

A CHURCH, and MEN, who Pray

1 Timothy 2:1-8

When a doctoral student at Princeton University asked, "What is there left in the world for original research?" Albert Einstein replied, "Find out about prayer. Somebody must find out about prayer."ⁱ

"Every faith," notes Phil Yancey, "has some form of prayer..."

Remote tribes present offerings and then pray for everyday things such as health, food, rain, children, and victory in battles. Incas and Aztecs went so far as to sacrifice humans in order to attract the gods' attention. Five times a day modern Muslims stop whatever they are doing—driving, having a coffee break, playing soccer—when the summons to prayer comes.

*Even atheists find ways to pray. During the heady days of Communism in Russia, party stalwarts kept a "red corner," in placing a portrait of Lenin where Christians used to keep their icons. Caught up in the fervor, **Pravda** ran this advice to its readers in 1950:*

If you meet with difficulties in your work, or suddenly doubt your abilities, think of him – of Stalin – and you will find the confidence you need. If you feel tired in an hour when you should not, think of him – of Stalin – and your work will go well. If you are seeking a correct decision, think of him – of Stalin – and you will find your decision.

Prayer is universal because it speaks to some basic human need. Thomas Merton put it, "Prayer is an expression of who we are...we are a living incompleteness. We are a gap, an emptiness that calls for fulfillment."ⁱⁱ

If Yancey is on to something – and I think he is – it fits hand in glove with what we are experiencing and social researchers are grappling with...the growing frustration, disappointment, and confusion people (especially young peopleⁱⁱⁱ) are experiencing in life.

Many people today don't like what they see when they look into that mirror (observes Douglas LaBier). Especially when so much feels out of control--social and political changes that can feel frightening, threatening; career uncertainty; relationships unraveling under stress; climate disasters, both man-made and natural. All of these events impact your mental health and overall well-being, as research and survey data show: Emotional, physical and social symptoms are rising, such depression and anxiety, obesity, demagoguery (link is external) from media personalities like ---, emotional disturbance in the workplace...the list goes on.^{iv}

Quite honestly, despite all our material abundance material and endless opportunities, despite all of the social media designed to keep us meaningfully connected, all of the entertainment options at our fingertips, all of the so-called life-remedies promising so much though leaving God out of the equation—despite all of that, we've simply created a whole lot of disappointing confusion.

Then again, we're not the first generation of humanity to do so. From what I can unearth from history, the world into which Jesus Christ himself landed and launched his first disciples was just as

out-of-wack as ours.

So here's the question: ***What does a confused world (of people) truly need?*** People struggling to find their footing, people (shucks, even Christians!) yanked this way then that at by divergent philosophies and influences and social pressures? What do the leaders of a confused world need? What about it's young people? What about families unraveling under the stress? What does any and every confused generation really need?

I have an incredibly surprising answer found in the Bible, in the Apostle Paul's 1st letter to his spiritual son Timothy. Simply this --

***A confused world truly needs a CHURCH
(and especially men) that PRAYS...seriously PRAYS***
Paul's first letter to Timothy

And, quite honestly, praying – I mean *serious praying* – may be the very last thing we think to do. When Hans Kung wrote a volume, 702 pages long, on the subject *On Being A Christian*, it did not include a chapter or even an index entry on prayer. He later admitted that he was under such pressure to meet the publisher's deadlines that he simply forgot about prayer.^v

And yet, before you judge this harried scholar...let's ask ourselves, "How often have overly busy days flown by without even 5 minutes in prayer?" In our own busyness and confusion, it may be the last thing WE do as well.

Does God make your day? Every day? Or does this confused world need something more important from you?

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Paul writes a letter to Timothy, a coach of the Christians and churches in Ephesus, and in chapter 2 He urges that three principles about the prioritizing of prayer.

**#1 PRAY: It's the FIRST thing to do when responding
to a confused culture. [WHAT] 1 Timothy 2:1-2a**
First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions,
and thanksgivings be made for all people

By now you might be asking, "What kind of confusion existed in the ancient city of Ephesus?"

requiring prioritized prayer. With your permission, let me summarize a whole lot of research^{vi}:

The confusion came from the **Jews** – Jewish teachers who insisted on obedience to the Old Testament law, including the thousands of traditions gathered over the centuries. These teachers quarreled over the law, got wrapped up in fanciful speculations about those listed (especially the patriarchs) in OT genealogies.

The confusion came from “the **Gnostics**” – individuals who claimed to have a secret “gnosis” (i.e., knowledge) which gave them inside information about what was actually real. They insisted that their “gnosis” allowed them to be uninfluenced by the physical world...so that they could indulge in any physical pleasure they wanted without it effecting at all their spiritual connection with God.

The confusion came from Greek^{vii} **mythology/magical arts** – this was a strong cultural influence that encouraged worship of the Greek gods and goddesses (cf. Artemis, the goddess of abundance and hunting and wild life, the “Lady of the Wild Chase” whose magnificent temple was hosted in Ephesus). Superstition and a strong emphasis on magic was large with the 225,000 people who lived in and around Ephesus.

The confusion came from “**asceticism**” (those demanding abstinence and denial). Ascetics taught that the only pathway to true life and peace was to abstain from the comforts and pleasures of marriage, to eat only from a short-list of approved foods, abstinence from wine and the accumulation of possessions and wealth. The physical creation was evil; limiting your use of the physical was the pathway to peace, fulfillment, true kingdom life.

This whole cyclone of competing ideas --laws and regulations and speculative interpretation on the one hand, superstitions and magic and indulgence on the other hand -- had the citizenry of Ephesus and Asia Minor...even many early Christians...in its confusing swirl. G.K. Chesterton’s observation – that people without God don’t believe in nothing, rather they believe in anything – was so very true in Ephesus. And, quite frankly, true today.

So...in light of the “swirl,” what should Jesus’ disciples – the church -- be doing? To what does the coach of the Ephesian churches (i.e., Paul) call them?

1 Timothy 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all who are in high positions

Note the 4 words in order...

ENTREATIES – “*requests*,” in a very positive sense. When we “entreat,” we are asking God to do something that is currently lacking, and for God to do something good for them or through them

PRAYERS – this word emphasizes *all kinds of communication* that is directed toward God alone

INTERCESSIONS – or these are encounters with God where you are petitioning Him specifically for someone else...someone who may not know how to pray or even feel worthy to approach God. (note

the Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we don't know what to pray, Romans 8) with groanings too deep for words.

THANKSGIVINGS – prayer which expresses thankfulness to God for those He has placed around you, for the people that impact your life and you impacting theirs

In other words, our prayer is PEOPLE-centered, not “things-centered.” The world of people need a church of people who pray for all the kinds of people in their lives, all the kinds of people who have authority over us...in school, in business, in national and local government. We realize – if nobody else does – that just like us they need GOD in their lives, to be open and responsive to what God can do in them and through them. God's hand in their lives is moved and energized when you and I pray.

That's the WHAT – first and foremost, our world needs us to pray. Secondly, notice the WHY

#2 PRAY: seeking OPPORTUNITY for GOSPEL effectiveness! [the WHY] 1 Timothy 2:2b-7

^{2b} that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

⁵For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. ⁷For 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.

These verses tell us WHY praying is so critical. First,

a) God's powerful help energizes the impact of godly, dignified living 2:2b-3

^{2b} that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, **godly and dignified** in every way. ³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,

Please do not miss the cause > effect of these verses. When I consistently pray to God – in all kinds of ways – for those who are around me, even those who have authority over me – urging God to do what is best in their lives, two pairs of characteristics emerge in my life:

#1 my **lifestyle is peaceful and quiet** (“tranquil and calm”). In other words, **God settles me down**. I'm trusting Him more and less concerned about my circumstances.

#2 my **reputation is godly and dignified**. In other words, **God enhances my witness**.

Listen carefully please: If I will take the time pray about all the people around me – some who have authority over me, and many of whom are confused and don't even know they need God's help...the first outcome will be with me. With you. God will settle you down; God will enhance your

witness about Jesus. Which means (secondly)

b) My life/witness expresses the passion of GOD for the salvation of ALL PEOPLE 2:4-7

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NOTE: The importance of the Gospel about God and His Mediator for a confused world

May I ask you something that I'm (again) asking myself? Does my praying life, and the way I live through the course of each day, express my Father's passion for the salvation of all people?

Hybels reminds us that to link the upper and lower peninsulas of Michigan, a five mile bridge was required. 466,300 cubic yards of concrete. 42,000 miles of cable wire. 11,350 workers. A billion dollars. 3 ½ years of grueling labor. The Mackinac Straits...all so that people on one side could reach people on the other side. Access to one another. Relationship.

"Since the beginning of time," he continues, "people have been consumed by the desire to somehow get over the chasm separating them from God. But how? How are we going to reach a holy God?"

"Study the [world's] religions for yourself. See if you don't agree that not only does every major world religion suggest you attempt to build the bridge...but also that there is no evidence or assurance you will actually get it done before you die.

Every religion, that is, except one: Biblical Christianity.

God saw the chasm. God knew no amount of human construction would every span a chasm so wide. So motivated by love, God took on the chasm-spanning responsibility himself. He laid the foundation. He built the bridge...His son, Jesus Christ.^{viii}

Paul's words? "One mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." The ransom for all. Communicated at the proper time. A bridge, a ransom for all the people you and I know.

What does a confused world need? The WHAT is a team, a church that seriously and eagerly prays. The WHY is so that the effectiveness of Gospel--the rescue confused people really need—through each one of us is empowered. Thirdly, the HOW

#3 PRAY: Men (especially) praying DEPENDENTLY and UNIFIED. [the HOW] 1 Timothy 2:8

^{2:8}I desire then that in every place the men should pray,
lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

Three observations. First, every church needs MEN who LEAD with PRAYER. Second, every church needs MEN who are openly DEPENDENT UPON GOD in prayer – "lifting up holy hands" (i.e., the outward expression of what is going on in your heart). And third, every church needs MEN who

are UNIFIED in prayer – “without anger or quarreling.”

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“Timothy,” Paul says, “you are in a city which is the crossroads of the ancient world. You have thousands of people caught up in the swirl of just about any and every confusing idea possible.

Timothy! First of all – get after praying.”

Your PRAYING will tap into **GOD’S HEART for ALL**. He wants **all** men prayed for. **All** in authority. He wants **all** men saved and to come to a full knowledge of the truth. **All** men have one mediator who can walk them **all** across the bridge of the cross to God. Christ was the ransom for all.

Your PRAYING will help your living and reputation express **GOD’S MESSAGE about the WAY**. A message that there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the one man named Christ Jesus. He is the one ransom and his testimony is the one which people must hear, understand, and believe.

Let our praying tap into God’s Heart; let your praying and living express God’s Message. And let your PRAYING be **your obedience to GOD’S PLAN**. “First of all, then...” Paul writes, “I urge prayer...” Serious praying can and will bring about everything else God wants to do.

My deep desire out of our 2018 summer worship is that you and I – all of us in the CCC family together, will re-connect with God through praying...praying that will change us, our ministry, and our community.

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ⁱ Cited by Philip Yancey in Chapter 1, “Our Deepest Longing” in *Prayer—Does It Make Any Difference* (Zondervan, 2006), 11.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 13.

ⁱⁱⁱ If you are between the ages of 18-27 today, and you have a significant measure of confusion in your life right now...well, you’re not alone. It’s the reason about 80 percent of (college) students in the United States end up changing their major at least once. On average, college students change their major at least three times over the course of their college career... the reason that 90% of you admit that you’ve had sex before you were actually ready for it...In April (2018) in the GOT PROOF teaching on sexuality, I suggested that we baby-boomer parents, used by God to bring you into the world, have managed to confuse you over the past 30 years on just about everything: about gender, about masculinity and femininity, about God, about who you really are, about truth, about right and wrong, about how to manage what God puts in your hands (without being captured by it or enslaved to it), about what life is truly about...not to speak about what to do about eternity.

I’d like to make the case that we live in a VERY confused world. A confusion – in rebellion to God – of our own making.

^{iv} Douglas LaBier, Ph.D., a business psychologist and psychoanalytic psychotherapist, is the Director of the Center for Progressive Development in Washington, DC. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-new-resilience/201008/confused-life-in-todays-world-reboot-remix-part-1>

^v Yancey, 14.

^{vi} This summary comes from material presented in William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles-Word Biblical Commentary* Volume 46, general editor Bruce M. Metzger (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc., 2000), “Introduction,” pp lxix-lxxiii, “The Ephesian Heresy.”

^{vii} i.e., Hellenistic elements

^{viii} Bill Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room* (Zondervan, 2006), 133-134.