. We are here to promote the interests and priorities of our true nationality. Christ has entrusted to the local church, the keys to his kingdom. The kingdom of God is the big deal!

So, how can we, average, struggling people manage to carry out such an incredible mission? God left us in charge? Let me scare you to death. Yes! This church is entrusted to us. This church is entrusted to every single one of her members. I wonder how the angels in heaven reacted when they first heard that the Son of God was going to come to this earth. He's doing what?! But, I am fairly convinced that when Jesus said that he was going to leave, go back to heaven and that Peter would be point guard that they went into a full fledged panic attack. Not Peter! It's like sending out the one guy who always fumbles on to the field to be your punt returner. Please, don't touch the ball. Just let it go. The only things scarier than having Peter return a punt is us, right! But, let me encourage you. God did not leave us alone. So, it makes sense then, when Paul gives Timothy instructions on how to build a healthy church that the first healthy practice that he gives to Timothy for the church is to pray. He is talking about congregational prayer.

Chapter 2 begins with the words, “*First of all, then...*” That word “*then*” connects what is about to follow, with what has just been written (1.3-5). Therefore, if we are going to carry out our mission to be a healthy embassy of the kingdom of God on this earth, we have to be a people who pray. And the words, “*first of all*”, could be a statement that refers to something that is the first in a list, or first in terms of importance. When we gather together, it is absolutely urgent that we pray. *Prayer is a gift from God that enables us to express complete dependence on God and genuine love for others all at the same time.* And what we see from these verses is that we are to pray for every kind of person. Verse 1 says that we are to pray for “all people.” He is talking about all kinds of people. Verse 2 gives us an example of one of the types of people we are to pray for. And then (v.7) Paul reminds these early believers (some of whom are Jewish) that Gentiles are part of the people that we pray for because God’s plan is to save them too.

A God-honoring church is a church that prioritizes praying because *prayer is a gift from God that enables us to express complete dependence on God and genuine love for others all at the same time.* You trust God to the extent that you pray to him. You love others to the extent that you pray for their salvation and their good. So, how should we, as a congregation pray for every kind of person when we gather together? Now, 4 points.

1. **Pray comprehensively** (1)

There are at least four different ways in which we are to pray as a congregation.

By the way, if you are trying to attract a crowd, then praying together as a group is not going to be the first thing you think of. There is a difference between attracting a crowd and being a church. Since only Jesus can build the church, then it makes sense that we must pray. But, why are we not all that urgent about prayer? Because we tend to trust in ourselves way more than we should. Prayer is a gift from God that enables us to express complete dependence on God and genuine love for others all at the same time. The truth

is, we tend to rely way more on ourselves than we do on God, therefore, we do not live with this ongoing sense of our need to trust in God.

Notice the different ways in which we express our dependency upon God. *Supplications* speak of making specific requests for specific needs. *Prayer* is a general word for bringing all of these specific requests before God and laying them out for him. *Intercessions* means to appeal boldly on behalf of another and *thanksgivings* speaks of expressing appreciation to God for that person.

Did you notice that each description of prayer is plural? In other words, there should be wideness in our praying for other people. We are to pray for all kinds of people, and we should pray in all kinds of ways for all kinds of people and when we gather together. We ought to pray specifically about particular needs before God, and appeal boldly to God on their behalf, as well as thank God for that person.

In order for us to pray like this, we have to be willing to give this some of our time as a congregation. But, do you see the wisdom of this? The church is always facing the threat of false teachers who arise in congregations and try to create cult-like followings. Praying like this forces us not only to depend on God, but it helps us grow in our love for all kinds of people. Verse 2 helps us see a great example of this.

2. **Pray specifically** (2)

We are to pray for people in leadership. Ok, can you think of a political leader whom you are tempted to detest? Do you pray for that person? When Paul wrote this letter, Nero was the emperor of Rome. Nero is the guy who used to take Christians, dip them in tar, impale them on large sticks, light them on fire and use them as human torches to light his garden for some of his parties. You don't get too much more twisted, deranged, and wicked than that. The next letter that Paul writes to Timothy is 2 Timothy. Paul writes that letter from a Roman prison just before he is executed by Nero.

How could Jesus die on the cross without giving in to bitterness at his enemies? How could Jesus die on the cross and cry out to God to forgive those soldiers because they do not know what they are doing? How could Jesus die on the cross with so much love for others? He showed us how, didn't he? He prayed for them. He prayed for us. And we are called to do the same. We are to pray for our leaders. Our leaders and officials are part of the "all kinds of people" we are to pray for in all kinds of ways.

We are to pray for them for gospel purposes. That is what this text is saying at the end of v.2. Pray that we (the church) may not be interfered with. Pray that we are left alone in order to live as we are called to live. Beloved, the gospel is offensive. We know this, but we do not revel in it. We know that people take umbrage to the fact that God is God, he makes the rules, he establishes the definitions and no one can actually live any way they want. So, when we tell people about sin, many people get angry. For example...

This past week I found out about a man named Johnny who was a businessman in Sweden who became a pastor of a congregation in Sweden. However, some of the influential members of this church sadly, do not want to embrace the gospel. They are offended at Johnny's preaching on man's sinfulness and are organizing to get Johnny removed. If you were Johnny, it would be tempting to look at this situation politically and organizationally and ask, "What do I have to do in order to survive?" But, Johnny needs to pray for these influential members of the church, who in this case do not even appear to be genuine believers. Instead of viewing them as the enemy, he needs to see them as victims, blinded by the enemy. If Johnny is faithful to pray for them, then his heart will be made wide toward them. Who do you need to pray for?

The history of our world is the story of people who get into positions of power and use and abuse those under their control. There are some wonderful exceptions to that, but (stating the obvious), they are the exceptions. Another way of saying that is that the history of our world is the story of people who are not in positions of power who are abused by those who are over them. Most of us can relate to that. So, how do you, as a follower of Christ respond to abusive authority in your life? Yes, you should pray for them with supplications, intercessions and thanksgivings, but you are more likely to think like that and respond like that, if you are already doing that on a regular basis with your church family. We need to be doing that with one another. This is a command for our church to pray. A minute ago, I really set you up, didn't I? I asked you if actually pray for the political leaders you are tempted to detest. But, since this text is written for the church, I had to admit that I have not led you well in this. Yes, we list government officials on our prayer list to pray for. But, when we gather as a church family on Sunday mornings, we need to regularly pray for our governing officials, and I need to incorporate this into our worship service. This will not only encourage you to do the same, but the Lord will use our prayers in the lives of our leaders. He will also use our prayers to enlarge our hearts for them and to actually care for the very people that we are prone to distrust and therefore, disdain. Then Paul gives us some great motivation.

3. **Pray hopefully** (3-7)

Paul is always anchoring commands to the gospel, isn't he? Why should we pray for all kinds of people, and in particular, why should we pray for the very people, that we think the Lord is least likely to save? We are to pray with hope for them because their salvation and for us, living a peaceful, quiet, godly and dignified life is good.

A. **It is good.** (3a)

What makes something good? The ultimate definition of good is God. The closer to God something is, the more "good" it is. Living a quiet, dignified, peaceful life is good. It reflects God well. Praying for all kinds of people, even the ones that you think are the least likely to change is good, because it is like God. God loves to save the least likely people. Seriously, that is the heart of the gospel, isn't it? After all, who is writing these words? It is Paul. He was not a likely candidate for early church leadership. But this is our story too. It really is. When we were God's enemies, Christ died for us. God gave us

Christ, not because we were nice kids who were getting good grades, doing our chores without complaining, and excelling in music and athletics. God did not give us Christ as a reward for making the honor roll or getting a scholarship or citizenship award. God gave us Christ, when we were the kids in the street throwing rocks at his windshield and spraying graffiti on the side of his house. Don't forget where you came from. Don't forget what you were before Christ. God saved you from you.

B. It is pleasing to God. (3b)

God loves to save unlikely people. God loves for his children to live peaceful, quiet, godly and dignified lives. It pleases him. Friday night I met a man from Iraq. He and his family immigrated here due to the violence in his home country. He is a follower of Christ and was a target. As you know believers are killed regularly in Iraq, Iran, and Syria. After arriving in the States, he ended up here in Detroit. His friends said, "what are you doing in Detroit? You didn't leave Iraq to go to Detroit!" But the Lord had other plans. There are thousands of refugees and immigrants from many countries living in our region and they need Christ. This brother not only has been reaching out to the them, but is starting a church. A few weeks ago, he met a young Islamic man who just received his green card, meaning he was able to travel freely. Now that the young man had his green card, this young man planned to go to Syria where he was going to be trained by ISIS and his plan was to come back and carry out a violent act back here in the states, perhaps in our area. The man, I met, happened to meet the young Islamic man and began to talk with him. For three days, he talked with him, prayed with him, pleaded with him. He would not let him out of his sight. He ate with him, had him sleep where he slept and would not leave him. On the third day the young man was to go to airport and fly to Syria. But, on the third day, instead of flying to Syria, he trusted in Christ.

Who are the people that you think are the least likely to trust Christ? Pray for them! God uses your prayers to bring people to Christ, who, like Paul would otherwise be hell-bent on bringing destruction to believers. Pray for them because God uses your prayers to show off his glory and he uses your prayers to bring people to Christ and, in case you haven't noticed, God is serious about bringing people to faith in Christ.

C. It is his plan. (4-6)

It is his desire to save all kinds of people and to bring them to a knowledge of the truth. What is the truth that God wants people to know? There is a Savior for them! In fact, God is so desirous of this (4) that he enacted a plan and has provided a way in order to rescue them. Verse 5 tells us what the way is. It is Christ. And here, we have this beautiful theological truth about Christ and the gospel that provides double motivation to pray, doesn't it? Look at this. I find this heart-filling, soul-happy fascinating.

Here is the theological truth or construct: There is one God and there is one way to this one God. That one way is Jesus! It is Jesus because only Jesus is both God and man. Only Jesus can bridge the gap and only Jesus paid your ransom. Jesus paid your ransom! That should stop you dead in your tracks! Do you know what that means? That is like a bam-

thought! Do you realize the mess you were in? You are prone to think of yourself as being a pretty decent person. But, do you realize the mess you made and the mess that you were in? To be ransomed means that you were being held hostage. The ugly and awful truth is that we were held hostage by our own wills. We willfully sinned and willfully rebelled and willfully wrapped our hearts with the chains of sin and locked them to the cement blocks of death and threw them into the ocean of guilt and judgment. Then, we discovered that we could not break those chains. Worse yet, we didn't care. God, in his justice would have been absolutely fair to allow us to experience the consequences of our rebellion. God could have rightfully said, "You brought this on yourself." Instead, he sent Christ who paid our ransom. Christ, who was God, became a man in order to live the life that we could not live. He then died the death we could not die. He died in our place. He died as an offering for our sin. He died as a wrath-appeasing, justice-satisfying, sin-absorbing, penalty-paying, all sufficient full and final sacrifice to God on our behalf. That is our ransom! Christ paid the ransom to God. Christ willingly paid the ransom to God. Christ did not do this begrudgingly because he had to. Christ chose to do this because this pleased his Father to rescue you. It pleases the Father to rescue you and it pleases the Father to rescue all sorts of people whom you think are unlikely to be rescued. That has always been God's plan. He rescues, ransoms, regenerates and redeems a whole bunch of beggars and street children and turns them into princes and royalty in his kingdom. That's the story! That's the testimony. That's the deal! So, pray! Pray not only because there is a mediator who has provided a means of salvation, but pray because this mediator who provides salvation also continues to mediate on behalf of his children. I think that Paul expresses this glorious theological truth in verses 5-6 for two reasons. 1) It encourages us to pray for the salvation of all kinds of people because there is a mediator who has paid the ransom. Therefore, we can pray for their salvation with confidence because it is so evident that God loves to save. But, 2) this truth is also great incentive to pray! There is a mediator! We have an advocate. When we pray, our cause is well represented by an aggressive, personal, enthusiastic, sympathetic, focused, interested and unrelenting, tireless mediator who is representing you before a very sympathetic judge. After all, it was the judge who sent Christ to be your ransom and become your mediator! What a plan! Brothers, sisters, pray! And when you see all that God has put into place for your prayers, doesn't this encourage you to pray big? Pray big! Ask great things from God. Ask hard things from God. Tell others about this. Tell young men who are planning on becoming Jihadists, about Jesus because God loves to save them. Tell self-righteous, self-worshipping, narcissist Americans about Jesus because God loves to save them too. Pray for government officials because God loves to save leaders.

D. It is our mission. (7)

Paul says, that is my mission. I am engaged in reaching the most unlikely people you could ever imagine with the gospel. I am preaching to the Gentiles. What are the chances that any Gentile is going to come to faith in Christ? What are the chances? 100%! Don't you want to be part of that? Paul did. What are the chances that unbelievers in this world are going to come to faith in Christ? 100%! Don't you want to be part of that? So, pray! Pray all sorts of ways. Pray specifically and pray hopefully.

Our mission, simply put, is to love God and love others. Loving God means to trust him. Loving others means to seek their good. *Prayer is a gift from God that enables us to express complete dependence on God and genuine love for others all at the same time.*

One last thing. I will develop this more next week, because verse 8 is a transition verse. When the church gathers together, ...

4. **Men, pray publicly** (8)

I want the women of our church to pray. I want the women of our church to be wise, godly, gracious, humble and bold theologians. I want the women of our church to handle the Scriptures with great competence and skill and I want them to do that with hunger and desire because the table has been set for them by the men of the church. I want the women of our church to want to pray because they hear the men of our church praying and setting the tone and atmosphere and example for them. God has ordained the men in the church to set the mark and for the women to keep the pace so that together we get to where we are going, with joy and in harmony.

You lift your hands for something. Why not for God?