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**This Is Good
and Pleases
God**

1218-A

Series: I Timothy

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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The little child stood, tugging at his mother's skirt. Tears were streaming down his chubby cheeks. He was crying so hard, he was virtually unable to speak. The words came out slowly, almost unintelligibly; but a mother's ears understand sounds no one else can fathom. What the little lad was saying was, "Mommy, I love you, and I want to make you happy." Now those are hard words for a parent to refuse. For most of us, they are words that seem to melt on a child's lips before they are ever uttered. But these were the tear-drenched sounds that fell from the weeping toddler's lips.

His mother looked down at him with loving, but wounded eyes. "Yes, Dear, I know you love me but if you want to make me happy, clean your room." "I don't want to clean my room," the little boy pouted, "it's too dirty." His mother kept on washing the dishes. The lad kept on crying. There seemed to be an impasse. "I'll prove I love you," the boy screamed, "I'll wash the car." With that, he raced out the door, turned on the hose, and proceeded to drench his mother's new station wagon, all with the best of intentions and the worst of results. (The windows were down.) It took about two hours of frantic efforts before the little boy got the picture. It wasn't that his mother *doubted his love*; it's that his mother was *not pleased until he did the one thing she wanted him to do*.

That's what Jesus meant when He said, "If you love me, *keep my commandments*." (Just do what I asked you to do.) So many of us who really love our Lord are caught up in a barrage of frantic activities and well-meaning endeavors to *prove we love Him*. How sad that we do not sit still long enough to find out *what will please His heart the most, and simply do that*.

The problem is (as the song says), we want to do it *our way*; and we miss the point of obedience entirely. Today's study highlights that internal battle and demonstrates how Satan often keeps us busy doing really *good things*, so long as he can keep us from

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doing the things that please the heart of God the most.

We are continuing our study of the book of I Timothy and we have been turning the microscope of our hearts towards the first few verses of chapter two. There we have listened to Paul instructing young Timothy on the basic priorities of the Christian life. He had preceded that instruction with a wealth of discouraging news: that there were problems in the church, problems in the world, problems in certain men's lives so severe they had been shipwrecked and handed over to Satan to learn their lessons. Not a pretty picture.

But chapter two began with Paul pulling back the curtain and beginning the process of revealing *the solution* to the problems at hand. His advice was: *First of all, pray*. Before you attempt to right the wrongs, correct the offenders, attack the problems, or plan your offensive...stop...stand totally still...and pray.

Before you panic, pray. Before you get depressed, pray. Before you are tempted to flee for higher ground rather than face what appears to be a no-win set of alternatives, pray. And then when you've finished praying, pray some more; in fact, make prayer a way of life. Let prayer *become your life*.

With that, Paul began a dissertation on the subject: a practical, but theologically accurate explanation of when to pray, for whom to pray, why we pray, and ultimately what happens *when* we pray. In our last lesson, we looked at *when to pray*. The answer was *first of all...before we do anything else...we are to pray*. It is to be our number one priority.

Secondly, Paul explained *for whom* we are to pray. We are to pray *for everyone*. There were to be no limits on the scope of our prayer lists. Everyone God puts in our paths and lays on our hearts is a divine assignment. That child up the street, that relative who so rails against the things of God, that man in your office who seems so lonely, that couple you met in the hospital who are undergoing such a series of trials. Your only limit on who to pray for would be the limit God places on who He will save; and we found there is none. He longs that *all men might be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth*.

But, Paul went on, we are *especially to pray* (that is, without ceasing), for *all those who have been placed in a position of authority over us*: the president, the governor, the mayor, the congressmen, the senators, the judges, the pastors, the elders all those who, *by*

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reason of their office (regardless of their qualifications), exercise authority over us. They are to be the constant object of our prayers. The reason? That we may live peaceful and quiet lives free from internal and free from external conflicts; lives lived in godliness and holiness, pure without and pure within.

Today we continue our look at that penetrating passage on prayer. Having seen the pleading and the priority, we turn to look at the principles and the purposes: first at God's purpose in prayer and finally, at the purpose of life itself in our next study. Let's read the entire passage in context one more time:

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions 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.

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

who gave Himself a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.

And for this purpose, I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.

I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. (I Timothy 2:1-8 NIV)

THE PRINCIPLES

Paul has instructed us *first of all, to pray*. But lest we misunderstand and try to attach some legalistic limits to the subject, or lest we turn it into some kind of emotional free-for-all, he carefully *defines* prayer as he proceeds. And his definition ought to open a whole new understanding of both the methods and the meaning. He does so through the use of four Greek words that in the NIV, are translated *requests, prayers, intercession* and *thanksgiving*. The problem is that because those words do not say much in our vocabulary, we tend to pass over them as all-too-familiar, and we miss the whole point of Paul's exhortation.

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Requests

The first Greek word is *deesis*. It is used nineteen times in Scripture, and in the King James Version is translated *supplication*. It is most commonly translated *an entreaty on behalf of a personal need*. It is not an exclusively religious word; it was equally used for a request one person made of another. In Ephesians 6:17,18, Paul uses the word twice in the passage where he tells us to,

...take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit,
which is the word of God;

praying always with all prayer and supplication in the
Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and
supplication for all the saints— (Ephesians 6:17,18 NKJV)

In that famous Philippians four passage, Paul admonishes us to

Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and
supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made
known to God; (Philippians 4:6 NKJV)

All three passages point out one basic truth, which I believe is often overlooked in considering priorities in prayer. That truth is this: the emphasis *was not on asking for your own needs*. In the Ephesians passage, we were to be “praying always with... supplication for all the saints.”¹ The verb was *to pray*, the method was *supplication*, and the object of those prayers was *all men*. The same was true in our First Timothy passage. “I urge you, first of all, that requests (or supplications), be made *for all men*.”² The emphasis is on bringing the *needs of others* before the Throne of Grace for solutions. Paul seldom prayed for his own needs, though he sometimes asked others to do that. But he was constantly lifting up the names and the needs of all the saints to his Heavenly Father without ceasing.

You just don't find Paul praying that Aristosis would get another job, or that Hezekikio would find a wheel for his chariot, that Anthony would get a raise at the tent factory, or that Demetrius would win the 100-yard dash in the Olympics. Paul's prayers were for *character*. He prayed that,

...your love may abound still more and more in knowledge
and all discernment,

1 Ephesians 6:18

2 I Timothy 2:1

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that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

(Philippians 1:9-11 NKJV)

Even in asking for himself, his purpose was the glory of God, not the removal of adverse circumstances. The very next verse in that Philippians passage, rather than requesting prayer that he be removed from prison, adds,

But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,

(Philippians 1:12)

We have misconstrued the basic purpose of prayer. We will get to it in detail in our next lesson. Prayer is not intended to help God get *our* perspective; prayer is designed to help us get *His* perspective. God's goals are spiritual. And that thing you may be praying that God would remove from Mary's life, for instance, may be the *very thing God put there* to help Mary grow. That's what God is after, and for you to be after *anything less is not really prayer*. That's why John said,

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

(I John 5:14)

What does it mean "in accordance with His will"? "It is *not* His will that any should perish; it *is* His will that all come to a knowledge of truth."³ It *is* His will that we "make disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them all things"⁴. It *is* His will that we be "conformed to the image of His Son"⁵. Those are the things we pray for. And we pray for all men, especially those in positions of authority, making requests always for them to be *what God wants them to be*. It doesn't mean we never pray for circumstances to be removed. Jesus in the garden prayed,

O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.

(Matthew 26:39b NKJV)

His *request* was for God's will to be done. His *reaction* was "Father, if there's another way than the one that seems to be imminent, that would be nice, but if *this is the best way to*

3 I Timothy 2:4

4 Matthew 28:19,20

5 Romans 8:29

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accomplish your purposes, Father, do it.” That’s prayer. Even in that prayer, Jesus was not praying for Himself, but for us. Listen as the Master prays in John 17. Jesus was praying for *our welfare*, on God’s terms. It is a beautiful model prayer. He was making *requests or supplications*, on our behalf. He prayed not that the Father should take them out of the world, but that the Father would keep us from the evil one.⁶ In other words, “Father, don’t take the pressures from them, just keep Satan from capitalizing on the pressures. Don’t let Satan take that which You allow for their growth and use it to destroy them.” He prayed that *as we go through the very things we want to avoid*, that Satan could take no liberties, so that God’s ultimate purposes could be accomplished.

So principle number one is to pray always for all men, especially those over us, by bringing their spiritual needs before the Father, asking for Him to meet those needs in whatever way would bring the most glory to Him. It is primarily a command to pray for others, not for ourselves, and a command to pray for their spiritual well-being, not for circumstances. This is so contrary to what is being taught in so many circles today *as the prayer of faith*. We are being told that prayer is a vehicle by which we get God into our corner and force Him to bless us in the physical realm by removing from us the very pressures and problems *through which He changes our lives*. It’s a Gospel that sells well on the surface, because it’s what man wants to hear; but it won’t sell in heaven because *it’s not what glorifies God and equips the saints*. Paul says, “First of all make requests for all men.”

Prayers

The second word in Paul’s “Primer on Prayer” is the word *proseuche*. It is a word with a more limited context, but a deeper meaning. For while *deesis* is used *of petitioning either God or man*, this word is used *exclusively of man approaching God*. It literally means *to come to a proper position before God*. It signifies great humility in the presence of awesome power. It means you don’t just toss those prayers up to God as though you were throwing basketballs through a hoop.

It is the undeniable realization that you are in the presence of the King of kings for the purpose of utilizing His Grace. You don’t deserve to be there. But because the King purchased you

⁶ John 17:15

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back from the slave market of sin and personally invited you into His inner chambers to have fellowship with Him, you go. You go joyfully, but you go carefully. You go boldly, but you go humbly. Yes, praying without ceasing means you pray as you drive, as you wait, as you work, as you rest; but it doesn't mean you pray *casually*. Even as you drive, to call upon the Great God of Creation is not a casual thing. You only utter His Son's precious Name and the gates of heaven swing wide, and you are ushered into His Magnificent Throne Room. The God of Eternity for a moment in time stops to listen to *what you have to say*.

How dare we take that lightly? How dare we stroll along with a "Hi, God, how are things in eternity?" mentality. No, we can pray without the *thees* and *thous*, but *never dare we forget*, we're not talking *to the man upstairs*; we're talking to the One who framed the universe, who spoke the stars into the heavens, who framed the oceans and said "go no farther", who knit us together in our mother's womb. We are approaching the Throne of Jehovah God. How dare we casually stroll in. We must spiritually take off our shoes...the place where we stand is *holy ground*. That's what it means when it says, "First of all make prayers". It means always, at all times *approach God without forgetting He is God*.

Intercession

The third word is *enteuxis*, and it is translated in most of our Bibles as *intercession*; but it doesn't mean exactly that. As you can see, the first word, *deesis* was the word for *making requests for another*. This word means *to fall in with or to draw near to another for intimate conversation*. It is the flip side of prayer. It means that once you enter the throne room with a realization of Who God Is, you are in a position to speak to Him as though He were not only the Creator of heaven and earth, but also your Redeemer Friend. It means you approach Him in prayer with confidence, once you have approached Him with humility and reverence, not because of who you are, but rather because of *what He's done*.

So praying with intercession is praying intimately, personally, and specifically. It isn't a liturgy of recited words. It is a pouring out of the heart, as David did, speaking one-to-one to the only One.

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Thanksgiving

The final word in Paul's quadripartite explanation of the phenomenon of prayer is more familiar. The Greek word is *eucharistia*. It means *the act of expressing gratitude to another*. It is translated *thanksgiving* in most of our Bibles. It is a combination of both attitude and expression; but the command is to *give thanks* whether you *feel* thankful or not. Now that may seem hypocritical, but the key is that Christ in you always wants to give thanks. That's what Paul meant when he said,

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in
Christ Jesus for you. (I Thessalonians 5:18 NKJV)

Christ in you *is thankful*. The flesh in you isn't. It's always wanting more, or justifying that it deserves at least what it got. And since self-control is the exercising of the will in obedience to the Word over the objections of the emotions and appetites, you simply *give thanks* by choice. It's an order from a God of order. And you are to do so, *in advance*. That's because, if you have prayed properly, you have taken your requests to God in an attitude of great humility, and *left them there*. The choice of what to do is His; and the results for what He does are His, so the giving of thanks is not predicated on anything that has not yet happened.

This may be the most important part of prayer. It is mentioned in virtually every one of Paul's sermons on addressing God. And for good reason, it is virtually the only thing we can do to practice for heaven. It was Trench who wrote, "Here is that aspect of prayer that will continue through eternity." And yet this may be the least practiced aspect of our prayer lives, the giving of thanks in advance for God's gracious answers to our prayers, even though we have no idea *how* He plans to answer. Because He is *THE I AM*, however He answers is cause for praise.

So Paul is saying *always* pray for *all men* without ceasing, but do so in the right manner. Approach God with *awesome respect*. Draw near to Him in *intimate conversation*. Speak to Him *specifically* of the *spiritual* needs of others, *particularly those in authority over you*, and wrap your requests in an anthem of *thanksgiving*, giving God the praise of your heart, and giving you a preview of those magnificent sessions in heaven where you will spend so much of eternity doing just that. Paul is saying, "Live your life with that priority, and the issues facing the Ephesian

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church, *or any church*, will suddenly come into focus and you will see it all from God's perspective."

THE PURPOSES

So Paul has told us *how to pray*. Now he tells us why. There are two reasons. One is actually *why we pray*, the other goes even deeper, it actually answers the question of the ages, "Why am I here?" We'll save that one for next time. We will close this lesson by letting Paul tell Timothy and us *why we are to constantly, first of all, be praying*. The answer is found in verse three. It reads,

This [kind of praying] is good, and pleases God our Savior,
(I Timothy 2:3 NIV)

That's purpose number one for praying all the time for everyone.

This kind of prayer is good (*kalos*) and pleases (*apodektos*) God. And, oh, the awesome implications of that phrase ought to cause us to fall on our faces before our Holy God and worship. First of all, it is *good*. There are two Greek words translated good in our Bibles, and their meanings are slightly different. The first word *agathos*, is *that part of God's nature that is so worthy of admiration because of His Righteousness*. It is used in Scripture to describe the nature or essence of God as it is seen in Him and in us when His character is being revealed. God, by essence of being, is *good*. He is perfect Holiness and perfect Righteousness wrapped in perfect Mercy. So when you see God reveal Himself, you are seeing that which is *agathos* or *good*.

The second word *kalos*, however, is used to describe the *beauty of the results of God's nature as it is visibly expressed*. It might be likened to the Hebrew word used when God looked at His creation in Genesis and continually exclaimed, "It is good". So when we pray as Paul taught us to pray, the results are *kalos*, *a beautiful reflection of the goodness of God flowing through us back to God*.

But not only is that kind of prayer good; it *pleases God*. The word is *apodektos*. It is found in Romans 16:15, where Paul speaks of the offering of the Gentiles up to God as a *pleasing act of worship*. It is used in II Corinthians 6:2, in referring to the *acceptable time of salvation*; that *now is the time* when it will most please God for men to come to Him. Its literal meaning is *"that which most pleases or warms the heart of God"*. Picture it as

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a key that unlocks the innermost chambers to the heart of God.

So Paul is saying, “If it’s your goal to reflect the nature of God more perfectly, and affect the heart of God more personally, then pray.” First of all, pray. Pray often, pray always for all men, pray without ceasing, pray especially for those God has placed over you.

Enter His presence reverently. Speak to His heart respectfully, but talk to Him intimately. Pray for others specifically, but focus your prayers spiritually; and be sure to pray thankfully, for you already know, even before you rise from your knees, that God will answer perfectly. The issue isn’t whether or not He does it *your way*, but whether or not you have set Him free to do it *His way, which is good and acceptable and perfect*. In the process of praising Him, you are saying, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”; and you are preparing for heaven as you do.

So many of us live the Christian life like the little boy in the opening illustration. We spend so much time running around doing things to make God happy, we don’t have time to sit still and find out what *God says will make Him happy*. He just told us that it expresses His nature beautifully, and it warms His heart personally, when first of all, and last of all, and all in all, we pray.

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