

Why Pray? Series

We are talking about prayer. As one of the elders said recently, prayer is not passive; it is work that you must do. It is one-on-one engagement with God. Prayer makes connection between the earthly realm and heavenly realm, inviting God to come into your circumstance in the earthly realm. God is delighted to answer.

You may find it easy to pray, particularly when you are desperate. But other times praying is hard. That's because prayer is a DISCIPLINE.

In the Bible, God gives instruction about how to pray and what to pray for. That's the discipline part. Today we are looking at one aspect of what we are to pray for. READ 1 Timothy 2:1-8

I bet you are thinking small. I bet you are thinking in terms of praying for those in authority,

- ~ "That's never work!" or
- ~ "Lord, surely you are not willing to bless our politicians!"
- ~ "No, Lord, NOT that other party! They'll never do anything right." or
- ~ "Lord, only bless the (party I love)!"

Martin Luther said, "We always ask for less than we should and don't even think God is willing to give us what we ask for. We don't ask the right way. We don't understand that what we pray about is more important than we can comprehend. We think small, but the Lord is great and powerful. He expects us to ask for great things. He wants to give them to us to demonstrate his almighty power."

So we are going to ask for a miracle for our politicians.

Don't get discouraged. God knows what God is doing by asking you to pray about this.

Prayer is the link, the crossover point between the realm of earth and the realm of heaven. The better we understand it, the more successful we will be with GREAT PRAYERS.

Let's review last week's diagram.¹ The realm of earth reflects what we see and what we perceive with our senses, what we can reason and what makes sense. Our culture is a strong influence, as well as our upbringing, and our higher education. We are quite loyal to that human system on earth and submit ourselves to its laws.

THE REALM OF EARTH

THE REALM OF HEAVEN



The realm of heaven is being able to comprehend the realm of faith—that we have a God who is involved in the world. The heavenly realm operates under God's laws as defined in the Bible. For the Christian, God's heavenly laws trump the earthly laws. We believers gain knowledge of God's realm through the Word and Spirit, and also by taking steps of faith. Prayer is a primary step of faith.²

In prayer we have to be willing to bring our own agendas to the cross and allow the Lord to begin shape us with God's agenda. Jesus went to the cross and we are to take up our cross too, and follow him. He went to the cross through prayer. (Mt. 26:39)

One way God asks us to lay our agendas on the cross is with some mind-blowing instructions like:

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Mt 5:44-45).

That just does not seem reasonable or sensible at all. But Jesus goes further:

"If you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.

¹ Diagram from Paul Maconochie's "Naturally Supernatural Workshop." See www.3dmovements.com/why-naturally-supernatural, accessed August 8, 2018.

² "Our Biggest Question About Prayer," 8/12/18 sermon. See www.fpcd.org

So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God” (Mt 5:22-24).

Now think of your favorite news channel hosts or your political leaders putting these two Scriptures into practice! Wouldn't it be a magnificent blessing for the world if they would? Wouldn't our lives be more peaceful if they did?

God might actually want to answer this prayer.

Go back to the diagram. Imagine yourself on the left side—the earthly side of the cross, holding in your mind all the political views that upset you (and we all have things we have not yet brought to the cross)—we would probably find it impossible to pray in the above manner. When we are firmly a part of the earthly realm and we haven't put our own agendas on the cross, we struggle with praying for governmental authorities we do not like.

So is there hope? On the one hand we are called to pray for them, and on the other, we often feel such a strong commitment to what we believe in that we simply cannot bring ourselves to pray for the leaders we do not like.

So here is our guide:

“In every place of worship, I want men (and women) to pray **with holy hands lifted** up to God, **free from anger and controversy.**” (v. 8)

To lift up holy hands in worship means we honor God. Psalm 134 states, “Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD.”

Here's another lifting up of the hands. The story is told in Exodus 17. Israel was in the wilderness. An enemy nation, Amalek, attacked them. Moses lifted up his hands to God for help. As long as his arm, holding his staff, was lifted, Israel held the advantage. But if he put his arms down, Amalek prevailed. So, Aaron and Hur held his arms up when Moses got too tired. Lifting up our arms shows dependency on God's help. When we are weak and we seek God, God fights for us.

Lifting up the hands is also a sign of surrender. You have heard “hands up, or I'll shoot!” We lift our hands to surrender. In the same way, we surrender to God's wisdom. We cannot be holy and pray for leaders we do not respect without surrendering to God. God is involved in the world. Invite him in!

Lifting up hands to the Lord has been done literally and must be done figuratively. When you are praying for people in places of authority, surrender your opinion of someone to God. Offer the holy sacrifice of praying for our leaders. God wants to bring our leaders together. God wants them to know the truth. But when people are filled with anger toward each other it is impossible for the truth to be heard.

So God adds one more caveat: “*Pray free from anger and controversy.*” (v. 8)

Anger, wrath, indignation is an attitude which is incompatible with what Jesus is looking for: If you are angry, before praying, you need to reconcile that anger.

That does not mean that there isn't righteous anger. Jesus had righteous anger. But Jesus always prayed in God's will. When others were angry enough to kill him, Jesus walked right through the crowd without animosity.

Anger, quarrels, dissensions, and disputes are hindrances to prayer. When you are angry you lower your vision to the problem and assign blame to a person or party. This does not take into account the many reasons for our nation's problems. Better to lift our sights. Tie your opinions and your anger to the cross. Let anger and rudeness cease! Tell God of your concerns. Ask God to lead the politician you oppose with God's truth. Your prayers will make a difference! They will be powerful, because you have moved into God's heavenly realm of almighty power.

There was a time when our nation and our nation's leaders were so divided that we actually divided. But there was a man who was president who had a higher vision. He knew only God could solve the nation's problems. Three times he proclaimed a day of fasting and prayer. Listen to his words to governmental leaders, the military, and ordinary citizens from The Third Proclamation, August 1864:

“to confess and to repent of their manifold sins; to implore the compassion and forgiveness of the Almighty ... to implore Him, as the Supreme Ruler of the World, not to destroy us as a people, nor suffer us to be destroyed by the hostility or connivance of other nations or by obstinate adherence to our own counsels, which may be in conflict with His eternal purposes, and to implore Him to enlighten the mind of the nation to know and do His will, humbly believing that it is in accordance with His will that our place should be maintained as a united people among the family of nations;”

God is so willing to answer your prayers. Prayer without anger comes from the realm of heaven. It gives victory to nations—and it changes you! Take heed! AMEN

This resolution was presented by Senator James Harlan of Iowa

A Proclamation by the President of the United States, March 30, 1863

And whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.

And, insomuch as we know that, by His divine law, nations like individuals are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war, which now desolates the land, may be but a punishment, inflicted upon us, for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole People? We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!

It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.

Now, therefore, in compliance with the request, and fully concurring in the views of the Senate, I do, by this my proclamation, designate and set apart Thursday, the 30th day of April, 1863, as a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer. And I do hereby request all the People to abstain, on that day, from their ordinary secular pursuits, and to unite, at their several places of public worship and their respective homes, in keeping the day holy to the Lord, and devoted to the humble discharge of the religious duties proper to that solemn occasion.

All this being done, in sincerity and truth, let us then rest humbly in the hope authorized by the Divine teachings, that the united cry of the Nation will be heard on high, and answered with blessings, no less than the pardon of our national sins, and the restoration of our now divided and suffering Country, to its former happy condition of unity and peace. In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this 30th day of March, A. D. 1863, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-seventh.

*By the President: Abraham Lincoln
William H. Seward, Secretary of State.*