

“Pray for Kings”

1 Timothy 2:1-4

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Introduction:

This morning I would invite you to take a bulletin and turn with me to the inside of the front cover—to the page that has been set aside for prayer concerns—and I would invite you to think with me for just a moment about the concerns that are there. Certainly there are many things that we pray for—we pray for this congregation, we pray for our outreach efforts, we pray for those who are traveling, we pray for the unemployed, and we certainly pray for those who are sick.

And then, of course, there are many things we pray for that are not on this list. I am reminded of a minister who observed a young man praying, but as the minister walked by, he overheard the school-aged boy fervently whispering the words, **“Tokyo, Tokyo, Tokyo,”** and being pretty curious about that, the minister interrupted by saying, **“I am so impressed to see you praying so fervently, but please tell me: Why do you keep referring to Tokyo?”** And the boy answered and said, **“Well, you see, I just finished taking my geography test in school, and I have been asking God to make Tokyo the capital of France.”** And so there are certainly times when our prayers may be for some rather selfish reasons, but often we are, in fact, praying for others.

This morning, though, I would like for us to consider a prayer request that is sometimes overlooked, and it goes back to a brief (but often overlooked) passage in the book of 1 Timothy. In our pew Bibles, the book of 1 Timothy starts on page 1854. You might remember that the book of 1 Timothy was most likely written at some point after Paul’s first imprisonment in the city of Rome—most likely at some point around 64 AD. **»PPT»** As we think about world history in 64 AD, we remember that the Roman Empire was being ruled by a wicked tyrant by the name of Nero. From history, we know that Nero was the first Roman Emperor to make it his policy to kill Christians. He murdered his mother and his brother and even burned Rome in order to blame it on the Christians.

At this point, it would have been so easy for Paul to complain. It would have been so easy for Paul to encourage the early Christians to organize a revolt, to protest, to start a movement to have Nero removed as Emperor—an impeachment as we might say today. However, as we are about to be reminded, Paul suggested quite a different solution, and it is a course of action that we can still employ today. We certainly realize that our situation is not yet as bad as it was in ancient Rome; however, we do have struggles. From time to time, we will have some serious

disagreements with our elected leaders. **»PPT»** There are times when we will be incredibly frustrated with those who lead our nation, and so if you will, then, please look with me at **1 Timothy 2**—the words of the apostle Paul to the young preacher Timothy, as Timothy served the church in Ephesus under the rule of a brutal and godless Emperor. The words of Paul in **1 Timothy 2:1-4**...

¹ First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Based on this passage, I would like for us to consider the importance of praying for those in positions of power.

I. **And first of all, I'd like for us to consider THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER IN GENERAL—THE FACT THAT PRAYER IS GIVEN HERE AS A PRIORITY.**

»PPT»

As Paul says, ***"First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men."*** And what strikes me is the variety as Paul uses four different words to get the point across. We find, first of all, that Paul refers to ***"entreaties,"*** and some translations use the word ***"supplications."*** The word carries with it a sense of urgency, focusing on a specific need. Just a few chapters later, in **1 Timothy 5**, Paul referred to widows who were widows indeed. He said, in **1 Timothy 5:5**, ***"Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day."*** We have, then, a picture of an older woman with no living relatives who are able to take care of her, a widow who relies on the church for support—Paul says that such women are to play the very important role of continuing in ***"entreaties"*** night and day. It is the same word that Paul uses in our text for this morning. Last Sunday afternoon, I stopped by to visit with one of our own elderly widows, and on my way out the door she made a point of saying, ***"You know, I pray for you every day."*** That meant so much! And that is exactly what Paul was talking about. Even though someone may not be able to contribute to the congregation in other ways, the offering of entreaties is an extremely important way of being involved in the work of the church.

Secondly, the apostle Paul urges us to offer ***"prayers."*** A prayer seems to be an entreaty or supplication that only God can answer. We are to bring these concerns, then, to God.

Not only are we to offer entreaties and prayers, but Paul also refers to ***"petitions,"*** and some translations refer here to ***"intercessions."*** In other words, we are to pray on behalf of others—bringing another person's concern to God, asking for mercy, or grace, or help during a time of need—standing before God on behalf of another person.

And then finally, we are to offer *“thanksgivings.”* Even in difficult times, we are to make our thanksgivings known to God through the prayers that we offer.

And we find that these things are to be done (according to verse 1) on behalf of *“all men.”* The word *“men”* here refers not just to males but to all people, and so we are to pray for everyone. We are to pray for our mates, for our children, for our parents, for our siblings, for the church, for friends and neighbors, for our children’s teachers at school, we are to pray for everyone.

II. However, as we come to verse 2, we clearly see A VERY SPECIAL EMPHASIS, as Paul very specifically says that WE ARE TO PRAY FOR KINGS AND ALL WHO ARE IN AUTHORITY. »PPT»

Of course, in our free society, it is tempting to use our freedom to whine and complain about our political leaders. When we disagree with those who are leading our nation, it is tempting to throw up our hands in despair as we start bashing the current administration—and of course for some it is tempting to do nothing but bash the former administration. As I was preparing this morning’s lesson and looking at the picture up here on the wall, I kept thinking that most people could find at least two men up here who they would consider downright evil. Of course, the disagreement comes when we start trying to decide which ones are evil!

Let us please remember, however, who was leading Rome at the time Paul wrote this letter. As we mentioned earlier, the Emperor at this time was Nero—a madman intent on destroying the Lord’s church—a man who was intent on murdering Christians. And yet in spite of this, Paul tells the young preacher Timothy to pray for kings and for all who are in authority. This reminds me of a comment that was made by Edward Everett Hale, the U.S. Senate chaplain from 1903-1909. One day he was asked, **“When you consider the condition of our country, is that what makes you pray for the senators?”** And Mr. Hale responded by saying, **“No, I look at the senators and pray for the country.”** And so not a lot has changed over the past 100 years, or even the past 2,000 years. As Christians, instead of whining and complaining, we are to pray for those who serve in positions of authority.

We are to pray for our government leaders—no matter how good or bad they are, no matter what political party they belong to (whether Democrat or Republican), no matter whether they are conservative or liberal, no matter how moral or immoral they may be, no matter how just or unjust or even how corrupt they might be—we are to pray for those in authority because God put them there, God can direct their decisions, and when the time comes, God can also remove them from office. We remember what Paul wrote earlier in Romans 13...

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear

of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it [referring to the government] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

And so, knowing this, what is the best way to influence our government: By sitting around the lunch table at work slamming our leaders for this or that, or by spending that half hour in prayer—by going to God in prayer on their behalf? The apostle Paul would suggest that prayer is by far the most effective option.

We have several examples, even in Old Testament times, of God changing the course of human events through the actions of world leaders. In **Daniel 2:21**, for example, Daniel was praising God and said, ***“It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding.”*** There is also an interesting reference in **Proverbs 21:1**, a statement from the wisest man who ever lived—King Solomon said, ***“The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.”*** What a powerful statement! The Lord has the power to channel world events through the hands of our leaders.

Certainly it is difficult when things are not going our way to pray for our leaders. And yet we do have an example of this in the book of **Jeremiah**. After God’s people were taken away into Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah wrote a letter to the captives and passed along a message from God. In **Jeremiah 29:7**, the prophet said, ***“Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.”*** In other words, the Lord said that when the people were captured and taken away by force into a foreign land, they were to pray for the peace and prosperity of that land—they were to pray for their enemies. In fact, in the Bible, even wicked men like Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus the Persian are referred to as being the ***“servants of God,”*** even when they were being used to punish or persecute God’s people.

Some of you are aware of the prayer guides that we purchase and put in the cubbyholes from time to time. Several are still available on the table in the entryway—basically a bookmark with a listing of the top 130 members of the current administration. More have been ordered and will most likely be here by Wednesday. We’ll put those in the mailboxes as soon as they get here. And regardless of our feelings toward the current administration, I would suggest that all of us pray for these leaders by name and that we do it on a regular basis. As Paul says, we are to pray for kings and for all who are in authority.

III. So we have seen the importance of prayer, we have seen that we are to pray for all people, and especially for those in positions of authority, but before we close this morning, we need to consider THE GOAL OF OUR PRAYERS, and we are about to find that WE SHOULD BE PRAYING FOR OPPORTUNITIES—PEACEFUL CIRCUMSTANCES THAT WILL FAVOR THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL. **»PPT»**

Paul says that we should pray for kings and for all who are in authority, *“...so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* In other words, we are to pray for our leaders—not necessarily for wealth, or good times, or even for victory in a time of war—but we are to pray so that we might be able to lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. *“Tranquil”* refers to the idea of inner peace, freedom from worry and concern. *“Quiet”* refers to the idea of outer peace—peace in our daily lives, the kind of peace that people around us can see when they notice how we interact with others, when they notice how we react to stressful situations at work or at school or in the home. As Christians, we are not troublemakers, but as far as it depends on us, we are to live tranquil and quiet lives. *“Godliness”* refers to reverent awe before God, living with the understanding that God is watching. *“Dignity”* refers to the idea of seriousness in the way we live—not that we can never laugh or smile, but that we live with the understanding that life has a purpose. We are to pray, then, for God to bless our leaders so that we will be able to lead peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and dignity.

How interesting! The same Emperor who will eventually execute the apostle Paul is the same man who kept the peace, who maintained law and order in the far reaches of the Roman Empire so that Paul's gospel would continue to spread like wildfire! This is the same Emperor who built roads—roads that would carry the gospel message to the ends of the earth. And so this tranquil and quiet life Paul refers to in verse 2 is not the end goal, but the goal of peaceful Christian living is sharpened for us in verses 3-4 where we find that the ultimate outcome of a godly and dignified life is that we influence the world around us to obey the gospel!

The goal of the prayers we offer on behalf of our leaders is that all people will be saved and will come to the knowledge of the truth. It is also interesting here to see the emphasis on praying for *“all”* who are in authority so that *“all”* people will be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. In other words, this is not a matter of only praying for our leaders, this is not a matter of only praying for our nation, this is not a matter of only praying for people here in Wisconsin or even in Madison, but we approach our prayers for those in authority in a way that looks beyond our own immediate concerns.

As we know, some governments put policies in place that slow down the spread of the gospel, while others enact policies that speed up the spread of the gospel. Some people govern in a way that makes it easier for us to live as we should. Paul tells us, then, to pray for those in positions of authority, so that we can live in a way that honors God. Peter said something very similar in 1 Peter 2:13-17, *“Submit*

yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king."

Conclusion:

This morning we have studied the importance of prayer. Certainly we can pray for those who are sick, we can pray for those who are unemployed, we can pray for those who are traveling. Perhaps, after taking a geography test, we may pray that Tokyo is really the capital of France. But this morning we have allowed the inspired word of God to remind us of how important it is to pray for kings and for all who serve in positions of authority. And we have learned this morning that we pray for our leaders with the ultimate goal that the climate will be right for sharing the good news with a world that is lost in sin.

The good news is that God sent His only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. We respond to that sacrifice with faithful obedience. Motivated by our love for God, we turn away from sin and we allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism—dipped in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, please ask, and we would love to study with you sometime soon.

If you are already a Christian but you have slipped and fallen, the Lord would love to see you come back. If there is something in your life that we need to pray about as a congregation, please write it down, bring it to the front, and we can go to God together. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can let us know about your decision as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org