

Prayer for All
United Church of Broomfield
September 22, 2019

1 Timothy 2:1-7 (New King James Version)

¹ Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all, ² for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. ³ For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and us, *the* Man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, ⁷ for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ *and* not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Prayer is good. Prayer is necessary. Prayer is essential. Prayer is universal, all-encompassing and vital for everyone. That is something that we can surely get from this passage, yes? The author is exhorting, urging – not just saying, “you know, it’s a good thing to pray for folks.” No – it is SO crucial to you, them and the church that I *urge* you to do it.

And then the author doesn’t just say pray. No – offer your supplications, prayers, intercession and giving of thanks. All of these things are simply variations on prayers, yet the author feels the need to stress them all and I think it’s because he is pushing the point. Pray, pray, pray! Prayer is key...to what / for whom? Well, he says that as well – so that “we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”

So, now that I have that established, let’s move to the whom? In this passage, the author gives a broad instruction; that we should pray for everyone. In this passage you hear - **ALL** prayers, **ALL** in authority, **ALL** are to be saved, and Jesus Christ was a ransom for **ALL**.

The author is quite insistent about ALL - EVERYONE. This isn’t very discriminating. The prayer isn’t limited to good people, religious people or deserving people; it doesn’t favor those with a certain level of education or those with a certain intensity of need. We’re asked simply to pray for *everyone*.

Why everyone? The author gives the answer a sentence or two later: “For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” We should pray for everyone because God wants us to. God has extraordinary wonders in store for every human being, and God wants everyone (get that word again, *everyone*) to get the full benefit of God’s divine grace. God is exceedingly generous, good beyond all of our imagining, and doesn’t want any blessings to go to waste or any of the human race to miss out on the blessings. The author said, “God ... desires everyone to be saved and to

come to the knowledge of the truth.” So, it’s really very simple. I should pray for everyone because God cares about everyone and God has salvation and truth enough for everyone, and it would be a shame for this salvation and this truth to go to waste.

I’m sure this idea was difficult for some people in the first century to grasp. In the time that 1 Timothy was written, early Christians were widely oppressed. Nero ruled over the Roman Empire and he was notorious for torturing and killing Christians. Those in authority were anything but kind to this new and fledgling group of religious zealots. Yet, the author is stressing that these early Christians should pray for **everyone**, clearly meaning that they should pray for their tormentors.

Also, it must have been hard for a devout Jew who had come to know Christ as Lord to see uncircumcised Gentiles joining the church. A Jew worked hard to get hold of the faith in Judaism that eventually led him to Jesus Christ. He knew the laws of God and tried to fulfill them. Jews saw most Gentiles, on the other hand, as somewhat lawless, careless and intellectually speculative. To have been a Jew in that era, one would have found it easy to pray primarily for the salvation of one’s own people, and if any Gentiles slipped in by chance — well, all right, but one wouldn’t go out looking for them.

I don’t need to tell you that the same basic mood still exists today. Most of us find it easier to pray for those we’re aligned with; politically, theologically, economically, etc. And it’s sad to say, but for quite a long time, churches have been some of the biggest offenders of this Biblical instruction. Some churches, despite espousing that “all are welcome,” aren’t really that welcoming to people who aren’t their kind; people who dress differently, talk differently, or come from a different racial, economic or intellectual background — they aren’t welcomed with as much enthusiasm.

The author counsels that we should pray for “everyone,” but then he continues, “for kings and for all who are in high positions....” Although we ought to pray for everyone, the author feels compelled to call out certain people to have special prayer: kings and persons in high positions.

Is this because such persons are more deserving than the rest of us? Does the Bible favor people who have power? In truth, quite the opposite. If the Bible shows any favoritism at all, it is for those who are without power — the poor, the orphan, the widow, the alien and the outcast. But we should pray for kings and other people “in high positions” — persons in public office, and perhaps also those people who, because of their money, their social status or their prestige are able to influence what goes on in government. Why? Because kings (and presidents, prime ministers, governors, mayors and congressional leaders) have the power to provide us with a quiet and peaceable world, where we can live, the author says, “in all godliness and dignity.”

Some church and denominational bodies include a section in their service prayers where they pray by name for their national and regional leaders. It's not a practice in our church, but in today's complicated world, with minute-by-minute reports and tweets that are increasingly disturbing, I personally try to pray for our president and other key officials whether or not they belong to my own political persuasion. I pray for them, not because I agree with them, but because — as the author says — these persons have power and are capable of providing a peaceable world in which to live. We should pray that they properly use their power, that they focus on peaceful and benevolent results, that they will seek and try to understand the will of God.

We often forget how practical the Bible is. When the author of 1 Timothy told the early Christians — and by extension, tells us still — that we should pray for those who rule over us, he wasn't just being religious, he was being very pragmatic. People in political power make the decisions that determine whether we will have war or peace and the decisions that play a large part in how much prosperity or poverty our world will have. If those leaders are irrational, greedy and foolish, great harm can come to people, as well as the planet. But if those leaders are wise and unselfish, they can make a huge difference in the daily happiness of the average citizen. As the author put it, they can provide a world where we can lead "quiet and peaceable" lives "in all godliness and dignity." When we pray for leaders, we are not only helping them, we're helping to make a better way of life for ourselves and for everyone else.

The instructions in 1 Timothy is to pray for ALL, including kings and those in authority. *** Now, it doesn't say that we have to like what our leaders do – just pray for them. As we talk of prayer, let us not think of prayer as only words, but remember that prayer is also action. While we are praying for *everyone* we should also vote, we should protest, we should speak up. God wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth. The truth is - we play a role in salvation, through our prayers. Through our words and actions, we become wise and we change the world.

The perfect example that I can offer you today is Greta Thunberg. I'm sure you know who she is – she is a 16-year-old girl from Sweden who, only about a year ago, took time off from school to sit alone outside of the Swedish parliament calling for stronger climate action. Within a very short year, this young lady with Asperger's - her actions have created a revolution – a global awareness, that is leading the youth of the world toward change. I'm not sure if Greta is religious or not, but she speaks of God's charge to us to care for God's creation. The world has been given to us and it is our responsibility to be good stewards so that it will not only be around forever, but it will be healthy, abundant and flourish, for all generations to come.

In the last year, Greta has given a Ted talk, spoken at the United Nations, spoken at the world economic forum in Switzerland, and last week spoke to the U.S. congress. There, she said, ""My name is Greta Thunberg. I have not come to offer prepared remarks at this hearing. I am

instead attaching my testimony. It is the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C [SR1.5] which was released on October 8, 2018. I am submitting this report as my testimony because I don't want you to listen to me. I want you to listen to the scientists. And I want you to unite behind the science. And then I want you to take action." Greta's prayers are not one of words, but actions.

She desires that her testimony – her prayer – be that ***everyone be saved, that everyone come to the knowledge of truth.*** Listen and take action. In support of Greta and in response to our Christian doctrine – (today it's the words from 1st Timothy) - let us pray for everyone and particularly for our leaders, for it is good and acceptable in the sight of God.

AMEN