

1 Timothy 2:1-7 & Colossians 4:2-6 **Praying for EVERYONE!**

Portions adapted from "What God Wants," Dr. Roger Thomas @ SermonCentral.com

A guy was on a diet. His biggest temptation was donuts. As he drove down the street in front of his favorite donut shop, he prayed, "Lord, if you want me to have a donut this morning, let there be a parking place right in front of the bakery." Later his wife asked him if had stopped at the donut shop. He told her about his prayer. "Well, what happened," she persisted. "It was like a miracle he said, there was a parking place right in front of the door just like I prayed. I spotted it on my eighth trip around the block."

We say want to know God's will. What we really too often want to know is how to bend God's will to ours. At other times, we pretend that God's will is a great mystery. We say we can't do what we don't know. Most of the time our problem is not lack of knowledge but a lack of obedience. What Mark Twain said of the Bible applies to God's will in general. "It's not those parts that I don't understand that give me the biggest problem, it's the parts that I do understand."

So what is God's will for our lives? What does he want me to do?

Today's text clearly spells out a major portion of God's will for our lives and also for others. It is not a mystery. It is not complicated. It involves three interrelated goals; which we will handle in reverse order so you can see their connections.

1. God wants everyone to be saved.
2. God wants us to live godly lives in support of His salvation efforts
3. God wants us to pray for all kinds of people so that they also might be saved.

Let's start with God wants everyone to be saved. Look at verses 3 & 4. God wants us to pray for all kinds of people [because]... *God **our Savior, desires everyone to be saved** and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4).*

Can this be any clearer? God's great desire is for the salvation of lost people. And God's will is for us to be involved in His efforts to save these lost people. God doesn't want to save just some, He wants to save all people; all kinds of people.

The Christian message is not about making us feel better. It is not fundamentally about our earthly happiness. It is not about making us healthy, wealthy, and wise, even though some of those things may be byproducts. The gospel is about how men and women who *are dead in their trespasses and sins can be made alive together with Christ* (Eph. 2:5).

The gospel is not about this political policy or that welfare program. It is not about social reform or caring for the poor and hungry. It is not about building hospitals or orphanages as good and important as all these things are. **The truth is Christians have always been the first people doing these things both here and around the world because this is also part of God's will for our lives and because these ministries our support the spread of the gospel. The gospel is that**

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God John 3:16-18

You can be the healthiest, best fed, most highly educated, generous and kind hearted person in the world, and if you die apart from Christ – you will be separated from God – who wanted to save you - forever.

Hearing and believing the Gospel. That's how you became saved. Somewhere, sometime, somebody told you what Jesus had done for you. You heard it. You believed it. You accepted it. What was true for you is true for everyone, God wants all people to hear and respond to the Gospel; all kinds of people. The gospel is not a white person's, rich person's, or an old person's message.

- God wants to save the up and coming as well as the down and out.
- He wants to save the person who has only broken one of the Ten Commandments as well as the person who has broken them all.
- He wants to save those who are respectable and the convicted felon. He even wants to save the kind of people you don't like.

God wants all kinds of people to be saved and He wants you involved in helping to bring that to pass for as many people as possible. That this is God's will, however, doesn't mean that all people will be saved. Jesus and the rest of the Bible make this clear. God doesn't necessarily get everything He wants; this is one of those truths about how God works that we will never understand, we just accept it because the Bible says it is so.

Remember that childhood taunt? Can God do everything? Can He make a rock so big that He can't pick it up? The answer is that God can't do everything. He can't die and in certain ways He can't change, but He can – especially in response to prayer - change His mind. There are also things that God will not do: He will not lie, He will not break a covenant promise, and in that mysterious interaction between His sovereign will and our will, even His predestination requires our response. Jesus once explained it this way... *All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away* (John 6:37 NIV).

God is ultimately in control, but we humans are still responsible for responding. And surprise! Now you know that somehow our response to God for those people who God wants to save, both with our prayers, and our lives, and our witness, all this is involved in the process.

God wants all kinds of people **to come to a knowledge of the truth**. Salvation comes from them hearing and accepting the truth of the Gospel for themselves, which is that *"there is one God, there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all"* (vs. 5-6).

Two hundred years ago some theologians wrongly concluded that if it is God's will that all people be saved, then he doesn't need our help. They argued that if God wants the heathen saved, he would do so Himself. If we believed in God's predetermination of who would and would not be saved, they insisted, we need do nothing. William Carey and other missionary pioneers had to argue that foreign missions, that our participation in sharing the Gospel was indeed God's will. Clearly Jesus meant what he said when he ordered us to go into the world discipling all people. Clearly that was Paul's understanding of his ministry. He writes, *God our Savior, desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth ... For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle ... a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth* (Verses 4-7).

People become saved when those who are already saved speak the truth about what God has done in Jesus Christ and extend an invitation for lost people to come to Jesus. **God's will is our work**; that is what we have been left here to help accomplish. **We can't save a soul, but the life we live, the gospel we share, and the prayers we pray – in some mysterious way – can help save them.**

God wants all people to be saved. That's the first and most obvious lesson of our text. The second lesson flows from there. God wants those who are saved to lead godly lives because we are his best advertisement. People make judgments about God based on the conduct of God's children.

That's why in addition to wanting all people to be saved, God also wants us to live godly lives as our endorsement of the gospel. Listen to the way Paul underscores our responsibility in God's salvation efforts. In this letter, Paul urges Timothy to live in a way that is *"above reproach"* (5:7), and to instruct believers to manage their households well *so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us* (5:14).

To his disciple Titus Paul would write ...

Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us. Titus 2:7-8

The point is that while our lives should back up our words, our words are still needed. Sharing the good news of Christ Jesus' offered salvation is God's will for our lives. To the Romans Paul would write:

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' Romans 10:14-15

Today's text uses four terms to describe the quality of life that God wants from us. The first two speak to our relationship with people — we are to be **peaceable and quiet**. We should be that kind of person who gets along with everyone to the degree that we have control over the relationship. We aren't trouble makers. We don't look for arguments and quarrels. We should have a reputation for being kind, gracious, and peace loving.

The second two words refers to our relationship with God. **Godliness** refers to a spiritual reverence that is more than skin deep. Our love for God should be genuine and it should show. We aren't just going through the motions. **Holiness** describes a life that is set apart for God. We don't just do what everyone else is doing. We live for and follow Christ because he has made a difference in us. That is God's will for your life. That's the kind of life that will impact a lost world and cause the people who know us to want to know more about our God.

God wants all people to be saved. That's number one. That is why He wants us to live godly lives that endorse the gospel. But God also wants a third thing. He wants us to pray for ourselves and for all others!

If we don't pray, we might think that we are the key to saving the world or that we can live a godly life under our own steam. God knows better. He wants us to know better. That's why he wants us to pray. For us, prayer is step one.

Listen to the way Paul phrases the necessity of our prayers: ***First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for all people***

Paul urges us to **always** be praying for **all people**. In the Greek language this word "all" (*pantown*) shows up six times in these seven verses. The words ALL and ALWAYS sets the theme for this whole paragraph. Have you ever heard that dictum: *never speak in absolutes*. Obviously neither has Paul. Because basically he is writing that we should always be praying for all the people that God wants to save because Christ gave his life to ransom all of them.

That is why the most important thing we can do both as individuals and as a church is to pray for all people; for everyone without exception. Our prayers somehow form a vital part of God's plan for saving the lost and blessing God's people.

- We pray for the Lord to send laborers into the harvest.
- We pray for fellow believers to be strengthened for God's ministries (2 Thessalonians 1:11)
- We pray for the sick (James 5:14).
- We pray that the Lord will open doors and give us words to say when the opportunity arises (Col. 4: 2-6).
- We even pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:28)
- Our text adds another topic to our prayer list. We are to pray "*for kings and all those in authority.*" Remember, these words were written to believers who lived in the Roman Empire, whose rulers were evil, anti-Christian tyrants. Yet believers were called to pray for them, because God wants to save them too!

We live in terribly partisan political times. I am not sure that it is worse than it has ever been, but it is quite bad: Many people have a generally divisive spirit, apparently looking for excuses to offend. Republicans and Democrats are constantly at one another's throats. National needs and worker's paychecks are obviously less important than the 35 day tit for tat stare down between Trump and Pelosi with their respective parties lined squarely up behind them.

I don't care what side of that argument you were supporting. But I know that everyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus has an even higher responsibility to pray for those in authority whether they belong to your party or not. Obviously, I am not talking about praying that they drop dead or get what we think they deserve. Our text says *supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for for kings and all who are in high positions.*

Our mandate – direct from God –, is to be asking Him to guide them, to help them be the best leaders they can be for the sake of the country that they are leading. And yes, even thanking God for their leadership.

Why do we pray for those in authority? Our Bible is quite clear: *The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever he will* (Proverbs 21:1).

Many times our scripture states that God puts into power – even those we may consider evil – to fulfill His specific purposes (c.f. Daniel 2:21, 4:17, Romans 13:1). And God has charged us to pray specifically for these people. Note how our text explains it. We pray so that we can live quiet, peaceful, holy and godly lives.

- The society we are in affects how we live.

- Those who govern affect our society.
- We want good leaders because that makes it easier for us to live good lives.
- Our good lives make it easier to get done what God wants done — the salvation of lost.

Yes, Christianity can thrive in times of persecution, but it does even better in times of peace (c.f. Matthew 13).

Eugene Peterson writes: "Prayer is political action. Prayer is social energy. Prayer is public good. Prayer shapes more of our nation's life than is formed by legislation. That we have not collapsed into anarchy is due more to prayer than to the police.

That society continues to be livable and that hope continues to be resurgent are attributable to prayer far more than to business prosperity or a flourishing of the arts. The single most important action contributing to whatever health and strength there is in our land is prayer." (Eugene Peterson's *Where Your Treasure Is* (W.M. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, MI, 1993)

Here is a radical suggestion? You can't do this with your unbelieving neighbors, but whenever anyone who claims to be a Christian brings up politics in your presence (regardless of their party or position), don't let them rant and rave and complain without asking them, "*Have you been praying for Donald Trump, for Nancy Pelosi, or fill-in-the-blank like the Bible tells us to?*" You might even offer to have a spontaneous prayer meeting right then and there rather than continuing to roast your least favorite politician. And begin your prayer with, *Dear Lord, guide, support, and bless your servant* _____. This way to remind yourself and others that these people are God's appointed servants for our good (c.f. Romans 13).

But let's back up one step to where this verse began

First of all, then, **I urge** that supplications, **prayers**, intercessions, and thanksgivings **should be made for everyone** (1 Timothy 2:1)

We began today, talking about discerning God's will for our life. Can it be any clearer than this? **Prayer forms the heart of every Christian's continuing ministry. Somehow by God's grace, He allows supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings to have a role in His sovereign government of the world ... so prayer becomes the most important activity for the church**

- We pray because God is pleased when we pray (1 Timothy 2:3)
- Our Prayers bring forgiveness of sin and changes in circumstances (James 5:16)

- Our Prayers can heal a nation (2 Chronicles 7:14)
- Our Prayers and witness empowers the spread of the Gospel (Colossians 4:2-3)

We pray for all because Christ died for all and it is God's will that all might be saved.

- So not to pray is to slight the cross!
- To pray only for ourselves is to deny the worldwide outreach of the cross.
- To ignore lost souls is to ignore the cross.

(Weirsbe, Bible Commentary, pg751-3).

Are you feeling convicted yet? I am!

After worship we often have a small group gather in a small room for prayer, when instead we should be gathering with a group like this in a room like this!

God wants these things to happen in each of our lives. They are all related. The order is important.

- We start by praying for ourselves and for all others that everyone might hear and receive God's good news of offered salvation.
- We pray for our leaders because we want a world that enables us to live God-honoring lives. That's not easy in the best of conditions. It is extremely difficult in a society gone wrong.
- We pray for the strength to live godly lives both in sharing and supporting the Gospel. If we fail at this point, no one will give the message of Jesus a second notice. Our lives do matter.
- Living godly, holy, peaceable lives is not about our happiness or pleasure. It's not just our reputation that is at stake. It is the Father's. We live the way we do because most of all we want what God wants. He wants all people to be saved.

That's what God wants.

That's what God wills for our life.

Let us want and pray for the same.