

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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Prioritizing Prayer
1 Timothy 2:1-6

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To borrow a few words from Abraham Lincoln...250 years ago, *“our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”*

Lincoln’s words remain powerful for many reasons. They remind us that the formation of the United States was truly revolutionary. Our Founding Fathers laid the groundwork for a self-governing nation of free and equal people. That’s the American Experiment. For 250 years, we have enjoyed religious liberty and freedom of speech and the freedom to assemble.

Lincoln’s words remain powerful because they also remind us that these United States have often been divided. From our nation’s birth, we have never perfectly lived up to our own ideals. Lincoln made his Gettysburg Address on a battlefield of the Civil War that claimed 50,000 casualties. The bloodiest war in our nation’s history was the one we fought with ourselves to liberate men, women, and children so they could enjoy equal liberties enumerated in the Constitution.

The point is that at any given moment in our nation’s history, there have been reasons to turn to God with thanksgiving and at the same time turn to Him to intervene in our brokenness and sin. That’s always been the case and it’s the case today.

And, in many ways, that’s what our text for this morning is about. It’s a call to look to God in prayer. Particularly, it’s a clarifying text for how we should pray when we think about our nation and our governing leaders.

Big Idea: The People of God should Prioritize Prayer for God’s Providence, Peace, and Purposes.

1 Timothy 2:1–6

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

The first thing I want you to notice about this text is how it relates to the purpose of Paul’s letter to Timothy.

1 Timothy 3:14–15

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

Paul is writing this letter to clarify how Christians are supposed to live as part of the church of God – which God has designed to be “the pillar and buttress of the truth.” God has designed the community of Christians to be a pillar of truth. A pillar supports and holds something up. A buttress is a foundation or reinforcement that a pillar rests on that keeps it from falling or collapsing. So, we are called to hold up and support the truth of God’s word in our world.

That’s the purpose of this letter. Paul’s letting us know what it looks like to live in a way that supports and holds up the truth of God’s word. And our text is what he puts at the top of that list. He says...

Prayer should be the priority for the people of God.

1 Timothy 2:1

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,

Paul uses words like “first of all” and “urge” to emphasize the priority of prayer in the lives of followers of Jesus. And notice he isn’t primarily talking about prayer for our governing leaders. He’s talking about how we live in relationship to everyone. Prayer isn’t a last resort. It isn’t what we do when we’ve tried everything else. God desires prayer to be a first response for us no matter what part of our lives we are talking about. I believe that’s one of the reasons he lists four different words for prayer.

- Supplications – asking for things we need. We pray because what we most need in any circumstance of life is a work that only God can do.
- Prayers –general word for praying that is often associated with worship. Prayer is one of the ways we worship God because we are acknowledging His unique power and authority. God is able to do what no one else can do.
- Intercessions –going to someone in authority, often on behalf of someone else. If you go to your boss and ask him to give your coworker a raise, you are interceding for them.
- Thanksgivings – this word means thanksgivings. I think you know what it means.

No matter what our circumstances are, it’s always right to turn to God in prayer. When something good happens, we turn to God in thanks. When we have need, we turn to God in supplication. When other people have a need, we turn to God in intercession.

The only way we will be able to uphold and advance the truth of God in this world is by depending on God to do what only God can do and seeking His face in prayer.

And the rest of our text contains three characteristics of the kind of prayer that God’s people should prioritize.

Characteristic #1 – We should Pray with Confidence in God’s Providence

1 Timothy 2:1-2

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life

Again, Paul is calling us to pray for all people. He mentions governing leaders as a way to illustrate the fact that he means all people. And there’s a massive truth implied here. Why we would pray

about kings and rulers? The answer is because God is the King and Ruler of every earthly king or ruler. By His sovereign power and authority, God governs the governments of this world.

That's what Paul says just a few verses before our text.

1 Timothy 1:17

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

God is the eternal King of the ages who rules and reigns over the affairs of this world for the good of His people and the glory of His name. The word for that is Providence. Providence is the protective care of God in and through all things. It's the work He is constantly doing to guide your life and mine into His purposes. The events of this world and our lives are under the direction of God's hand. That's the Providence of God. It's clearly taught throughout the Bible.

Proverbs 16:33

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

Isaiah 46:9-10

remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'

Daniel 2:20-21

Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding;

The Bible clearly teaches that God is actively at work in all the events of this world to bring about His eternal plan for the glory of His name and the good of His people. And, when you couple that with our text, it's amazing to think that one of the ways God has chosen to exercise the power of His Providence is through the prayers of His people. He was working with authority over the Roman emperors of Paul and Timothy's day, over the kings of Babylon in Daniel's day, over the wicked kings of Israel in Isaiah's day – His work of Providence included Him hearing and answering the prayers of His people...or, more often than not, the lack of prayers of His people.

So, when we pray, we should pray with confidence that God has the power and authority to direct the course of events of this world and each individual life – including kings and nations – and He is listening to and answering the prayers of His people as He does.

And when we look back and see how His Providence has been at work in our lives, we should go to Him with prayers of thanksgiving.

That's one of the primary ways we can apply this passage to our 250th anniversary as a nation. It's right for us to look back to 1776 and give thanks for the Providence of God in the formation of this nation, using the good and the bad, for His good purposes.

At the time of our nation's birth, the Providence of God was a common theme.

When Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence, he included these words as the final sentence: And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

John Adams believed God was leading the Continental Congress to adopt the Declaration of Independence. On July 3, 1776, the day after the Congress voted for independence, he wrote his wife: *It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty.*

Listen to the thoughts of Samuel Huntington, another signer of the Declaration of Independence who would go on to become governor of Connecticut: *It becomes a people publicly to acknowledge the over-ruling hand of Divine Providence and their dependence upon the Supreme Being as their Creator and Merciful Preserver...and with becoming humility and sincere repentance to supplicate the pardon that we may obtain forgiveness through the merits and mediation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

While not everyone who claimed to rely upon the Providence of God had a genuine faith in Jesus or correctly interpreted God's Providence in their lives. However, looking back, we can see the kindness of God's Providence through them as He used them to enshrine in our form of government the God-given right for men and women to freely worship God.

George Washington stated that: *The establishment of civil and religious liberty was the motive which induced me to the field.*

He further explained: *Convinced that our religious liberties were as essential as our civil, my endeavors have never been wanting to encourage and promote the one while I have been contending for the other.*

Charles Carroll, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a framer of the Bill of Rights, similarly declared: *To obtain religious as well as civil liberty I entered jealously into the Revolution.*

For 250 years, we have been a nation that upholds the God-given right to worship God according to our beliefs. We gather in this place, free from the threat of government interference, because God in His Providence allowed our nation to be established with the freedom of religion. That's reason to give thanks.

We should pray, in supplication and thanksgiving, with confidence in God's Providence. That's the first characteristic of the prayers of people who support and uphold the truth of God's word.

Characteristic #2 - We should Pray for Circumstances of Peace

1 Timothy 2:2

for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

Paul says we should pray for our leaders to lead in a way that promotes our ability to live peaceful and quiet lives in godliness and dignity.

Just think about this for a minute. The early church lived under the authority of the Roman Empire. Rome was a constantly expanding Empire that was constantly in need of more and more men to serve in the Roman Army. So, Paul may be saying that we should pray for governing leaders to pursue peace in a way that would keep us from being pressed into national conflicts that would send men off to war.

Paul could also be referring to the fact that there are many other ways government can interfere in our day to day lives in ways that make it difficult to live peaceful and quiet lives.

Just think about the current landscape of partisan politics in our nation. We are living in a time when political turmoil is pressed into our lives 24 hours a day. We are constantly bombarded with messages that are designed to keep us stirred up and angry in an effort to motive us to support a particular party or candidate.

Paul is calling us to pray against that kind of national turmoil. And it isn't just something that only rests on our leaders.

1 Timothy 2:8

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

Paul calls believers to live with holy hands and resist being drawn into unholy anger and fighting – including the unholy anger and quarrelling that often characterizes partisan politics.

So, we should pray for peace with a spirit of peace in our own hearts. I can't help but wonder what would happen in our nation if all of God's people lifted up their hands to heaven and offered them up to be instruments of peace without anger or quarrelling. How would our social media posts be changed if our hearts were filled with peace and our hands were holy and refused to type in anger or quarrelling?

The people of God should prioritize prayer and pray for this nation and our own hearts to be filled with peace.

Characteristic #3 - We should Pray with a Commitment to God's Purposes

1 Timothy 2:3

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. 7 For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Notice the progression of thought here. The reason we should desire to live quiet and peaceful lives isn't so that we would all become rich and prosperous or so we can spend our lives in pursuit of bigger houses and shinier toys. We should pray for peaceful lives because God has a great plan for all the nations that He desires us to actively devote ourselves to. He desires all people of all nations to know about Jesus and be saved. And He desires for them to be told the gospel by His people living on His mission to all the nations. And it's hard to do that when you are fighting wars against other nations or being imprisoned by your government.

As we are praying, we should be praying for peace. And not just the peace that comes when our nation isn't at war or the peace that comes when our government doesn't disrupt our day to day lives. We should pray for the peace that only comes through the work of Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection.

The greatest threat to the people of our nation and this world is that if we die in our sins, we will enter eternity separated from God. That's why we need Jesus. And we don't just need Him, we have Him because God so loved the people of this world that He gave His only Son to live and die in our place so that we could be forgiven of our sins.

That's the only hope for America and for every other nation on the face of this earth. Our hope isn't that our current President or any future President or politician will restore America to its former glory. Our hope is that Jesus Christ will restore every man, woman, and child who will trust in Him to the very glory of God.

That's the purpose and mission of God in the world today. He desires for all people of all nations to come to the knowledge of the truth about Jesus and be saved. And He desires that we would desire Jesus to be exalted and people to be saved more than we desire every other earthly pursuit.

And so we should pray. We should pray for revival and spiritual renewal to sweep through our nation. We should pray for the gospel to advance to every people group in this world. We should pray that the glory of the Lord would fill this world as the waters cover the seas.

The people of God should prioritize prayer for God's Providence, Peace, and Purposes. So, as we celebrate the 250th anniversary of our nation, let's pray.

I'm going to put a few prompts on the screens that can guide our time of prayer. I understand that you may want to just pray alone, but please feel free to pray with someone sitting next to you. And as you pray, consider praying in the following ways...

Give Thanks for God's Providence

- Thank Him for our Freedom

Pray for Peace

- Pray for our leaders to pursue peace
- Pray for your heart to desire peace
- Pray for the Lord to keep you from living in anger and quarrelling

Pray for People to be Saved

- Who's Your One?

Prayer Partners

- Trusting in Jesus
- Making your faith known in Baptism – Ocean Baptism