

The Pillar (Part 1 of 4)

Pray for Everyone

1 Timothy 2:1-2

Mark Vroegop

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

Today we return to our expositional study of 1 Timothy, and we launch Prayer week, our annual focal point for the first week of the year. For the last three years, we've started the New Year with a special emphasis on prayer, and we've invited you to attend various prayer events. Part of the tradition is a 24-hour Scripture reading and prayer vigil that took place in the sanctuary from December 31 – January 1.

Our theme for Prayer Week is **"Make Time To Pray,"** and throughout this week there are a number of prayer events to help you spend time in prayer and even learn how to pray. Passion for prayer leaks, so it is important to reengage the heart by praying with others. Here are the events that we have planned for this week:

- Monday: Father / Son prayer time – 8-9:15 a.m. + 5K fun run afterwards
- Tuesday – Saturday: Morning Prayer – 6:30-7:30 a.m.
- Wednesday: Noon prayer at the Capital
- Thursday: Noon prayer at the Beach in Brookside
- Friday: Global Missions Prayer @ 6:00 p.m.

My hope is that you will pick one of these prayer times, and make time to pray.

Why 1 Timothy Now?

Today we pick up the message of this book where we left off in November – chapter 2 – and we'll continue to study this great and helpful book through the month of May. It has already been a very helpful journey together, and our text today, 1 Timothy 2:1-2, fits perfectly with our theme of prayer.

I chose to dig into this book because 1 Timothy is one of the few books in the New Testament that tells us how we are "do church." The central and most thematic verses are found in 1 Timothy 3:14-15:

14 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth. (1 Tim 3:14-15)

So the book of 1 Timothy helps us know how we should “behave” in the household of God. In other words, it gives us helpful instruction regarding what the church of Jesus Christ should be and do. It provides particular truths, principles, and instructions that transcend time and culture.

The aim for this series was to take us back to the biblical foundations of church ministry. I thought it would be important to review these concepts during this particular season of ministry, especially as we were moving into a new facility. I’ve been around “the church” long enough to know that that a new building can create two challenges:

- First, there can be a misplaced assumption of success. New and bigger space can create an illusion that God is at work or that God’s hand is on a church. It is important to review what is foundational lest we become intoxicated with the appearance of success and miss the essence of our calling.
- Secondly, there can be a misplaced fear of change. There is something very special and important about the environment in which God has met with us in the past. It is hard to separate how a church “feels” from your experience of God; when that “feel” changes (even slightly) there can be a disconcerting sense that the church – your church – has changed. So it is important to review what is foundational lest we begin to needlessly worry and miss the essence of our calling.

1 Timothy helps us by providing some valuable instructions on what the church is all about, and these truths transcend time and culture. In other words, even though this letter was written during the first century, it still is relevant and helpful.

A Quick Review

Since we are picking up this study after a break, let me quickly remind you about a few background details:

- The book is one of three Pastoral Epistles written by Paul to Timothy or Titus who were leading churches that Paul had planted.
- Timothy was a special assistant of Paul, but he seemed to struggle at times with timidity and insecurity about his youthfulness.
- Timothy’s assignment was to pastor the well-established and well-known church in Ephesus that was struggling with a form of false teaching that some erring Elders were promulgating.
- The theme of this book is **guard the truth that leads to life**. The church is God’s vehicle for the proclamation and preservation of this life-changing truth.

The first chapter of 1 Timothy laid the foundation of the book by showing us the problem of false teaching (“How a Church Gets Off Track” and “How to Split a Church”) and highlighting the beauty of the power of the gospel (“God’s Grace is Greater Than Your Past” and “You Were Made to Make Much of God”). The chapter concluded with sober warning to preserve and not make a shipwreck of your faith (“Fight the Good Fight of Faith”).

Now in chapter two the focus shifts to more practical matters regarding how the church is to live out the gospel through corporate worship and body life. In other words, what follows in chapter two is the outworking of gospel-saturated living. If you know that God’s grace is greater than your past and that you were made to make much of him, then there will be a certain conduct that characterizes your life. Part of that gospel-centered drive will be prayer.

A Passion for Prayer

Paul begins chapter two with a particular call for prayer. He urges the church at Ephesus under Timothy’s leadership to be passionate about prayer. But this prayer focus is not just to be for their needs; the call here is for big, sweeping, other-centered praying. They are to pray for everyone.

Notice three things that Paul identifies here about prayer in the local church: the priority, the practice and the product of prayer.

1. The Priority of Prayer

Paul begins this chapter and this instruction to worship by identifying the critical importance of prayer in the life and ministry of the church. There are three words in verse 1 that we should notice: “then”, “urge”, and “first.” Each tells us something about what is on Paul’s heart.

- **“Then”** – This word could also be translated as “therefore,” and it obviously makes a logical connection from what was said previously. What has Paul just talked about? The gospel! And what follows regarding prayer is a product of a full understanding of this statement: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Tim 1:15).
- **“Urge”** – Paul is issuing a fairly strong command here. The Living Bible paraphrases this statement as “here are my directions.” This is more than a suggestion; in light of the gospel content, the church must do this. It is a vital part of her mission.
- **“First”** – The text specifically says “first of all.” The Greek word here indicates a place of importance and priority. In comparison to other duties, roles, and obligations, this should be a first priority issue. Interestingly, it is the same word that Paul uses to describe the Macedonian’s commitment to the Lord – “...they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us” (2 Cor. 8:5). In other words, when you rank the top priorities and the top activities of the church, prayer should be at the top.

Put this together. Just after talking about the beauty of the gospel and all that it means for the glory of God in the world, what does he call the church to do? In the midst of all that good things that could be done to advance the gospel what does he command them to do? To pray!

Now it is not that the other things can't be done. Paul is not saying that the only thing that we are to do is pray. But what he is saying is that the first thing – the most important thing – that we do is to pray.

Does it strike you as strange that prayer should be this important? If not, then is that how you think? Is that what your life and ministry really look like? You see, I think we need to heed this instruction because in our American, individualistic, activity-oriented, and information-loving culture I don't think that we naturally value prayer. If we are honest, I think for many of us prayer is a struggle because it seems like it is less fulfilling, less impactful, and less productive than other spiritual activities.

Oh sure, we'll pray – when we are desperate. But the reality is that few people and few churches really know what it means to live out the gospel by making prayer a priority. Why is this?

- Prayer acknowledges dependency and that is humbling and uncomfortable. Prayerlessness is my declaration of independency from God.
- We are lulled to spiritual sleep in our comfort. Prosperity, blessing, and safety reduce our natural sense of need. It is a sad commentary that our prayer life soars only when we are really desperate.
- Few people grew up in churches with a vibrant prayer ministry.
- We are more captivated by information and learning than prayer. It is sad but true that if I announced an evening study of the End Times or an evening prayer time, you know what the result would be.

Now I don't tell you this to depress you, but I think it is important for us to heed the command and the instruction of this verse. A church that really understands the transformative power of the gospel and who knows the depth of the need in the world will pray. A gospel-saturated, Jesus-loving people will make prayer a priority.

2. The Practice of Prayer

Having established the priority of this ministry, Paul now turns to the focus or the practice of this prayer ministry. There is depth and a breadth to prayer that needs to be noted here.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions...(1 Tim 2:1-2).

Paul lists four different words for prayer, and he calls for the prayers to be offered for everyone. Many New Testament scholars believe that the reason Paul wrote this was because of a wrong focus on the part of the false teachers. The effect seems to be that the church was not focused on evangelism and it showed up in how they prayed.

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

It is amazing how often and easily this can happen. Churches, because they are comprised of people, can easily become in-grown, self-focused, and exclusive. A church has to continually work on be externally focused, and Paul commands that the church lead the way in this through her praying. In other words, a church that fails to pray for needs outside of itself fails to realize what her mission in the world really is.

Prayer is both a thermometer and a thermostat when it comes to external focus. It is thermometer in that it gives us a gauge as to where our real priorities are, and it is a thermostat in that it can change the culture of a church. Prayer reveals and determines our priorities. The content of your prayers indicates what is really important to you. And by praying for certain things or people, your heart is enlarged for them.

Paul lists four different words for prayer. It seems that after he highlights the primacy of prayer he shows us the extent of what he has in mind. Why else would he use four words? Why not just say “pray”? I think he does this in order to show us the significance of this ministry.

- **Supplications** – The word seems to imply some level of lack, need, or desire for something. It is a cry for help.¹
- **Prayers** – This is the most general term for prayer, and it can be used to describe the place or location of prayer.² In the New Testament this word is only used of prayers to God, a nuance that may reflect a focal point of the person praying. If supplications focused on the need, prayer focuses on God’s ability.
- **Intercessions** – This is an unusual word, and it is used infrequently. It has the meaning of a formal appeal or petition.³ A cognate of this verb is used by Paul to describe the Holy Spirit’s intercession in Romans 8:27 and of Christ’s intercession in Romans 8:34. The idea seems to be some level of formal, authoritative, and bold appeal to a person of great authority.
- **Thanksgivings** – From this Greek word we get our English word eucharist, and it refers to prayers of gratitude and thanksgiving. In many cases it means prayers offered to God in gratitude to him for his provisions, but here the nuance seems to be more about the people whom God has put into positions of authority. Keep this in mind because it will become important in a few minutes.

When you put these words together there is a very clear sense that a gospel-centered church should have a multi-layered, creative, and vibrant prayer ministry that is focused on people outside of the ministry.

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Commentary – 1 Timothy*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 1995), 62.

² William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles – The Word Biblical Commentary*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 79.

³ Ibid.

Paul seems to suggest that a very important role for the church and its membership is to be involved in the ministry of prayer for people external to the church. Notice the three categories that he lists in verses one and two: everyone, kings, and all who are in high positions.

The church is commanded to pray for **everyone**. It seems that a very important role and a very effective way to demonstrate the love of Jesus is to pray for people. My own experience has proven this to be true. I have found that one of the easiest ways to demonstrate the love of Jesus, and open a door for evangelism is to ask someone if there is anything for which I can pray. Therefore, I want to encourage you – even challenge you – to pray that God would send someone across your path this week who you can ask this simple question: “Is there any way that I can pray for you?” Further, I’d like to cast a long-term vision for you about our church. I would love to be a church who is known for really caring for people through prayer, a place where hurting, discouraged, and desperate people can be prayed for. I’d love for our monthly prayer gatherings (Fresh Encounter Services) to be a place where you can bring a hurting friend and see God meet their needs through prayer. Finally, I’d invite you to join our Elders every Sunday from 7:15-7:45 a.m. in the Prayer Room as we seek the power of God upon what happens here on Sunday.

But Paul doesn’t stop there. He pushes the envelope even further as he urges prayers to be offered for **“kings and all who are in high positions.”** He is calling upon the church to recognize that every authority figure is ordained by God (see Romans 13:1-2). The church is to pray for the people who God has raised up as leaders.

A number of years ago in my former church I was spending time with the Lord and praying about how our church could be more externally focused. In God’s providence I was led to this verse, and I took it as a clear answer to my prayer. Later that same week I was at a banquet for a local rescue mission where I was the guest speaker and seated next to me was a State Representative. During our meal I said, “Representative Kuipers, this week the Lord seemed to call me to pray for our elected officials, and I am wondering if there is anything that I can pray for you?” He responded so positively, and he gave me three or four requests – some were for his children. And I began praying for the requests. Six months later, I ran into him again. I reminded him about our conversation, and I asked him about the requests, especially about his kids. He was shocked. After updating me on the requests, he asked if we could have lunch some time. Now, I was shocked. That was the beginning of a five-year friendship. On the Election Day of his successful run for State Senate, I invited him to come to our church sanctuary where we knelt together before the Lord, praying for his will to be known. That experience taught me that there is a vital role for the church to play in the public square through prayer.

But there is even more here. Remember the statement that I asked you to remember about thanksgiving? Paul is suggesting that we should both pray for and be thankful for kings and those who are in high positions, but becomes even more meaningful when you consider that the Emperor of Rome at the time was Nero, the famous persecutor of Christians. Don’t miss this: the church was to pray for good rulers, bad rulers – even persecuting rulers! This is what the gospel does.

You when see a person receives Jesus as their savior, God completely forgives, cleanses, and secures that person forever. There is no condemnation over them (Rom. 8:1), and nothing – death, life, angels, rulers, things present, things to come – can separate him or her from the love of God (Rom. 8:38-39). The believer in Jesus is completely free and safe! Therefore, this person is free to do things that the world would see as backwards or even risky. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew and Luke:

*"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account (Matt. 5:10-1).*

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... (Matt. 5:43-44).

"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you (Luke 6:27-28).

Do you see how connected the gospel is to all of this? Knowing that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners transforms how we live right now, and it motivates our externally focused praying. The gospel creates the drive to pray for people and issues beyond just the needs of our own church. The gospel pushes us to have a heart for a world in desperate need of the transformation that Jesus can bring.

3. The Product of Prayer

The final element that Paul highlights is the effect of this kind of prayer ministry. He identifies for Timothy that there is a role for the church to play in the culture; there is a reputation that the church should have in light of the gospel. In other words, the power of the gospel creates certain kinds of people in the world.

"...that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" (1 Tim. 2:2).

As you can hear in this verse, there is a gospel-effected tone or flavor for the followers of Jesus that includes four things:

- **Peace** – The word means tranquility or quietness. Not in the sense that there is no talking, but in an internal sense of security and freedom from anxiety.
- **Quiet** – This is likely a synonym of peace, and it means calmness, inner peace, or gentleness. While the world is in an uproar, panicking, or shrill, the believer is calm, kind, and at peace.
- **Godly** – The meaning here is a total consecration to God and his will, and it can also be translated as reverence. The true knowledge of God leads these people to behavior that fits with what they believe.

- **Dignity** – The word denotes a solemn, serious attitude and behavior.⁴ It refers to level-headed conduct, and a high standard of morality.

This is what the church and its members are to be known for. This is part of their role as Christians in the culture. This is what you and I are to be known for – in our neighborhoods, in our workplaces, and in the public square.

Christianity is not supposed to be a parochial island to itself in the culture, only being concerned about our own needs. Nor are we to be party to the cultural tone that is filled with panic, anger, abusive speech, and deceptive practices. 2012 is going to be a very interesting year for our national economically and politically, and I'm not suggesting that you sit on the sidelines. I'm not advocating some form of passivity, but I am telling you that the church is supposed to be known more for her praying than her power, known more for her godly conduct than her political victories.

In calling the church to pray for everyone, Paul is commanding us, in light of the gospel, to embrace our role in the world. To see that prayer has to be a priority in the church and in the believer's life. To embrace the depth and breadth of prayer through an externally focused concern. And to realize that the gospel frees us to be different people – radically different people – in the midst of seasons of change, uncertainty or even persecution.

So if you know and love the gospel, live like it and pray like it. Use your safety and your freedom in Christ to boldly love on hard people, to be calm in difficult circumstances, and to confidently take people who need the transforming power of the gospel in their life before the throne of God.

I invite you to start this new year with a new commitment, beginning this week: to pray for everyone.

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Scriptural Citations: Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical quotations are from the English Standard Version.

⁴ Mounce, 84.