

# A Call to Prayer

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Okay, so we're going to look this morning for a little while at 1 Timothy, chapter 2, as we go through this letter that Paul wrote, Paul the Apostle wrote to a young church planter, church leader called Timothy. And really the next section from chapter 2 onwards for a little while is about really instructions for setting up this church more formally and the kind of things that are important in the church. And that was not obviously just for the church in Ephesus that Timothy was part of, but it's for the church of all time. And there are huge and important principles. Because what we do together in our worship is really important.

It's the essence of what we are as a people is that we worship together. We live our lives, of course, and our lives are worship. But so is this corporate act that when we come together, it's very important. The praise that we offer, the song, the prayers that are offered and our amends are said to, the word we read, the hearing of the word preached and shared, these things matter to God and they matter and are important for us. And he gives us that day, he gives us one day when we can set apart at least some of the day for coming together in worship. And I really am not talking about the importance of the institution or the church as an institution. I'm talking about us as a people and the church of God worldwide as a people who gather in worship. It should be for us to a greater or lesser degree, I hope, at least.

And I feel almost embarrassed to say this, but it should be a little reflection of heaven. Embarrassed why? Because I think heaven is so much greater than we can ever imagine that it seems strange to try and compare it. But there should be something about our being together, the presence of God among us, the beauty of worshipers who have come humbly in faith to Jesus Christ for salvation, an unparalleled sense of goodness, not in ourselves, but that outward looking love for one another, the company of God. It should at least be a taste.

People, I believe people should come when we gather together, whether it's formally like this in worship or whether it's just as we gather, they should think, hmm, something good about that.

There's something right. There's something attractive about this people together. It's a very vital, it should be something vital and living. Now I know that sin often shoves it otherwise into the corner in our hearts and in our lives, and we marginalize it, and sometimes we ritualize it, and ministers can be the worst people for ritualizing church. We can have a critical spirit which doesn't help, you know, or we can relegate that so that it doesn't become something that we regard as, our presence there is really significant for others, which I think always should be. So I just want to say a couple of things that I think Timothy, that Paul, sorry, is foundational things that he's saying that church can be built on in a sense and that the importance of our gathering and being a worshiping people is focused on. And the first thing is that God matters. God matters, and the second thing is that other people matter, so very, very simple things really. But God matters. In verse 5, which I think really, I think is the pivotal verse of this paragraph, he says, for there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. And that's just a very simple phrase, we'll probably just read over that very quickly and moved on because we all know that. But there is one God, and that's what he's saying here because it reflects the whole teaching of the Bible. It's the chorus of the Bible, there is one

[ 4 : 36 ] God. And actually, even more so, it's the chorus of the Old Testament, because the Old Testament, the whole of the Old Testament was stressing that to the Israelites, to the people of God. They were stressing that there is one God. There's one God all over the place. It says that he is one God. You know, there's no God except me. He is God. There is none other beside him.

Hero Israel, you know, the great Shema prayer. Hero Israel, the Lord our God is one. The commandments, no other gods because there's one God. And it was repeated all the way through the Old Testament in the context of gods all over the place, a multiplicity of gods and idols, the people of Israel, worship the one living and true God. And in many ways, some of the Old Testament is just exposing humanity's rebellion against that by their constant descent into idolatry, into ignoring the living God, taking his benefits and then just kind of casting him aside. And that's the struggle that we find through the themes of the Old Testament. But this is, he's saying that because he's real, you know, he's real. And he is God. We can't change him. He's the real God, the only

God, the standard of perfection. And he is God. You know, he's not liberal. He's not reformed.

He's not Presbyterian. He's not Baptist. He's not cute. He's not harsh. He's not right wing. He's not left. He is God. He exists as God. We can't categorize him by our terminology because he's the living God. And amazingly, we, you know, our opinion of him, our categorization of him is irrelevant to his eternal existence as God. There's nobody like him.

We can't compare him. We can't understand him fully. Who can understand God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? We've made up words to try and understand that by calling it Trinity. But we, he is at that level not like us and not one of us, even though we know that we are, in some respects, made in his image. There is one God. And as Paul is teaching and giving information and truth about God to Timothy, in 2 Timothy chapter 3, he often says something very significant and one verse that we all know very well, 2 Timothy 3, 16, all scripture is God, is breathed out by this one God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training, and righteousness that the person of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

[ 7 : 39 ] So he breathes out his word. He reveals himself in his word. And that word comes through different people, as we'll see in a minute. But he tells us that we are made for him and made by him. And that he is, in his word, tells us he's the source of existence.

He's the origin of everything good. We know, what do we know from our cacus of infinite, eternal and unchangeable. He sees your life and my life right to the end today, right to the end, because he exists out of time. And he knows everything. And in him, there is no darkness at all.

Provides the earth for our home to be with him. And his word that he gives us is his record of his story among us in real time, because he's a real God. Yes, he's a spirit. And yes, he's not like us, but he is real. And he gives us his word, which is not a history of the universe.

It's the history of his dealings with us as people. And it can be ugly. And we don't like it. It's certainly not PC. There's much of it that is brutal, hard to grasp. But it's also glorious.

And unparalleled in its beauty, because it's his revelation. I know 35 authors, 66 books, written over 1500 years. But it's the word of the one God, this one God.

[ 9 : 27 ] As he inspired through his spirit, these writers to bring together the message. And the overarching theme is that God is love. So 1 Timothy, when we look at this or when we study any of the letters that we look at in the Bible, it's not just an ancient letter to a church from long ago.

It is his word. It's his word to us. And it's his word that says to us that humanity is in deep trouble without recognizing the one God and recognizing his love because we experience love in great measure. But it's often disordered and at best shadowy. It's there to point us to the author of a greater and more important love, because we have replaced him. Isn't it absurd that we replace this one God, this infinite God with something else? It's absurd. The absurdity of our heart is that we try and live without God, without his love and without recognizing his unique reality. But there simply can't be another. And that means for us, of course, that when we separate ourselves through our lives by from the author of life, we come under the influence of death. And it's not that we have no God, it's we have a million gods, a million idols to replace him with, because we would need a million, wouldn't we? And more and more to replace this infinite real God. I had an illustration and it's really probably rubbish. But I'm going to give it anyway, because it would be like taking the battery out of a car. Now, why you would...

This illustration falls down because I can't think of a reason why you would do that. Okay? So forget the fact that I don't know why you would do it. But it's like taking the battery out of a car, maybe just because you don't like it. Okay? Don't like that battery. I'm going to take it out of the car. And then thinking that you can make that car run by gathering a million dud AA batteries and sellotaping them together with a wee bit of wire in the end and sticking them to the two ends of the battery connectors and thinking the car will run. A million dead batteries wouldn't do it. It wouldn't do it. Now, that's a stupid illustration, isn't it? Sorry. But maybe it gives you an idea sometimes of the absurdity of trying to live life without the author of life and the author of love. We choose to simply because... Because we do, because we're rebels from Him.

But there is one God. And that's why we gather in worship. And that's why He is so important. There is one God. But also, we recognize there is one mediator. There's one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, which is testimony given at the proper time. There's one God. How hard was it for Matthew or for Peter or for other Jewish educated and these Old Testament scriptures of their day? How hard was it who are monotheistic Jewish people who believed in this one God, this one God? It's always one God to get their heads around the fact that Jesus was God. The revelation of the New Testament and the revelation of Paul is that he met with Jesus Christ and worshiped Him as the living God.

And we see that coming to fullness in the New Testament. Don't we? It describes this unique God as God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, but not three Gods. One God. That's what absolutely confuses our tiny minds, same in substance, equal in power and glory. And Jesus, this one God, this one God who is love, how does He, how does He express that love to a people who have turned away from Him by sending Jesus Christ or by becoming, coming as a mediator himself.

[ 14 : 09 ] He gives himself as a ransom. So he becomes humankind to represent us because a mediator is the man in the middle. It's the person in the middle who can mediate between two parties.

He's the only one, a mediator is the one who can broker peace. That's maybe a very significant term at the moment when we think of what's happening in Ukraine and Russia. We need a mediator. We need someone who can come and broker peace. And he came as God of love, to love God the Father and people perfectly as the example of true humanity, the author of life, but then by choosing to pay for our guilt willingly facing God's wrath, choosing death as the punishment and in His resurrection it says paid in full. The ransom is paid, paid in full because death cannot hold this one God, can it? Death cannot hold Him. That's why the resurrection is so important because He's the living God. He chose to pay the price, our death, in order that we might live. And the source of all that love, it points to Him. All the love you enjoy, the love you shared this morning with people, the love of your family, the love of your partner, the love of your children, the love of your neighbors, your sisters, the love that you have for people. Where does that come from?

And that comes from the author, the Lord God. But it's to point us to the perfect love and to be reconciled with our Father so that we can love like Jesus. So there's one way, one God, one way, one answer. And we remind ourselves of that. And Paul is reminding Timothy that that is really important as a foundation for gathering and worship because it has to be that that is the way. It has to be all or nothing. Otherwise, you have to come up with a different answer and I have to, and we have to recognize that there is no revelation from God, that Christ probably isn't God, and therefore we don't know who God is if He exists at all. If He's not made Himself known objectively to us through Jesus Christ and in His Word, then our worship is futile.

And I know we're called to accept it by faith, but it's not a blind faith because we know that this one God has entered the room. He's got dust between His toes and He has bled real blood in the hands of Roman soldiers. And it can't just be a nice feeling or a figment of our imagination for all of us to make up. He's either real and we deal with Him eyeball to eyeball or He's not.

And we have to make that choice in that decision. And Paul recognizes that in verse 7, you know, he says that. He says, for this is appointed a preacher and an apostle. I am telling the truth, he says. I'm not lying. You know, he really wants to get across. He is met with the risen Savior.

[ 17 : 39 ] He's been appointed to bring and reveal who Jesus Christ is to the Gentiles. And he wants people to know that his experience is an experience of the truth. And you know what convinces me so often when I struggle? What convinces me that he is my Redeemer and my Lord, apart from His Spirit at work in my heart, is that when I meet a complete stranger from maybe China or from Russia or from a different part of the world, maybe even from Lewis, and I've never met them before, and they're Christian. I know immediately there's a brotherhood, a sisterhood, that the core truths of Christ and what He has done are as real to them as they are to me, because we both know Jesus.

There's a knowledge of Jesus that we have, not a knowledge about Him, a knowledge of Him. And we share that, and there's a commonality there. So there is one God, and that's a great foundational truth that he speaks here in this passage. But he also, secondly and briefly, also says that other people are important in our understanding, not only that we come at terms with this one God and His love for us and what He has done on our behalf, but other people are important as we worship together, as we live our lives together. Bible, the New Testament's full of that, and here Paul is urging Timothy about the importance of praying in our worship together. You know, he's instructing him about the public times of worship that they are to have, and that because Timothy is a leader of the church, he's saying, look, the prayer you do together is a really important part of church life. It's a really important part of being together, because it reflects, as does all of church, reflects the public face of your private walk with Jesus.

So what we think is important publicly reflects often what we think is important personally. And he's saying we as a people should reflect that we are lovingly dependent on the living God in prayer, because, well, if Jesus needed to be, because He prayed more than anyone, didn't He, when He was here, how much more should we be prayers as well? Prayers, He says, all kinds of prayers. Prayers as worship, prayers as intercession, prayers as supplications and thanksgivings, all kinds of general prayers, specific prayers, prayers for in worship and prayers of thanksgiving.

And because, why? Because we're channeling it to the one source of life, the one God, the one hope. It's a reflection of who we are. We're created to be in fellowship and in communion. And in His presence, and worship is about presence, it's about knowing Him, whether these prayers are verbalized or otherwise. And so prayers is always part of our corporate worship on a Sunday, or as we gather on a Wednesday evening for the engine room, or on a Friday morning for one, two, seven, one prayer, is what we do. It's just what we do, because together we show and we pray as individuals and as people together. It's not really meant for the few, or the elite, or the retired, or the time rich. It's part of our DNA when we can, that we pray together as a people before the living God.

Why is that important? Because it's outward facing. Not only are we upward facing in God, but we're outward facing, because we are not people who believe primarily that our salvation is only individual. That it's only just me and my walk with God. It's a reflection of the truth that once we were not a people, but now we are the people of God, and that we're doing something that we'll enjoy in heaven forever, which is a multitude that no one can number.

[ 21 : 38 ] Man, that's a real battle, isn't it, sometimes, when we want to be in our own. But one day we'll not just want our own company. We'll want everyone's company. And so our salvation is not simply, it is, but it's about, but it's not simply about my walk with God. And as a church, our church has not been navel gazing. We're not just interested in ourselves and St. Columbus, or it's all about St. Columbus. It's not about that. It's, and it's not about my place in St. Columbus. It's expansive. He says, you know, our prayers are to be for all people, for all people. It's massive.

You know, I mentioned that in prayer and was provoked and reminded of my own failure so often to do that today, that there's no one in our lives beyond prayer. There's no one we should say, well, I'm not going to pray for them. God says, pray for all people with all kinds of different requests. Maybe say to someone someday, oh, I prayed for you this morning and I was root, because I wanted to thank God for you. Doesn't need to be a Christian that you're thanking God for.

And but just that we're praying for all people. It's massive. No one outside of God's reach. What a privilege we have to be praying for people. I'm way, what a great privilege you can pray to tomorrow as you go into work or go to study or in your neighborhood for the people around you.

What a great privilege that is that we have to pray for all people and we're commanded to do so here, but also for our national and world leaders, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead peaceful and quiet life. So we pray and I hope we pray together, but maybe generally that we pray for our leaders to rule well. Man, that is a big prayer to protect their people, to provide peace, stability, justice, security, to protect the poor, to protect the vulnerable, the voiceless. Because what we see so often is the opposite, isn't it?

And in conclusion, why do we do that? Why do we pray to the one God? And why do we pray to the one God? Why do we pray recognizing the importance of other people and leaders?

[ 23 : 58 ] Because I think it reflects God's heart that people are to be saved. This is good and it's pleasing in the sight of God our Savior who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge where our lives, our prayers, our understanding of God reflects His love, doesn't it? It reflects His mission. It reflects who He is. That when we pray for all people, when we pray for leaders and for people in high places for every nation, when we recognize that, we recognize that at the heart of it all is God's desire that people are saved. His saving work. No one's disqualified. God has provided enough in Christ for every single human being to come to know Him. Now, we dive there into the mystery of His sovereignty, of His electing grace, and of our human responsibility. I leave you with a great word, antonymy, an unresolved paradox.

But I believe somehow, and I don't know how, but somehow our prayer lives make a difference to God in that respect. Our prayer lives make a difference. He chooses to work through the channels of our prayers. If we are prayerless, we may not see God in His power and His glory working.

But we pray for people and we pray for leaders because God is sovereign over the universe and over the nations as they rise and fall. And as we pray for them and pray for peace, that seems to suggest that it will allow us then to live lives as Christians of both godliness and holiness and live lives that are peaceful and quiet. Isn't that great? That we can live lives that are peaceful and quiet. And that seems to provide a better foundation for the gospel to flourish. You can think of the Pax Romana at the New Testament or Cyrus in the Old Testament and Babylon and how God's blessing was on these leaders and nations so that the gospel flourished.

And that is good and pleasing to live a quiet and peaceful life, lived out prayerfully and practically for other people. You know, I really praise God. I read this passage and I looked at it and I was thinking about it and I really praise God that there's no regret in heaven. I really do.

I really praise God there's no regret in heaven because I can't imagine not looking back and saying, well, why in earth didn't I pray more? I don't know how there's no regret for that, but I'm glad that there isn't. So we're glad today that God speaks through His living Word and reminds us that He is this one God. He's the real God and He's teaching us in our hearts and lives about our privileges and about our corporate worship and about who we are. And I know that He wants me and you to see Him more clearly and His love for us more clearly and to see that He uses ordinary, apparently run-of-the-mill, peaceful and quiet Christian lives to radically change the world.

[ 27 : 33 ] And that's good news. Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would help us to live out the good news of the gospel. You don't ask us to be super people. You don't ask us to be Jesus.

Thankfully, you help us to buy the indwelling of your spirit, live upward in our gaze and outward in our gaze, loving you and loving others. Buy grace and through your amazing redemptive power that we are covered in your righteousness, not our own. And we come to you for forgiveness and help.

We thank you for the love that we share. We pray that it would grow each day. Pray that we would be long-suffering over one another, that we'd be quick to forgive, that we would look at our own hearts often, that we would embrace one another in grace, that we would pray often for each other, for others around us, and for the leaders and kings and governors of this world. And I know that I often think in my own prayers that that is beyond my pay scale to do. And it seems almost like we're praying just into the ceiling, because it seems such a massive thing, and we are so insignificant. But yet you choose to work through our prayers and we plead and pray that we would see that. And we would see the power of prayer and see answered prayer, not just in the Bible and not just in history, but in our own lives, day by day, this gentle, loving, sovereign, powerful Father whose love is at the very core of the universe on our side. We thank you for that. Amen.