



1 TIMOTHY A PRAYING CHURCH

WEEK 5 | 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-7
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As we have been working through the book of I Timothy, we have seen what a healthy, God-focused church looks like. We are talking about the kind of church that wants to do things God's way, honor Him, and be centered on His Son, Jesus Christ. So far, we have seen that this kind of church is doctrinally sound, gospel-centered, and fighting the fight of faith. Today, we are going to see that a healthy church is also a praying church.

I think it goes without saying that prayer is one of the most powerful graces that God has given us, which, sadly, is often the most neglected. In one sense, every one of us knows that prayer is important, yet at the same time, most of us would say that we don't pray like we should. A healthy church not only knows the importance of prayer but also engages in it. Paul instructs us to pray as a church, which is something that is to be both private and corporate. There are a lot of things that a church can do to manifest hope, attendance, and recognition, but a church that sees a true movement of God is a church that is actively seeking God through prayer. If we want to be a healthy church that sees the lasting fruit of lives being transformed by the gospel, we must be collectively seeking the Lord in prayer.

What Prayer Looks Like (v.1)

Paul lists four words to help us understand what he means when we talk about praying. While I don't think we should overthink the words that Paul is using here, each of these words speaks to an important aspect of prayer. The first word he uses is "petitions," which can literally mean "desires or needs." This is asking in prayer, and it is something that we should not be afraid to do. We have been invited by God, as His children, to bring our requests (Philippians 4:6) and cares before Him (1 Peter 5:7). Scripture is clear that God not only invites us to bring our needs and desires but also delights in giving good things to those who ask (Matthew 7:7-12). God, who is the giver of all good things (James 1:17), wants to do good for us and tells us not to be afraid to ask of Him. The people of God should never be afraid to bring their petitions before Him. While I think the idea of petitioning God can be expansive, meaning that we are invited to ask God for anything that is in accordance with His will, we should never neglect to ask for spiritual things. So often, we may be tempted to seek our own kingdom in asking rather than the kingdom of God by which we know that God will give us what we ask for (Matthew 6:33). Our petitions should not only be for ourselves but for others, as well. As we will see as we work through the passage, Paul urges us to pray on behalf of others.

The next word he uses is "prayers." This is the most general word for prayer used in the Bible. It refers to any and all kinds of prayers that we see referenced in the Bible. When I think of this word, I think of the general ebb and flow of communication with God. When I have a need or see a need for others, I pray. When I am thankful, I pray. When I am joyful, I pray. When I am hurting, I pray. Prayer, in general, should be part of our regular life, happening continually throughout the day. These are the prayers that we are to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

The third word he uses is "intercessions." This word doesn't speak as much about interceding for others as it speaks to conversation in an intimate way. It carries a boldness that we have to come into the presence of God and commune with Him (Hebrews 4:16). This is the depth of prayer where we feel a closeness with God, sharing our lives intimately with Him. All mature believers experience a closeness with God where they feel they can come into His presence, opening their lives bare before Him while feeling His presence in their lives. This is the kind of prayer that Jesus modeled and made possible for us.

The final word is "thanksgiving," which involves being thankful to God for all things, especially the gospel. This should be in all prayer as it acknowledges that all things come from God. All throughout the day, there are reasons for thanksgiving and praise, and we should be quick to express this gratitude to God.

Who We're to Pray for (v. 1b-2)

When we think about prayer, it is important to note who we are to be praying for. Of course, some of our prayers are for ourselves. We all have needs, desires, and much to be thankful for. We should seek to be in close communion with God, which involves sharing the details of our lives with Him. This is the personal and private part of prayer. As part of the body of Christ, we are to pray for each other. We are to go to the Lord and intercede for one another, asking Him to work in the lives of those around us. One of the best ways to experience this in our church is to be involved in a Life Group where you can share your life with others who can pray for you and allow you to pray for them. While these are important and vital, Paul doesn't just limit prayer to us and each other but says we are to pray for "everyone." Some translations say, "all people." This makes clear that our prayers are not just voiced for those inside the church but for those outside as well. He wants the church to lift up the world to others collectively.

This is revealed in the fact that he mentions secular governments and authorities. The Bible teaches that government is the idea of God (Romans 13:1) and is established for the benefit of people. Sadly, because of sin, authorities do not always operate this way, which is why it is even more important for us to pray for leaders. Paul alludes that when the government operates well for mankind, it can be an ally of Christian life and the gospel. However, the governing authorities sometimes operate differently, and Paul knows this very well. During this time, Rome was led by Nero, who was cruel and persecuted many Christians and was the leader under whom Paul would ultimately die. Even in times of hardship, the apostles understood that anyone with authority had been given it by God and, therefore, must be submitted to unless it violated what God had said (1 Peter 2:13-17). Knowing what governments and authorities are capable of puts even more emphasis on why we should pray for leaders. The church should be actively praying for the world. Imagine what may happen if we spent as much time praying for the world as we do complaining about it.

What We are to Pray for (vv.4-6)

There are a lot of things that we can pray for concerning our world. Because of the reality of sin and the need of man, there is no shortage of the things that we can ask for. However, the primary prayer we are to pray for the world is for their salvation. Paul reminds

Timothy that God desires that people would be saved and come to understand the truth. Paul then transitions into a mini gospel reminder that the one true God sent Jesus to stand in the gap between Himself and sinful mankind so that we can have access to God through His saving work. The greatest thing we can pray for in the life of anyone is that they would be saved. We so easily get confused about what the greatest need of the world is. Sometimes, we focus more on God stopping the bad than saving the lost, which would lead to an end of evil. The greatest need of the world is that lost men may find forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.

Verse 4 raises a question that has been debated for the ages. It has to do with God's desire for everyone to be saved. If that is the case, then why isn't everyone saved? To answer that question, I think we have to understand that God has both a permissive will and a will of decree or command. His permissive will involves the things that He desires to happen, but that won't necessarily be done, while His will of decree involves the things that command to happen as part of His divine, sovereign plan. For instance, we see in Scripture that God desires for all of us to pray without ceasing, yet we know that we don't do that. Yet, there are things that God desires to happen according to the purpose of His will that will for sure be done. While God, in one sense, desires that all people would be saved, this is not according to His divine plan by which He leaves some to the consequences of their sin, unbelief, and rejection of Jesus. God's choices are determined by His sovereign purpose, not just His desires.

A Praying Church

I am glad to be part of a church that cares so much about one another that we lift up each other's physical and earthly needs. I am glad that we care enough about each other to share our lives with one another and seek prayer for the spiritual struggles we face. But I also want us to be a church that understands that there is a lost world that needs Jesus and is actively praying for that as well. Today, we are going to end by doing what the Bible has just instructed us to do: pray.