“First Of All Prayer”

February 25, 2018

I Thessalonians 5:14-28

Please open your Bible today to the 2nd chapter of I Timothy.

Today’s word is pray; what does God say about it and what can you and I do?

Who do you pray for? Who should you pray for? Does the Bible tell you who to pray for? And why should you pray?

Almost everyone everywhere knows the LORD’s Prayer.

But there are so many things that Jesus said about prayer? I’d like to begin with just a few of those things. We find them, of course, in the Gospels.

For one, He told us to always pray and to not give up; to pray with persistence? Luke 18:1 *“And he spake a parable unto them to this end [purpose], that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; …”*

And of course you know He taught us that we should say this to the LORD; *“Thy will be done.”* And Jesus did exactly what He taught. In the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed as follows: Matthew 26:39 *“… O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”*

And yes He prayed alone Luke 5:16 *“And he withdrew himself into the wilderness [desolate place, deserted, and barren place], and prayed.”* Luke 6:12 *“And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.”*

Sometimes He prayed alone the whole night. But He also prayed with others. Luke 9:28 *“And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.”*

Today’s word is prayer. Prayer is sometimes difficult. But prayer must have been devised by the LORD. And if He did design it, then it was intended for our good.

As I prepared my sermon this week, I discovered this week that, not only is the Bible filled with people praying, but there’s so much given to us in Scripture on prayer that I had to really narrow down the topic. There are roughly 600 prayers in the Bible. So, I settled on just one passage; I Timothy chapter two.

I also discovered how important prayer was to Jesus. And in the Gospels you’ll find Jesus at prayer on at least twelve occasions. It would be worth your while this week to read through those twelve accounts.

For example, did you know that Jesus prayed for you while He was here on earth? John 17:20 *“Neither pray I for these [the Apostles] alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word [for you and me]; …”*

One day while He was at prayer, one of His disciples came to Him with this request. Luke 11:1 *“And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”*

I’m absolutely sure that that request touched Jesus’ heart. Let’s look in and hear exactly how He responded that day. First, says Jesus, *“When you pray, say Our Father, which art in heaven;* …” the LORD’s Prayer.

Second, He told them they should be persistent in prayer. And, as He often did, He then asked them a question as He began to tell them a story. He asked them if they’d ever had a friend with a need and who went to another friend at midnight to ask for help. “And, because,” said Jesus, “he was persistent, he got what his friend needed.”

Third, He told them to expect an answer when they prayed. Luke 11:9 *“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. (10) For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”*

And He also taught them to ask for the Holy Spirit. Luke 11:13 *“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”*

All that on a day one of His disciples came with a request *“LORD, teach us to pray.”*

So, what’s on my heart today? “First Of All Prayer.” Shall we pray?

Now, where does a Christian go to learn to pray? Three places. He meets with other Christians and learns as he listens while they pray. He learns how to pray from his own reading and study of the Bible. And he also learns to pray by praying alone.

When a person is first born of the Spirit; when he or she is first saved, wouldn’t it be best to let them hear you pray and then to get them to pray rather than educate them with information? And why? Because, if God’s first concern for us is to respond to His loving heart, shouldn’t we begin with a true heart relationship with Him?

Today, my hope is that you will learn to pray again. I know I’ve shared with you what the Bible says about prayer. But how do you pray? Paul answers that question from the passage in front of us; I Timothy two.

Timothy, as you know, was Paul’s son in the faith. He was mentored by the greatest Christian to ever live. Timothy was taught and he was discipled by Paul himself. And without a doubt, Timothy had watched Paul; and he had learned, to some degree, how to pray.

Now, have you ever wondered what a Christian would talk about in his last days? Well, at this point in his life, Paul was concluding his ministry on this earth. He was awaiting trial in the Mamertine Prison in Rome, Italy. And in prison, in his last days, he recorded and sent two letters to Timothy, who was now the Pastor at the Church in Ephesus.

So, I’m sure what Paul says to his protégé Timothy on the subject of prayer must have had a huge impact. You see, Timothy knew his mentor, Paul, to be a man of prayer.

A few years ago we had a missionary come to our Church to present his ministry. And I remember he and I talking about one of the missionaries our Church had supported for nearly fifteen years at the time. He knew him. That missionary was Ed Fitzgerald, missionary to Honduras. Ed has been serving in Honduras since 2012. This missionary who came to EBC to present his ministry had at one time been a Summer Missionary Intern. Where? In Honduras. And with who? With Ed Fitzgerald. So, we talked a little bit about our dear Brother Ed.

I asked him what he’d learned from Ed. Here’s what he said. He had asked Ed if he could pray with him. So, yes, Ed agreed to do just that. And here’s what he saw that day. He saw our missionary Ed Fitzgerald lay down on the floor of his house on his face and begin to talk to the LORD. And as Ed prayed, this missionary intern learned why it was the God was using Ed among the Hondurans. That’s what he learned from Ed Fitzgerald.

So, I’m sure that Timothy had had a great example of a man of prayer when he had spent time praying with the Apostle Paul.

This past month we had our Annual Church Business Meeting. In that meeting we had quite a significant discussion on the need for our Church family to meet together as a Church to pray. You brought up the question of why it is that our Church doesn’t meet as a body for prayer; why so few come together to pray. So, I want to say a few words today on the matter of prayer. And I’ve chosen I Timothy 2 for the passage.

Please follow as I read. I Timothy 2:1 *“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; (2) For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*

*(3) For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; (4)**Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. (5) For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; (6) Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”*

None of us are great when it comes to praying. The LORD hasn’t called us to be great at prayer. But He has called all of us to pray. And He’s called us to pray together. James 5:16 *“…pray one for another…”*

Here in Paul’s words on prayer to Timothy, we find the specific types of prayer. We find who to pray for. We find why we should pray. And we find what God thinks when we pray.

First, then, Paul doesn’t command prayer. Instead, he exhorts. I Timothy 2:1 *“I exhort therefore …”*

My words today, like Paul’s are exhortation. The word “exhort” in the original means “to call alongside.” Paul, the man of prayer, was calling Timothy alongside himself to be a man of prayer. And that’s really all that’s necessary when it comes to the call to prayer. You today, from me and from the LORD, are being exhorted to come to prayer.

Second, Paul tells us the priority of prayer. I Timothy 2:1 *“I exhort therefore, that, first of all …”*

Two weeks ago our nation experience another horrific slaughter. And did anyone notice that there were no calls for prayer; at least none in the news. Rarely, if ever, do you see a reminder anymore to pray. What I did hear was “we need to quit talking and quit praying and do something.” That’s what I heard people saying about prayer.

But, right here let me remind you that among the many reasons we pray, Paul tells us what will happen when we pray. Look at verse two. I Timothy 2:2 “*that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.”*

Quiet, peace, godliness, and honesty. Those are the effects of prayer; effects upon you personally, upon your family, and upon the society around you. And, yes, we all pray *after* such an incident. But who prays simply because God calls us to pray for specific people first? Who prays for the administrators and teachers at school? Do you? Who prays for your supervisor or your boss at work? Who prays for our town Selectmen, the police, the fireman, your doctor, our Governor, our President?

But, are they first? What does Paul say? I Timothy 2:1 *“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; (2) For kings, and for all that are in authority; …*

The priority of prayer is not for ourselves directly, but for all those who are in authority. And Paul lists who it is we are called to pray for; *“for all men; (2) For kings, and for all that are in authority; …* And yes, when we pray for people, for kings, and for all those in authority, prayer does have an impact on society. Quiet, peace, godliness, and honesty.

Now, in Paul’s day, Rome was quote in authority. And the Emperor of Rome was a psychopath. His name was Nero. Nero may have himself started a massive fire that engulfed the city burned most of Rome. But he was so wicked he blamed the Christians for a massive fire that had of Rome. And what did he do to the Christians for igniting the fire, which they did not do? He sent them to their deaths in the amphitheater to fight with wild animals like lions and camels and elephants and even giraffes and goats and leopards and buffalo, which usually were fought by the gladiators for sport for the people.

History also tells us that Nero took the life of his wife, his step-brother, and even his own mother because of his paranoia. So, when tragedy strikes, we can have confidence that God does fulfill His word. When Paul says we should pray, let’s not wait until we have tragedy and then pray.

First, an exhortation.

Second, a call to pray for those in authority.

Third, how to pray.

Now, I’m saying all I am saying on the matter of prayer today with this caveat. None of us really knows how to pray as we should. Here’s Paul to the Romans. Romans 8:26 *“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (27) And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”*

But, just because we don’t know how to pray as we ought, that is not a word to say that we shouldn’t pray. Jesus said it this way. Luke 18:8 *“…men ought always to pray, and not to faint; …”*

Then Paul reminds Timothy of four ways we can pray. Now, there are more ways than that. But, here are for types of prayer that God has made available for us.

First, supplication. To supplicate means *“to pray because there is a need.”* Now, as a reminder, as you read and study your Bible, you won’t see it always translated as “supplication.” It’s often translated by the word “prayer.”

Now, what does the LORD want you to do when you supplicate? Let me show you what this is like. Philippians 1:4 *“Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy …”*

Both of these words, “prayer” and “request” are the same word as “supplicate” here in I Timothy 2.

Here’s Philippians 1:4 again *“Always in every prayer [supplication] of mine for you all making request [making supplication] with joy …”*

Each time you come to the LORD with a request, you come because there is a need. That’s supplication. What do you need? Is there a need in *your* life or is there a need in *your home* that you can’t provide? Take that need to the LORD today and you will be supplicating.

Turn, if you would, to James 5. Here’s an example of supplication. Look with me, if you would, at James 5:13 *“Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. (14) Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:*

*(15) And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. (16) Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer [supplication] of a righteous man availeth much.”*

Can you see here what it means to supplicate for someone? Think of it like this. Someone you know has something *you* need. So, how do you approach them? Here’s how. You come humbly before them and you make your request. When you come to God and humbly plead with Him for something, you supplicate.

And, who is it you are making this request of? I Peter 3:12 *“For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers [supplications]: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.”*

Focus on Who He is when you ask. See yourself as weak and unable to provide that need and see Him as the One Who wants to meet it. Can you think of something right now that is a need in someone’s life? Be specific. Humble yourself. And go to the LORD. Come to Him. And pray. That’s supplication.

Second, prayer. This is the main word for prayer. Now, granted, when you supplicate, you are praying. But prayer is more than praying when you have sense of need.

Actually, there are many, many definitions for prayer. Some say it’s a conversation with God. Or, prayer is seeking the LORD. Or, prayer is asking God for something. Or, prayer is communion with the LORD.

Now, would you like to know what prayer really is? It’s “paying attention to God.” Ralph Martin “The Fulfillment of All Desire.”

Sometimes we speak. Sometimes we don’t. You can pray, as I have, and not pay attention to Him. It’s coming to the LORD because *He* is your *Father*. When you pray, you come to God. And, yes, prayer will include supplication and thanks and other things. But, how would you come to the LORD if, when you came to Him, you saw Him as He really is, your Heavenly Father? Remember what Jesus said *“When you pray, say Our Father, which art in heaven; …”*

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all make reference to Jesus’ words that go like this. Luke 19:46 *“My house is the house of prayer.”*

You can easily see here what the LORD wants for us. He wants us to see that when we come to worship Him together, we should pay attention to Who He is. And, when we do that, we’ll see that He’s ready and willing to listen and respond to us.

Let me add here that I, like you, am learning. And one of the things I’ve begun to do is to just come to LORD; be quiet; and say “Father” and wait quietly before Him. My Pastor was Dale Sharer. Here’s what he did when he prayed; “Father …….”

So, first, supplication. Pray because there is a specific need.

Second, pray, the main word for prayer; seeing God as your Father and coming to Him.

Third, come between others and God.

I Timothy 2:1 *“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers,* ***intercessions*** *…”* . It means *“to come before the LORD on someone else’s behalf.”*

Supplicate. Pray because there is a need. Pray. Focus on Who He is. And intercede. Come in between someone else and the LORD.

And who intercedes for you right now? Well, without a doubt, the LORD Jesus intercedes for you. Hebrews 7:25 *“Wherefore he [Jesus] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”*

And what does intercessions mean? It means *“to go and meet a person to converse or consult on behalf of someone else.”* When was the last time you talked to the LORD about your spouse? One of your children? A co-worker? A friend? An enemy? A neighbor? That conversation is an intercessory prayer. You see, not only are needs important to God when you pray. People are; the ones that He has placed into your life.

Who are you praying for? Every time you come between them and the LORD, you are interceding.

So, first, supplication. Pray because there is a specific need.

Second, pray, the main word for prayer; seeing God as your Father and coming to Him.

Third, intercede; come between others and God.

Fourth, thanksgiving.

Do you remember what Jesus did when He had seven loaves and a few fish to distribute to some four thousand hungry people? Here’s what we read from the Gospel of Mark. Mark 8:6 *“And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves,* ***and gave thanks****, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people.”*

And what did Jesus do at the Last Passover meal He shared with the disciples? I Corinthians 11:24 *“And when he* ***had given thanks****, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.”*

And what did the Apostle Paul do he began to pray when two hundred and seventy-six people onboard a Roman ship were in danger of being drowned by a Mediterranean nor’easter? Here’s Acts 27:35 *“And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and* ***gave thanks to God*** *in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.”*

And what did Paul do for all the Christians in all the Churches he ministered to? I Thessalonians 1:2 *“****We give thanks to God*** *always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; …”*

Folks, if there is one thing that you can always do all of the time under any circumstance and for anyone and for anything, it’s to say “Thank you” to your Heavenly Father.

He is worthy of your appreciation. He’s the LORD of Heaven and Earth. He’s the captain of your salvation. He’s the Creator. He’s the Sovereign King. So, we say, from our hearts, *“Thank you LORD for all that you are and all you have done.”*

This might be the simplest type of praying. Just thank Him for His love and His mercy and His grace. Thank Him for the victory we have because of the Cross. Thank Him for His law. Thank Him for answers to your prayers. Thank Him because He redeemed you. And thank Him because He is good and faithful and just.

Billy Graham puts it like this. *“The next footsteps in the corridor, he knew, might be those of the guards taking him away to his execution. His only bed was the hard, cold stone floor of the dank, cramped prison cell. Not an hour passed when he was free from the constant irritation of the chains and the pain of the iron manacles cutting into his wrists and legs.*

*Separated from friends, unjustly accused, brutally treated — if ever a person had a right to complain, it was this man, languishing almost forgotten in a harsh Roman prison. But instead of complaints, his lips rang with words of praise and thanksgiving!*

*The man was the Apostle Paul—a man who had learned the meaning of true thanksgiving, even in the midst of great adversity.”* “How To Be Thankful In All Things” by Billy Graham November 21, 2017.

And thanksgiving includes praise; even singing.

So, there you have it. Supplication, prayers, intercession, and giving of thanks. Now, I’m sure you aren’t distinguishing your prayer types before the LORD when you pray. But, as you can see, the Scripture teaches us that there is a differ-ence.

And what we find in the Bible is that we should pray all of these kinds of prayers. Philippians 4:6 *“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”*

Ephesians 6:18 *“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;…”*

And last, I want to show you that there are numerous examples of the Church *together* at prayer.

Acts 1:14 *“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication …*

Acts 2:42 *“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”*

Acts 4:24 *“…they lifted up their voice to God with one accord …”*

Acts 12:5 *“Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.”*

Acts 12:12 *“And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.”*

The LORD of the universe has called us to pray. He invites us to meet with Him.

Why should the Church gather together for prayer? We have just one answer. Because you are not your own. You have been purchased with a price; the precious blood of Jesus. And out of deference to Him and love for Him you should meet with the rest of the Church for prayer at the hour of prayer.

So, my concluding question to you is this, “Will you join us for prayer?” When you do, your life will be blessed more than you know because He has called you to pray.

So, do you believe Him?

Shall we pray?

Hymn # \_\_\_\_ “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”