

Let me remind you of the focus of this series. It comes from the middle of the letter where he writes of his purpose.

1 Timothy 3:14-15 (NIV) Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

I remind you that this is not a new church. And the instructions he is giving are not about elementary Christian teachings of how to conduct themselves. He is presenting advanced Christian teaching. This is for more maturing Christians, those well acquainted with God's kingdom goals. With that background, let's see what is on Paul's heart for this church.

1 Timothy 2:1-2 (NIV) I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Notice that what follows is as important to Paul as his first subject. In chapter one he urged Timothy to command certain men to quit teaching different doctrines. Here he is urging something else. He urges Timothy to get the church praying for others.

When you first become a Christian it is important to learn to pray. We teach you methods of prayer and habits of prayer. We teach you of the different kinds of prayer. We urge you to pray.

As we begin praying we most naturally pray about ourselves. But in the maturing Christian the Holy Spirit is developing the heart of Jesus. Jesus spent His time on earth serving God's love for others. Jesus lived to teach God's truth to others. Jesus died to pay the penalty of the sins of others.

Christmas is not far off and with it will be the appearance of Salvation Army bell ringers. This fundraising effort may be all you know of the Salvation Army. But the founders of the Salvation Army, Catherine and William Booth sought to bring salvation to the poor, destitute and hungry by meeting both their physical and spiritual needs. Well one year at Christmas, William Booth decided to send a telegram to all the workers of the Salvation Army. He wanted to encourage them in the work, and remind them of what their focus should be. He wrote several different versions, pricing each out to see how much it would cost. Each one was too expensive and did not quite communicate what he wanted to say. Finally, he came upon a version that was the least expensive and gave the encouragement and focused message he wanted. The message consisted of one word. That word was "others". He reminded them of the need of others to know of Jesus. He reminded them that God had called them to get the gospel out to others.

God gives us this same focus through Paul's letter to Timothy.

1 Timothy 2:1 (NIV) I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--

The first three words, requests, prayers, and intercession are synonyms. But there are subtle differences in the Greek words that have been translated. The first word means to make a request for a need. This word carries the idea of being without something, in need of something. It is praying for God to fulfill a need.

The second word is prayer in general, always addressed to God. The first word might be used of people to people requests. This second word is never used in that way. It is always used in reference to God.

The third word comes from a root that means "to fall in with someone". It means to get involved with them in their need. So by extension it carries the idea of compassion. Compassion is to put yourself in another's place and ask, "If I were this person, what would I be feeling?" Upon that basis, then, you pray for that person.

He also calls us to thank God for others. Now likely there are people that rub you the wrong way, people who are complainers, or nosy, or opinionated, or just mean. But even such people have their good qualities. Most all people have their good points. You can always thank God for those good qualities. If nothing else, you can thank God that these people are in your life to develop patience in you.

So the maturing Christian is praying more and more for others. As we grow to be more like Jesus, our concern for others will grow. We will be concerned about the state of their soul. Do they know Jesus? Are they still lost in their sins? How can I help them to come to the Savior? The maturing Christian has Jesus' concern for others.

What others? What others should we be praying for? Paul tells us to pray for everyone. There is no one not covered by this command. Jesus is concerned about everyone. He wants to help everyone enter the kingdom of God. He wanted the Pharisees and Sadducees, the scribes and teachers of the Law to enter the kingdom of God. I am sure Jesus prayed for all of these different groups that he encountered each day. He prayed that they would come to know the truth and humble themselves to receive it. He prayed about his interactions with them.

These same men turned out to be Jesus' enemies. He was aware of that fact when he taught his disciples to pray for their enemies. I am sure Jesus prayed for his enemies just as he taught his disciples to do. He did not just pray for his family and friends. He prayed for everyone. It is no wonder, then, that we read in the Bible of Him spending so much time praying. There was so much He needed to bring to God from what was happening each day.

This is how the maturing Christian is to pray. We are to pray for everyone. Praying for everyone means to pray for more than just your family and friends. It includes your neighbors, your coworkers and even your enemies. You can pray for everyone you encounter each day, even if they are strangers. You cannot pray for every individual in the world by name. You can pray for most people in the world you can pray for through the work of our missionaries.

There are no shortage of people in your life and no shortage of things to pray for them. If you see someone in the store who is struggling in some way, you can lift that person to God. Maybe they are elderly or handicapped. Maybe they are struggling with a child. Maybe they just look sad, or worried. You can pray God's peace to calm their spirit. You can pray that God will remind them to pray for His help.

When you are driving down the road and see an accident you can imagine what the needs are of those involved. Pray those needs to God. Pray for the first responders. We never know the details or outcomes of those situations. Maybe we will one day learn how our prayers helped. For now it is enough to know that we are praying like Jesus, for others.

As a maturing Christian enlarge the sphere of your prayers.

There is no person who does not fall under the category of "pray for everyone". There is no one that we should not pray for.

Anyone can do this. A child can pray for others. A paralyzed person can pray for others. Young and old can pray for others. Intercede with God for the needs of others.

It may be that you can offer some form of personal help to someone. You can offer a kindness, lend a hand, purchase something they need, give a ride, etc. But beyond you using your money, your hands and feet and car and time to help someone, the most valuable thing you can do for them is to bring their need to the all-powerful and all-loving God. Your prayers connect you to the all-powerful creator of the universe. Prayers on behalf of others is real help. Help them with your prayers.

2 Corinthians 1:10-11 (NIV) On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. (Philippians 1:19)

God responds to the prayers of His people. Praying for someone brings genuine help to them from God. Your prayers make a difference. Believe it and pray for others.

Paul does mention someone specific that we should pray for.

1 Timothy 2:1-2 (NIV) I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- for kings and all those in authority...

Our president, our senators and congressmen, our judges, and our first responders need all the help they can get. Some of them are in over their heads. They don't know how to do what needs to be done. They often fail. Their failure affects us all. Your teachers and bosses should be included in your prayers.

I know it can be hard to pray for those in authority. It can be hard because they are distant. You don't know them and they don't know you. It can be hard because they may be different from us, not sharing our values, our faith. They may not even be religious or people of good morality. It can be hard to pray because you might feel it will make no difference.

Remember that your prayers do make a difference. And while you may not be able to reach out and contact these people, God can. God can reach out to any person on this planet and move them to do what He wants done. Read your Bible. God moved Cyrus, a heathen king to allow the Jews to return to Israel. Your prayers, even for those in authority, will make a difference. It may not be a difference you see. But prayers to God make a difference.

The reason he mentions those in authority specifically is that they can hinder the sharing of the gospel.

1 Timothy 2:1-4 (NIV) I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

The gospel is Paul's primary concern. He urges Timothy to get Christians praying. Note that he does not write to ask for the safety of Christians. He does not write to pray for each church to have its own building. He does not write to pray for the worship services. His concern is that we be able to share the gospel in peace. And those in authority can hinder those efforts.

The maturing Christian prays for those who can affect our sharing of the gospel.

If the community is at peace, if we are able to work and put food on the table, and provide shelter for our families without fear of war or crime or persecution, we will be able to focus more time and attention on sharing Jesus with others.

Imagine trying to share the good news of Jesus in Charlottesville, VA in August. That wasn't a good day to be doing personal evangelism in that city, at least not downtown. Imagine trying to share Jesus in Baltimore when people were rioting over the death of Freddy Gray.

Pray especially for those with authority in the land, so that we are free to share the gospel. God wants all to be saved.

Today, commit yourself to praying for others.

We do this because others prayed for us. Others shared the gospel with us.

We do this because Jesus died for us.