

## 1 Timothy

**2 1-3** The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation. This is the way our Savior God wants us to live.

**4-7** He wants not only us but *everyone* saved, you know, everyone to get to know the truth *we've* learned: that there's one God and only one, and one Priest-Mediator between God and us—Jesus, who offered himself in exchange for everyone held captive by sin, to set them all free. Eventually the news is going to get out. This and this only has been my appointed work: getting this news to those who have never heard of God, and explaining how it works by simple faith and plain truth.

Two weeks ago, we started a sermon series called BLESS. Over the two weeks we have been reminded that we are blessed not for our own gain but so that we might be a blessing for others. We have been challenged to look at and think about the mission field that surrounds our congregation and to be open to and consider the ways that God is calling us to bless them. We have named some of the pain and heart ache that people within one mile of the church are facing on a daily basis. We named how 7 out of 10 of our neighbors don't have a faith community to call home. Well, our Scripture this morning reminds us that if we want to help this hurting world, it all begins with prayer. Would you turn to a neighbor and say, "it begins with prayer"?

We are a praying people because Jesus prayed. Jesus began his ministry, in Luke 4, by being filled with the Holy Spirit after a prayerful time in the wilderness.

When he was deciding who to call as disciples, he began by going to a

mountainside to pray and prayed throughout the night. Throughout his ministry as he faced the grief of his friend, moments of healing, and his own face with death, he began with prayer.

Ok, so Jesus prayed, we should pray. Prayer is important, not a big surprise.

The question is, do we believe it? Do we really believe in the power of prayer?

I don't think a lot of us feel super confident about our prayer lives which is why I am really excited that Nancy, our prayer coordinator, and our prayer team, is assembling a prayer toolbox with short prayers that we can pray to help us build up our prayer life with quick and easy go to prayers. There is more information about the prayer toolbox in your bulletin and in the newsletter and I am thankful for her creativity to help us grow as prayer warriors. And I am thankful that this morning, as we celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism, that we as a congregation promise to pray for Mackenzie and Lillian as they join in the baptismal waters.

Even with this strong base of prayer in our church life a lot of us continue to struggle with prayer in our personal lives. From what I have read, the three key reasons people don't pray are either they don't know how to pray, they are too busy to pray, or there is doubt that prayer actually works.

This morning I don't want to get into the weeds building a case for why we as Christians should be cultivating our prayer lives or the how to's of praying. I read a great quote a long time ago that if you want a group to build a ship you don't

motivate them by telling them how much lumber they will need and how to construct a boat. You motivate them by creating a longing for the sea. So, this morning, I am not going to get into the nitty gritty details of prayer, but I want to share two experiences with the power in the prayer in the hopes that it will make you long for a deeper prayer life with God.

The first story I want to share is a story I learned from two Chicago pastors, and it is a story about a man named Louie. “One day Louie went to the mall, and for whatever reason he noticed a guy sitting on a bench. He said he had a strange sensation: Go tell that guy God loves him. Of course, Louie didn’t want to do that. Would you want to walk up to someone you don’t know at all and say, “Hey, God loves you”? So, he did what most of us might: he shrugged it off and kept on shopping.

When Louie came out of a store in another part of the mall a bit later, there was that same guy again. Again, Louie felt an inner nudge. Go over there and tell him God loves him. He blew it off again. Then a third time, he saw the same guy. Again, he got the same prompting. Finally, he said, “alright!” He walked up to the guy and said, “I don’t want to seem weird or anything, but I feel like I’m supposed to tell you that God loves you.”

Immediately, the stranger’s eyes filled up with tears, and he said, “This morning I was at the end of my rope. I told God, ‘If You’re real, show me You love me

today.’ I don’t know who you are, but you are the third random person in the mall today who’s come up to me and said, “Hey I don’t know you but God loves you.’ No one’s ever said it to me once before and now it’s happened three times in one day.” My friends prayer can take us on the adventure of a Godtime.

Stories like this inspire me to pray every day that God will use me to be an instrument of love. In all honesty, I should have been more specific in my prayer life and really outlined what I was comfortable with and what I was not. Last week I shared a story about Sylvia and Corey, and I shared that I was in a McDonalds when I overheard their conversation. Let me tell you a little more of how that went down. It was a Friday, I had my three little kids with me, and I had them on my own so I was trying to juggle getting shoes and socks off for the play fort, ordering food, and pouring everyone’s drinks. And it was as I was pouring the boys sprites that I really heard Corey and Sylvia talking. I will be honest. I had my back to the couple, and I seriously fought with the Holy Spirit about my role and responsibility with this couple. I just wanted to go eat my fries while they were still hot, play on my phone, and not engage or get involved. So, I am standing there filling up our sodas and I am literally fighting with God. I felt a tremendous feeling that I needed to go and introduce myself and engage with this crying couple. Let me tell you, in the history of McDonald’s I don’t think anyone has ever moved so slowly filling a large diet coke and three small sprites as God and I wrestled in that moment. As

you can imagine, God won. I got the boys settled and went back to introduce myself to the couple and offer to go to the hospital to pray with them and their premature son.

Praying takes great courage because it often changes us, challenges us, and calls us an adventure that only God can take us on. The same pastors who told the Louie story, in writing about prayer, said “I cannot change the world. You cannot change the world. Even prayer alone doesn’t change the world. Only God can change the world! However, God uses prayer to change us, and then God uses us to change our world.” Can I get an amen to that? God uses prayer to change us and then God uses us to change our world. For this reason, I kind of think prayer should come with some kind of warning. Caution: prayer will change you and then God will use you to change the world.

Knowing the risks associated with longing for and cultivating a deep prayer life I want to ask you to pray for the people God needs this church to bless. We might not know the names of the people in our community who are at the end of their rope, but God does. We might not know the people who are sitting in a booth crying and wondering how God can help them, but God does. Pastor Gina introduced me to a beautiful book called “Anam Cara” by John O’Donahue. In the book he says this about prayer: “A person should always offer a prayer of graciousness for the love that has awakened in them. When you feel love for your

beloved and the beloved's love for you...send that love out into the world to people who are desperate, to those who are starving, to those who are trapped in prison, in hospitals, and into all the brutal terrains of bleak and tormented lives. When you send that love out from the bountifulness of your own love, it reaches other people. This love is the deepest power of prayer.

Prayer is the act and presence of sending this light from the bountifulness of your love to other people to heal, free, and bless them. When there is love in your life, you should share it spiritually with those who are pushed to the very edge of life.”

This week, would you join me in praying, every single day for the people at the very edge of life, the people who are praying to be healed and freed, the people who God is calling our church to bless, and we don't yet know, would you pray for them? If you will pray for them, would you say amen?

Additionally, this morning we are handing out prayer cards with the names of missionaries we support as a congregation. If you are bold and brave, we invite you as you leave this morning to take a card, or two, or three, and pray for this missionary and their work every day this week. But let me caution you. As you pray for this missionary every day God might nudge you to look more into their work, you might feel called to up your pledge to support them financially, and let me really warn you, God might even use your prayers to call you to go and serve on a mission team yourself! If you will pray for them, would you say amen?

And as you pray for those God wants us to bless and as you pray for the missionaries we support, be open to Holy Spirit nudges and be on the lookout for who God is calling you to bless. Amen?

Let's close with a powerful prayer called the Wesleyan covenant prayer, would you pray with me:

“I am no longer my own, but thine.

Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.”