

Prayer is Priority!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 February 2022

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 0 0] But if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, for a short while this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read.

1 Timothy chapter 2. 1 Timothy chapter 2. And if you read again just from the beginning.

What Paul says, 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, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

This is good and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus.

And so on. Now I'm sure we've all heard of the familiar missionary slogan from the Slavic Gospel Association.

[1 : 1 3] Much prayer, much power. Little prayer, little power. No prayer, no power. That slogan was first penned and pronounced by the founder of the Slavic Gospel Association, Peter Denka.

He was actually more affectionately known as Peter Dynamite. He was known as Peter Dynamite because he was a powerful preacher and he was known as a prayer warrior.

And as someone who was so passionate about preaching the gospel and also praying to God, Peter Denka, he wrote a book in the 1950s called, you'll never guess, Much Prayer, Much Power.

And it's a fascinating book to read. It's a very small book and you can actually get it in a PDF format. I think I'll put it in the notices for this week. So you'll have a link to read it if you want.

Because in his book, Peter Denka, he highlights and he homes in on the need to pray, the power of prayer, and even how to conduct prayer meetings.

[2 : 1 5] And he has all these amazing stories of how the Lord directed him through prayer. And he also speaks about all his experiences of gathering for prayer with different people from all over the world, from different countries and different places.

And he gathered with them for prayer and he speaks about all these experiences. But you know, when you read Peter Denka's book, you're reminded of how prone we are to forgetting the priority of prayer.

I was reading through the book and I was thinking, well, how prone I am to forgetting the priority of prayer. Because, you know, we can read books and we can reflect upon all these books about prayer.

We can read about the importance of prayer and the intensity of prayer and the influence of prayer. But, you know, it doesn't matter how many books we read and reflect upon.

Because it's the business of prayer that's priority. It's the business of prayer that's priority. And as you know, Spurgeon was someone who knew that prayer is priority.

[3 : 23] Spurgeon knew that prayer is priority because each Lord's Day, as you know, Spurgeon, he preached to a full capacity church of 6,000 souls. And whenever he was asked about the secret to his success in ministry, we don't like using the word success or his faithfulness in ministry, he always said, my people pray for me.

You know what a testimony to have as a preacher. He says, my people pray for me. Spurgeon knew that the prayer meeting was the engine room of the church. And as Spurgeon explains in his book, it's called Only a Prayer Meeting, another brilliant book on prayer to read.

He said, if the engine room is out of action, then the whole mill will grind to a halt. Because he says, we cannot expect blessing if we do not ask.

We cannot expect blessing if we do not ask. Brethren, says Spurgeon, we will never see much change for the better in our churches until the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians.

So, my friend, prayer is priority. Prayer is priority. And that's the first thing Paul reminds Timothy in this letter. He reminds him that prayer is priority.

[4 : 43] Prayer is priority. I want us just to look at these verses, these opening verses of chapter 2, under the headings, the request for prayer, and then the reason for prayer.

The request for prayer, and then the reason for prayer. So, we see the request for prayer. He says in verse 1, Now, as you know, Paul, he wrote this personal and pastoral letter to Timothy.

Timothy was a young minister who was preaching and pastoring a congregation in the city of Ephesus. And as we've discovered, for many years, Ephesus had been this model church in the early church.

In fact, Ephesus had a great heritage of preachers and pastors. Because, well, Paul had planted the church in Ephesus, then he ministered there himself for three years.

But they also had ministers like Priscilla and Aquila and Apollos and Silas. They worked there to establish the church in Ephesus. And then after Timothy, after Timothy had been the minister in Ephesus, towards the end of the first century, the apostle John was in Ephesus.

[6 : 11] And John was there, as we read in his letters, he was there dealing with the nonsense of Gnosticism. And so, Ephesus, you could say, had this great heritage of preachers and pastors.

But even though it was a place that had a great heritage of preaching and pastoring, it didn't leave them void of heresy. Because as we learned from chapter 1, there's these erroneous elders in Ephesus who are twisting the Torah and glossing over the gospel.

And their false teaching is influencing and infiltrating the Christians in Ephesus, which is why Paul sends Timothy to Ephesus in the first place. It was to confront and challenge these erroneous elders about their false teaching, the false teaching that they're preaching and promoting in Ephesus.

And of course, that was no easy task, especially for this young minister. He was a young man who was inexperienced, and he was, in his own eyes, immature to deal with the heavy burden that was being placed upon him.

Because, as we saw, when Timothy arrived in Ephesus, all he found was problems. Problems, problems, problems. In fact, there were so many problems in Ephesus that Timothy wanted to leave.

[7 : 32] He wanted to throw in the towel and just walk away completely. He wanted to just give up. But as we read in the introduction to the letter in chapter 1, Paul exhorts and he encourages Timothy to stay there, stand firm, and stay focused.

Stay there, stand firm, and stay focused. Paul says to Timothy, keep preaching the gospel. Keep pastoring these people. Keep reminding them and reassuring them that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Keep reminding them and reassuring them that they're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Timothy, stay there, stand firm, and stay focused.

I know that you think you have so many problems. Problems, problems, problems. But Paul says right here at the beginning of chapter 2, pray, pray, pray. Because prayer is priority.

Prayer is priority. And as we read, that's Paul's first exhortation and encouragement to Timothy. He says, prayer is priority.

[8 : 42] First of all, first of all, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.

Paul says, I urge you, I exhort you, I encourage you to pray. Pray, pray, pray, he says. And you know, it's interesting the word that Paul uses to urge and exhort and encourage Timothy to pray.

It's actually the same word that Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit in John 14. The word that Jesus used and the word that Paul uses is the word paraclete.

It describes the comforter, the helper. Literally, it's the one who comes alongside. The one who comes alongside. And that's what Paul is saying to Timothy. He's saying, Timothy, pray that the Lord will come alongside you to strengthen you and support you and sustain you in your ministry and in the work of the gospel.

Pray that the Lord will come alongside you. And notice, Paul doesn't urge Timothy to carry out a congregational health check.

[9 : 54] And Paul could have said that. He doesn't exhort Timothy to conduct a survey of the congregation in Ephesus. And that's things we have to do. He wasn't told to have diagrams and pie charts full of unhelpful statistics that mean absolutely nothing to anyone.

Nor does Paul explain to Timothy that he needs to write a strategy document. No, Paul says, very simply, I urge you with urgency.

This is first and foremost. This is primary. This takes precedence over everything else. Prayer is priority.

Prayer is priority. Timothy, stay there, he says. Stand firm. Stay focused. Pray, pray, pray. And with this, we have to see that Paul is emphasizing and explaining to Timothy that as the pastor in the congregation, you know, Paul is stressing, he's stressing the priority and the primacy of the prayer meeting.

He's stressing the priority and the primacy of the prayer meeting. You know, as Anna Weiss-Burgeon said, we shall never see much change for the better in our churches till the prayer meeting occupies a higher place than the esteem of Christians.

[11 : 14] And, you know, if Paul had to stress the importance of prayer in the first century, and Spurgeon in the 19th century had to even rebuke Christians in his congregations for not attending the prayer meeting, then the same is true in the 21st century.

Because the emphasis and the exhortation of Scripture, as we see here, is still the same. Pray, pray, pray. Because prayer is priority.

And when it comes to prayer, Paul says that prayer should be specific. Prayer should be specific. He doesn't want us to generalize prayer. And he emphasizes that by using four different words, four different and distinct words to describe prayer.

He says, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people. So he talks about supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings.

Supplications, they're the prayers to God to supply the need. Of those who are lacking, whether they're lacking temporally or spiritually.

[12 : 30] We've been encouraged to pray that God would supply their needs. All their needs according to his riches and glory by Christ Jesus. Then he says, prayers.

That means that we're to pray, and in our prayers, we're to ascribe adoration and adulation to God. Our prayers are to be full of praise to God.

They're to bring glory and honor to God. So there's supplication. Then he says there's prayers. Then there's intercessions. Intercessions means that simply we're to pray for one another.

We're to bring the prayers and petitions of others to the Lord in prayer. We're to bear one another's burdens at the throne of grace. We're to pray with one another and for one another.

And you know, that's why I find those prayer notes, the praying for one another prayer notes, I find them so helpful. They're helpful because they direct our intercession.

[13 : 28] They give us informal or informed intercessions, and also intentional intercessions. So he says, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and then thanksgivings.

Which means that we should always be thankful in our prayers. We should always have an attitude of gratitude in our prayers. Gratitude for God's goodness.

Gratitude for God's grace. Gratitude for the gospel of Jesus Christ. We should have an attitude of gratitude in our prayers. Because prayer is priority.

And as Paul says, prayer should be specific. It should be particular. That's what he says. First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.

So Paul urges us, he exhorts us, he encourages Timothy and us. And this congregation to see that prayer is priority. And prayer is particular.

[14 : 37] But he also says that prayer is for all people. Prayer is for all people. You know, when Paul says that prayer is for all men.

Or all people at the end of verse 1. It literally means mankind. He's talking about the whole of mankind. The word he uses is anthropos.

Meaning mankind. Men and women. Boys and girls. Everyone is included, he's saying. And Paul says, we're to pray for everyone, everywhere, without exception.

We're to pray for everyone, everywhere, without exception. Why? Because as Paul explains and emphasizes in verse 4. God, our Savior, desires everyone, everywhere, without exception, to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

Therefore, we're to pray for everyone, everywhere, without exception. That they'll be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. We're to pray for everyone, particularly, he says, particularly for our family.

[15 : 43] And we know that. That's what we do naturally. We pray for our family, and our friends, and our neighbors, and our work colleagues. We're to pray that they'll be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

But what we see in verse 2 is that Paul highlights and homes in on those whom we might tend to skip over.

Or skip over, you could say, in prayer. He says in verse 2, pray for kings and all who are in authority.

Pray for kings and all who are in authority. Now, Paul's teaching here might seem very straightforward to us. To pray for kings or queens and all who are in authority.

It seems straightforward to us because, well, it's important for us to pray for our sovereign, Queen Elizabeth. We're to pray for our queen. And especially at this time of this year, which is her platinum jubilee.

[16 : 47] She's been on the throne for 70 years. She's been the monarch of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth for the past 70 years. And, you know, you often hear it being sung, the British National Anthem.

But it's actually a prayer for our queen. It was written in the 18th century as a prayer for the king. And that's what it is. It's a prayer. And in many ways, the Lord has certainly answered that prayer for our queen.

God save our gracious queen. Long live our noble queen. God save our queen. Send her victorious, happy and glorious. Long to reign over us.

God save our queen. And the Lord has answered that prayer. Thankfully, our queen is saved. She has come to a knowledge of the truth.

But, you know, we should pray for her family. For her children. For Prince Andrew and all that he's going through. Pray for her children and her children's children. That they too would be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

[17 : 57] But more than that, we should pray for her government. Because we need a good and a godly government. But as you know, there are many laws being passed in both governments.

Westminster and Holyrood. Laws that have been passed that are contrary to God's word, God's will and God's way. So we must pray for our prime minister. We must pray for our first minister.

We must pray for their cabinets. That they would all know and fear the Lord. Which is the beginning of wisdom. And with that, we should pray for Christians who are in parliament.

That they would be encouraged and enabled to have a voice in our day and generation. But, you know, the thing is, when Paul wrote 1 Timothy chapter 2, he wasn't thinking about Great Britain.

He wasn't thinking about Great Britain when he was writing to Timothy. Paul was thinking about the Roman Empire. The mighty Roman Empire.

[18 : 59] And that's what puts all this in perspective. You know, Paul highlights and homes in on those whom we might tend to skip over in prayer. And he says in verse 2, Pray for kings and all who are in authority.

And Paul was teaching Timothy, he was teaching the church in Ephesus, what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Pray for your enemies. That's what he was basically saying to Timothy.

Pray for your enemies. Jesus said, You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who hate you.

Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. And, you know, it's so important as to what Paul is saying here, because Nero was emperor at the time.

And if you know anything about the emperor, Nero, you'll know that he hated and he hurt many Christians. He took pleasure in punishing and persecuting Christians.

[20 : 01] Nero would have Christians beaten and then battered and then burned. And so, my friend, to be a Christian in the first century, living under the rule and reign of Emperor Nero in the Roman Empire, it simply meant that you were signing your death warrant.

You come out on the side of Christ. You confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. You are signing your death warrant. In fact, the year that this letter was written, that's what I find fascinating.

The year that this letter was written was written in 64 AD, the same year as the great fire of Rome, where Nero, he set fire to the city of Rome so that he could rebuild it according to his liking.

And he used the Christians as a scapegoat. He used the Christians in Rome as a scapegoat to place the blame on them for the fire and then proceed with more persecution.

And with persecution so real and so rife within the Roman Empire, you know what Paul says in verse 2 becomes even more powerful. Because he's saying, pray for your enemies.

[21 : 11] Pray for your emperor. Pray for the one who's in authority in the Roman Empire that you may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

Pray for your emperor that he'll be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. And what a statement to make to Timothy.

Pray for your emperor that he'll be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Pray, pray, pray, he says, because prayer is priority. Prayer is particular. And prayer is for all people.

But you know, Paulie doesn't leave it there because the request for prayer is then quickly followed with the reason for prayer. The request is followed by the reason.

The reason for prayer, which is what we see secondly and a bit more briefly. So the request for prayer and then the reason for prayer. He says in verse 5, The reason for prayer, for there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

[22 : 28] Now, as you know, many people, they often ask the question, why should we pray at all? Why pray? Because they say something like, well, if the Lord is omniscient and omnipotent and omnipresent, then why pray?

If the Lord is all-knowing and he's all-powerful and he's everywhere present, then why bother praying? If the Lord knows what's going to happen and even plan for it to happen, then why should we pray?

If the Lord knows what we're going to say and ask before we say and ask it, then why should we bother? Why do we need to pray? And of course, the simple answer is, well, Jesus prayed.

Jesus prayed. And Jesus prayed as someone who was both God and man. Jesus prayed as someone who was both divine and human.

Jesus prayed as the God-man. And if Jesus thought that prayer was needed and necessary for his life and ministry, then surely we should see and see the priority of prayer as needed and necessary for our life and our ministry.

[23 : 42] And, you know, if Jesus told us and even taught us how to pray, then surely we should follow in his example. And, you know, it's important to note that when it comes to prayer, the example Jesus sets for us is that Jesus had long prayers in private and short prayers in public.

Jesus had long prayers in private. He was praying all night on the hill on his own, but he had short prayers in public. Long prayers in private, short prayers in public.

And, you know, every book you read about prayer, about the influence and the intensity and the importance of prayer, they all say the same thing. That man, Peter Denka, who wrote Much Prayer, Much Power, he emphasizes it again and again in his book.

Short spiritual prayers, fervent prayers. Spurgeon says it in his book, Only a Prayer Meeting. He actually talks about a time when he told someone to sit down. They'd been praying too long and he's told them, finish the rest at home.

We're here for a prayer meeting. Even Andrew Boner, the free church minister, he said it in his book, it's a book, a visitor's book of texts.

[25 : 02] I started reading this book the other day and that's what it's called, The Visitor's Book of Texts. And even in the introduction, the first thing Andrew Boner says, he says is, what we say to the sick should be brief.

And when we pray with the sick, we should be short in our prayers. I am persuaded that short, frequent, and fervent prayers at a sickbed are most suitable.

And so the example of our Savior and even the emphasis of Scripture is that prayers should be longer in private and shorter in public. Longer in private and shorter in public.

And you know, even as a rule of thumb, it was my professor, Donald MacLeod, he often reminded us in college, and I'm sure I've said this to you before, that when you pray in public as ministers, this is what he would say to us in our practical theology class, when you pray in public, during the first five minutes of your prayer, the congregation are praying with you.

During the next five minutes, they're praying for you. And anything after that, they're praying for you to sit down. And you know, it's so true, isn't it?

[26 : 16] It's emphasizing to us that when we pray, our prayer should be longer in private and shorter in public. But you know, as Paul urges and exhorts and encourages Timothy and his congregation to see that prayer is priority and prayer is particular and prayer is for all people, he says that the reason we pray at all, the reason we pray at all is because we have a mediator.

We have someone who not only prayed as God, but we have someone who also prayed as a man. We have someone who intercedes on our behalf as both God and man.

Because as both God and man, Jesus Christ can relate to both God and man. He can relate to God in his divinity and us as man in his humanity.

He is the perfect mediator. That's what Paul is saying here. He is the perfect mediator because he's the God-man. He's the only mediator who fills the chasm and stands in the gap between holy God and sinful man.

And what Paul says is, this is the reason for prayer because there's no one else who can reconcile us to God. There's no one else who can restore our relationship with God.

[27 : 36] There's no one else who can receive our prayers and present them to God apart from this Jesus. This Jesus who is both God and man.

There's no one who can reconcile us, restore us, or receive our prayers apart from this Jesus. Therefore, says Paul, we are to come with boldness. Come with boldness to the throne of grace because there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men and he is the man, Christ Jesus.

Do you know, I'll always love those words in Hebrews chapter 4 where it talks about our great high priest who was touched with a feeling of our infirmities.

You know, there's nothing that Jesus doesn't understand about us. And that's why we're urged to come with boldness to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy first and foremost, but also find grace to help in our time of need.

And so the first thing Paul reminds Timothy as he goes into his letter, the first thing Paul reminds Timothy, he says, stay there, stand firm, stay focused.

[28 : 52] I know you think you've got problems, but pray, pray, pray because prayer is priority. Prayer is priority. Prayer is particular.

Prayer is for all people. This is the request for prayer. And then Paul says, the reason for prayer, and it's a wonderful reason, there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus.

So Paul is saying to Timothy, pray, pray, pray, pray. And the message for us is the same. Pray, pray, pray, because prayer is priority.

Prayer is priority. But may the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray. O Lord, O God, we give thanks to Thee for the exhortation and even the encouragement from Thy Word this evening.

We thank Thee, Lord, for the reminder that prayer is so powerful, that Thou are the one who does hear and who does answer. And Lord, we pray that Thou wouldst make us prayer warriors, that we would be much in prayer, and that we would see much power in our lives and in the lives of those who are still outside of Christ, that they would see the power of the gospel working in their experience, drawing them from darkness unto Thine own marvelous light, that they too would come to a knowledge of the truth, that they would be saved.

[30 : 36] And Lord, give to us a burden for them, that we would bear one another's burdens, that we would bring them to the throne of grace, that we would plead for them, that we would pray for them, that we would intercede on their behalf.

O Lord, we give thanks to Thee that Thou art one who will answer us in accordance with Thy will. For that is the wonder of what the psalmist says, that I love the Lord because my voice and prayers heeded here.

I, while I live, will call on Him who bowed to me His ear. Lord, hear us then we pray. Go before us. Take away our iniquity. Receive us graciously.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Now we're going to sing again. This time in Psalm 28.

Psalm 28 in the Sing Psalms version on page 33. Psalm 28. We're singing from verse 6 down to the verse mark 9.

[31 : 49] Before we sing, I'm just going to highlight the prayer points, the pray for one another prayer points that were sent out this week. Now this week, we're encouraged to pray for the youth camps.

I mentioned on Sunday morning about youth camps, about Ferrier's Youth Camp. But pray for the youth camps. All the camps have been allocated and places and maybe even encourage the children to look at the camps.

I was going to do that at the YF on Sunday night, but we never managed to do it. But pray for the camps. They've been a great blessing throughout the years of people coming to faith because they were hearing the gospel.

Pray also for Richard and Barbara who are serving the Lord in Europe. Pray for them that they'd know the Lord's blessing. Pray also for Grace Church Montrose.

So this is a new church plant in Montrose. Pray for them as they seek to go forward and outreach in the Montrose community. We're also encouraged to pray for the Jews encouraged to pray for them.

[32 : 58] Again, to pray for Dumasani, the Theological Institute in South Africa. And pray for Romania, that's a Slavic country, to pray for them that they would know the Lord's blessing and that they would know the Lord's help in all that they're going through.

So, I mean, you can read the prayer points yourself, but just to remember them and to be mindful of them. And as we were encouraged this evening, pray for our Queen. Pray for our government. Pray for them.

We just, you look at them and you think, oh Lord, help. That's all we can do is pray for them. Pray for those who are in authority over us. So we're going to sing Psalm 28, singing verse, from verse 6 down to the verse Mark 9.

Praise to the Lord, for he has heard the plea for mercy which I made. He is my strength, he is my shield. I trust in him who sends me aid.

We'll sing down to the end of the psalm of Psalm 28 to God's praise. praise to the Lord, for he has heard the plea for mercy which I made.

[34 : 24] He is my strength, He is my shield, I trust in him who sends me aid.

My heart uplifted leaves for joy, my thanks to him I gladly sing.

The Lord God is His people's strength A saving fortress for his King Lord, Savior, your people, your Lord, Lord, be pleased to have heritage to bless Be there, your shepherd, carry them forever in your faithfulness.

Amen.