

## 1 Timothy 2: 1 to 8      The Elements of Prayer

(t/b-m: 13 May 18)

If you had to prepare someone for Christian service, what would you tell them? What insights from your years of Christian faith would be share with them? There's a story about a group of ministry students that went to visit an old historic church. When they entered this grand building, they were met by an old bearded gentleman they thought was the janitor. He offered to lead them on a tour through the facilities and answer their questions. They walked through every part of the sanctuary and when they'd seen just about everything and asked all their questions, the old gentleman asked if they would you like to see what fires up the church? They weren't interested in touring the basement and seeing the boiler, but just to humour their host they followed. They went down a narrow stairway to an area beneath the pulpit. As the old man opened the door he said: *Behind this door is the secret of this great church. Everything that happens upstairs starts down here. This is where the fire in the pulpit begins.*

The old man was C. H. Spurgeon who was a famous preacher and he opened the door to reveal several dozen people on their knees in fervent prayer. ***Spurgeon would always insist that the secret of any church was the prayers of the people. Spurgeon said He would rather teach one man to pray than ten men to preach.*** The Apostle Paul would agree wholeheartedly. In his first letter to his young associate Timothy, Paul points to prayer as being essential to his future ministry, and lays out some instructions on the matter. Think about this: In Acts chapter six the church is still in its infancy yet we learn that the apostles chose seven deacons to tend to ministerial duties so they could focus on *prayer and preaching*. That is how important prayer it is to Christian service and ministry.

We spend a lot of time, energy and money on various programs at church. We want to attract newcomers, we want to excite and energise the deepen the discipleship of our congregation.

We are always looking for new and innovative approaches to the gospel that will catch the attention of our people. We're so busy working that we overlook the most powerful gift we have which is our prayer ministry! We overlook the power of prayer and this applies to us all. We all underestimate the power of prayer.

When I was in training I attended residential conferences and each day started and ended with prayer. Each meal was accompanied by a prayer of thanksgiving. The importance of prayer was drummed into us, but once we were out of training how quickly we forgot. The same happens when we're going through a crisis; our prayers are fervent and there's an urgency to our prayer life. Until the crisis has passed and our prayer life becomes erratic and laboured. We all need to be reminded of the power of prayer.

***Prayer is our spiritual fuel and we are running on empty.*** There are a lot of people running low on fuel who need to be filled up by the Holy Spirit, and I include myself in this. When we are a praying people our community will see the lights on in our churches and they'll come to us for help. As I said last week, we can spend so much time maintaining our programmes and wondering why we are not seeing growth. When we make prayer our priority, God will hear our prayers and reveal the direction we should be taking us in bringing growth to this church. I firmly believe that our priority in 2018 should be prayer.

The Apostle Paul agrees wholeheartedly with me and that's why he says *First of all* before giving any other encouragement or instruction. He wants Timothy to realize that prayer should be the foundational of his ministry. Paul says that before Timothy starts a mission initiative or any other work, he is to pray and then he can build upward from there. And this is important; we should start any work with prayer. We should use prayer as the foundation for the work that God has for us, and then prayer should accompany action.

Some people have been rightly critical about prayer because they consider that some use prayer as an excuse for doing nothing. But we can be equally critical of those who ignore prayer and press on regardless. If we visit any powerful and life-changing congregations we will see that any action they take begins with prayer in order to be successful.

Paul begins his lesson to Timothy telling him to pray for everyone. He doesn't mean to pray generically, Paul is calling Timothy to pray for individuals. He says to pray for government officials, for teachers, for friends and for the people who run the markets. He wants Timothy to be praying for everyone he runs into during his day. This goes right along with Paul's encouragement to pray without ceasing. *Paul sees every encounter as an opportunity to invite God into the situation. What a wonderful way to live!* The truth is that there are many people who are struggling to remain faithful to Christ or who haven't met him yet. Many people are facing challenges and tests; looking for a solution to the crisis or illness in their lives, and just like Timothy, we've a lot of people to pray for! We're even to pray for people we may not particularly get on with, Paul encourages us to focus on praying a blessing for that person.

I recall speaking Stan who was my minister about my real problem with forgiveness. I understood that when we pray *Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors* in the Lord's Prayer, this meant that if we want God to forgive us then we've to forgive others. I struggled with that for there were people I held grudges against. My minister advised me to pray for those I had problems with. He told me to pray and ask God to bless them, and he explained that if I could pray blessings upon them, then my grudges would melt away. I tried this and discovered my minister's advice was right. I found it impossible to hold a grudge against someone while praying for their blessing. I found I was released from my bitterness and I hope they were blessed also. I've learned that prayer produces a win-win situation.

Paul teaches Timothy to pray for those in authority, which included the Roman Emperor who considered Christians to be rebels and ordering them killed. But Paul told Timothy to pray for them because Jesus taught us to pray for our enemies and to do good to them. Many of us would just as soon pray against governments with whom we disagree, especially with the rising tide of anti-Christian legislation coming out of government, but Paul tells Timothy to pray for our leaders to have wisdom and vision. *When we pray for others God gives us a peace that enables us to live lives that will reflect God's glory.*

I worked with a man who quietly lived out his faith and kept a calendar on his desk that had Bible verses of the day. Each day people would stop to read the verse and question him about it. Even those who didn't claim to be religious got caught up in it. One day he accidentally spilled his coffee on the calendar and ruined it. He said he was amazed by the disappointment his colleagues expressed at the loss of the calendar. He never realized what an impact he was making by simply sharing his faith in this quiet way. He went out and found another one to replace it.

We have a team of prayer intercessors in Thornliebank and we'll be re-introducing you to them at the end of this month. Do you know what an intercessor is? It's someone who stands in the gap between the world and God. Although we have a team of intercessors, Paul says that God calls us all to the role of intercessor. We should all be praying for the healing and deliverance and the salvation of people. We have no idea how our prayers impact our churches, our communities, our city and nation or our world, but God does and we should be praying.

Another group that Paul says we should pray for are those who proclaim the gospel. Timothy might not think of himself in prayer but Paul reminds him that he will need prayer. If Timothy is going to take the gospel out to unbelievers he will need to be supported in prayer.

God calls us all to take the gospel out to all people, and Christians engaged in this task need to be prayed for so they will have the words to share. That brings us right back to need to pray for everyone. Here we are called to pray for those who are doing the work of the kingdom, and sharing the news of Jesus' redeeming work. We need to pray for the anointing of the Holy Spirit so people will be effective in all their efforts.

Once we have prayed for those who will be sharing the Good News we should pray for those who will hear the message. We should pray for those speaking and listening. The gospel message tells us that people are lost. Paul writes in verse 4 that *God desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*. Our job is to pray that people's ears be opened and their hearts to be receptive to the preaching of the word.

Apart from intervention by God there is nothing more powerful than prayer when it comes to changing hearts. I know of people who have prayed for family members to come to faith, and although they may have prayed for years they have lived to see their brother, husband, daughter or son come to faith in Christ. We pray for people to be healed, and the result of their healing is they come to believe in Christ for themselves. We may think our prayers are going unanswered but God honours our prayers. We need to keep praying for those who do not know the Lord for at the right time, God will open their eyes to the truth.

I want to conclude by leaving you to think about this: Jesus declared ***You are the light of the world. And a city set on a hill cannot be hidden. So don't hide your light, let it shine!*** We can't sit around and wait for something to happen. We have been called by God to be His representatives in our world, and He's given us the gift of prayer to help us in our task of sharing the gospel. We've been called to transform the world through the power of the gospel.

It's an overwhelming task and we need to pray for boldness. Paul knew his task and he said: *For this purpose, I was appointed a herald and an apostle, a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.* That was who Paul was called to be and that's who God calls us to be! Be bold, and release the power of prayer in your life and watch what God can do with you and through you! ***Amen***

(1928 words)