MAIN IDEA
Prayer is the foundation for individuals and churches that successfully serve God.

I. PRAYER IS HARD WORK (VS 1-2)
   IT TAKES HUMILITY AND COURAGE TO PRAY EFFECTIVELY.
   A. PRAYING FOR GOD TO HELP ALL PEOPLE (1)
   B. PRAYING TO ALL PEOPLE IN AUTHORITY (2a)
   C. PRAYING FOR PEACE (2b)

II. PRAYING FOR GOD’S WILL (VS 3-6)
   RATHER THAN ASKING GOD TO DO OUR WILL; POWERFUL PRAYER IS SUBMITTING OUR WILLS SO THAT THEY CONFORM TO HIS WILL.
   A. KNOWING GOD’S WILL (3-4)
   B. KNOWING GOD (5)
   C. KNOWING GOD’S LOVE (6)

III. PRAYING TO ACCOMPLISH GOD’S WILL (VS 7)
   OUR PURPOSE IN LIFE IS TO LOVE, PRAISE, WORSHIP, AND SERVE GOD.
   A. CHOSEN BY GOD
   B. GIFTED BY GOD
   C. LIVING FOR GOD
Prayer; the First Order Of Business
1 Timothy 2:1-7

Let me just catch you up to where we are this morning. The Apostle Paul spent a great deal of time in Ephesus. He visited the city at least twice and we know he spent at least three years with this church. Paul has a lot invested in this church. However, the church seems to be losing its grip and quickly descending into becoming extinct as far as being a Christian Church. A lot of false doctrine and theology has gotten a foothold in the church, people were being led astray by false teachers, and immoral behavior was becoming commonplace. Adding to all of this, a large portion of the congregation has become apathetic and as a whole, the church has lost its passion and love for Jesus. Paul is worried and so he sends one of his best troubleshooters, Timothy, to try and get the church back on track. He has personally discipled and trained Timothy. Timothy’s main task is to bring back order to this dysfunctional church.

The point I am about to make is very important for any church. This is the main idea of this morning’s text. PRAYER IS THE FOUNDATION FOR INDIVIDUALS AND CHURCHES THAT SUCCESSFULLY SERVE GOD. That is something that is characteristic of most of our modern day churches. We have lost a sense of dedication to prayer. One pastor commented that when they had a family night with food and entertainment, nearly the entire church would turn out. When he called for a prayer night, almost no one would come. I really don’t understand why that is. Have we become so sophisticated in the United States that we trust more in our intellect, competence, and techniques than we do in the power of prayer?

Let me give you an example. A temporary Sunday school teacher was struggling to open a combination lock on the supply cabinet. She had been told the combination, but couldn’t quite remember it.

She went to the pastor and asked if he could come and help. The pastor immediately turned to the first two numbers on the lock, and then his face went blank. Finally, he looked serenely heavenward, and moved his lips silently.

He then looked back at the lock, quickly turned to the final number, and opened the lock. The teacher was amazed. She said, “I’m in awe of your faith pastor.”

“It’s really nothing,” said the pastor, “The combination is written on a piece of paper taped to the ceiling.”

I think that it has become far too common that churches and individuals have come to rely on the latest techniques and formulas to solve our church problems and problems in our individual lives. If prayer is not foundational in our individual lives and in the life of the church, both are destined to fail. Paul reminds Timothy that prayer has to be foundational.

I. PRAYER IS HARD WORK (VS 1-2)

In verses 1-2, Paul reminds us that Prayer is hard work. IT TAKES HUMILITY AND COURAGE TO PRAY EFFECTIVELY. It takes humility to submit to God’s Word and God’s will. It takes a great deal of courage to pray the Lord’s Prayer phrase, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”
means we are praying for God to work His will through our lives. I hope that we all take the words we pray to God seriously. Did you ever pause and pray with purpose the line in the Lord’s Prayer that says, “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us?” How seriously do we take Jesus’ words to pray for our enemies? How seriously do we pray for Jesus to show us places in life where we can lay down our lives, pick up our crosses, and follow Him? How often do we pray like Jesus in the Garden when He says, “Let this cup pass from Me; but let Your will be done in my life Father, not mine.”? Do we pray mindlessly or do we take the words we pray to God seriously. I have to tell you, there are many times I become unsettled as I pray to God things I know are His will. One of the daily prayers I struggle with is this, “Lord, I will not seek after health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, or a long life rather than a short one.” I pray that prayer daily but I really have to struggle through each phrase and tell God I have a great deal of ambivalence as I pray it, but I do mean it.

Let’s see what kinds of things we are instructed to pray for and let’s take seriously the words that we pray. In verse 1 we are commanded to pray for God to help all people. There is a theme here that permeates the entire passage. That theme is the universality of the Gospel. Listen to the theme of ALL in this section. We are to pray for ALL people, for ALL in authority. We are to live in ALL godliness and holiness. God wants ALL to be saved. Jesus died for ALL.

Paul again uses that intimate word to urge. He urges Timothy to make sure he and the congregation pray. Look at the second phrase in verse 1, “first of all.” There is that word all again. The word for first is protos. It means first in the sense of importance. So hear what Paul is saying. Considering ALL things, prayer is the first, the most fundamental, the most important activity. The rest of chapters two and three will lay out an atmosphere in which the Gospel gains credibility and power. He will deal with appropriate behavior, leadership, good theology, good behavior, and the commitment of the congregation. But right here, the first step is prayer.

Paul uses four different words for prayer. The first is petitions. This is the kind of prayer in which we offer up our desires and requests. We should offer up all of our desires to God but we should never forget to ask for the things we are commanded to ask for; that we become transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we become the men and women He created us to be, to forgive us our sins, to forgive the sins of those who have sinned against us, to use us to accomplish His will in this world, to accomplish the good works He has prepared for us, etc.

The next word Paul uses for prayer refers to general prayers. These are the kind of prayers we offer up in worship to God. These prayers contain our expressions of love for God. They are relational prayers. They are prayers in general.

The next word he uses for prayer is intercession. We are to pray on behalf of others. That seems easy when we pray for our family and friends; but that also includes praying for our enemies as well.

The last type he lists here is thanksgiving. Thanksgiving acknowledges that all we have and all that we are comes as a direct gift from a gracious and loving God. Thanksgiving reminds us that we do not deserve anything nor are we entitled to anything. All is gift and so we should live in thanksgiving to God; no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in.
Let me just summarize the attitude of this kind of prayer as Paul lays it out in his letter to the Philippian Church:

4 Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! 5 Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. 6 Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4-7 / New Living Translation

Look at the last phrase as we ask who we are to pray for. We are to pray for ALL human beings; our family, friends, neighbors, missionaries, pastors, church friends, and people all over the world. We are to pray for people we like, people we don’t like, people who have harmed us, and people we don’t even know or care about. That’s quite a list.

If you think that’s a task look at the first half of verse 2 where Paul says, pray for kings and ALL in authority. Let me just disclose this to you. I have no idea how to interact with government. I don’t know when we should be demonstrating, rebelling, or even how to take action for social justice or things like that. I think this passage is good for me and perhaps a great example for you since I probably have one of the most negative views of human government and am extremely distrustful of all governments. I hope you catch the flavor of my negative view and distrust because now God, through the Apostle Paul tells me to pray for all kings, dictators, presidents, senators, congressmen and women, mayors, aldermen, etc. Let me up the ante a little bit with a couple of other quotes.

Jesus said, “…give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar …”

Luke 20:25 / New Living Translation

The Apostle Paul said this,

1 Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. 2 So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished. 3 For the authorities do not strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong. Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you. 4 The authorities are God’s servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you. They are God’s servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong. 5 So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience. 6 Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For government workers need to be paid. They are serving God in what they do. 7 Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and government fees to those who collect them, and give respect and honor to those who are in authority.

Romans 13:1-7 / New Living Translation

The Apostle Peter said this,
1 Peter 2:13-14 / New Living Translation

Believe me when I say that every fiber of my being screams out against that. However, the texts are clear. We are to obey the government, pay our taxes, and obey the law. The Bible takes a step further. We are to respect the authorities over us. Not only do we have to obey them, we have to respect them and pray for them! Let me quickly add this. There is no confusion about the meaning of the words. Jesus, Paul, and Peter make it clear. I want to say, “But wait, our politicians are evil and crooked. Their goals are to make more money and to amass more power. They have no concern about the welfare of the people nor do they care about the will of the people. They are downright bad.”

That may be true or it may be my own paranoia speaking but the Bible is clear. During much of the New Testament writing, Nero was the emperor of Rome. He was a brutal emperor. He persecuted, tortured, and executed Christians. He was responsible for the death of the Apostles Paul and Peter. The Apostles lived under the most repressive universal and local governments; and they have told us to respect authority. As far as I can tell there are no government officials preventing us from preaching the Gospel, feeding the poor, clothing the naked, visiting and welcoming strangers and the less fortunate.

Paul commands us here in verse 2 to pray for all in authority. Now that I have read this and studied this, there needs to be a great change in my attitude and my prayer life. If I am going to follow Christ, then I need to respectfully think about and pray for all government officials. I have to confess to you, that’s hard for me to swallow but it’s God’s truth and I need to obey. I don’t know what that will look like in your life, I don’t know what it will fully look like in my life, but I’m going to step out in faith and start praying.

The second half of verse 2 reminds us to pray for peace. We pray for the leaders of the world because in this world peace comes by their decisions. We can see the world deteriorating quickly and we can see that it won’t be long before Christians and Jews become all out targets for persecutions. It doesn’t seem to be too far away that serious tribulations will come our way. Instead of fretting about all of this, we need to use this time of peace and tranquility to live lives of holiness and godliness in order to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ by word and deed. If indeed the time is near for us to be arrested, humiliated, persecuted, and killed, then use this precious time to spread the love of Jesus to all we can reach. Prayer the way the Bible defines prayer is not for the faint of heart. IT TAKES HUMILITY AND COURAGE TO PRAY EFFECTIVELY.

II. PRAYING FOR GOD’S WILL (VS 3-6)

In verses 3-6 we are instructed in praying God’s will. RATHER THAN ASKING GOD TO DO OUR WILL; POWERFUL PRAYER IS SUBMITTING OUR WILLS SO THAT THEY CONFORM TO HIS WILL. If we look to Jesus as an example, He made perfectly clear to God the Father that He would like to avoid going through the suffering and death if possible. However, He was more interested in
doing the Father’s will than having His own way. Jesus used prayer as a way to conform His will to the Father’s. Prayer is one of the ways in which we allow God to change our minds.

In order to pray for God’s will, verses 3-4 inform us that it’s important to know God’s will. The word Paul used for good is a rich word that not only means good but beautiful as well. In other words, when we submit to the authorities above us and pray for them; this pleases God because it is a beautiful act of obedience on our part.

Secondly it is God’s will that, here’s that word again, ALL people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Jesus prayed from the cross, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Jesus prayed forgiveness for all people. However, we all have a choice whether or not to receive Christ’s forgiveness and receive eternal life.

It is God’s will that all people be saved. There are two ancient errors that center on this concept and they are still with us today. One argument says that if it’s God’s will that everyone will be saved, then everyone will be saved. We call this false doctrine Universalism. This error says that everyone, regardless of what we think, say, or do will be saved; whether we reject Christ or not. The Bible is equally as clear as God’s desire that no one perish that there is a real place or state called hell where people who reject the forgiveness and salvation of Jesus Christ will spend eternity.

The second error is called Pluralism. This error states that there are many ways to God and that all ways are equal and legitimate. There is only one way to God and that is through Jesus Christ.

Look at the last line in verse 4. God’s will is that we come to knowledge of the truth. Jesus said,

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

John 14:6/ New Living Translation

We live in a society in which we have all agreed to live together allowing everyone the freedom to believe what they believe. Therefore we need to be polite as we present to truth to all people. The truth is that there is only one way to be saved. Referring to Jesus, the Apostle Peter said this, “

12 There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12 / New Living Translation

In our spiritual formation groups, we have spent a great deal of time trying to replace all our wrong thinking with thinking that is consistent with our Lord Jesus Christ. Pursing truth is difficult and often hard to look at. Again it takes a great deal of courage and humility to submit to the truth of Scripture.

Ultimately our goal is not to just pursue truth for truth’s sake or simply to gain more knowledge about God. Our goal as described in verse 5 is to know God. We forget that God is a being that has thoughts, emotions, and feelings. It does us a great deal of good to spend time with Jesus in the Gospels because He is God in the flesh. When we see Jesus, we see God the Father. Again, the Apostle Paul wants to leave no doubt that there is only one God. Keep in mind that Christianity
has been launched into a world that worshiped many gods. We have already said that Ephesus was the center for the worship of the goddess Diana and her temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. I want you to catch a real flavor for this. If you ever go to the Vatican in Rome, you will see all sorts of shops and vendors that are in close proximity. They sell all sorts of religious souvenirs, trinkets, and artifacts. Many claim that the crosses and medallions were blessed personally by the Pope. This is a huge business. These shops and vendors make a great deal of money.

In Paul’s day, one of the major things that drove the powerhouse economy of Ephesus was all the articles and medallions of the goddess Diana. You can see how unpopular the Christians would be if they claimed that there was only one God and Diana was not Him.

In our culture, people make a great deal of money off of religions, cults, and spirituality. There is a huge market to buy all sorts of spiritual relics and paraphernalia. People make a great deal of money off superstitious people. It is considered bad form to say that another person’s religion is false. The problem is that bad form or not, the truth is there is only one God. He is the God of the Hebrew Christian Scriptures. There is no other. People can go around praying to and serving other gods; but it does no good. Christians are lucky because we have gotten a great look at the one true and living God in the person of Jesus.

Paul says there is only one mediator between God and human beings. There is one God and we as human beings have alienated ourselves from the holy God. In order to fix the problem, God decided to come to earth in human form to take care of our sin problem through His suffering and death. When Jesus came to earth, He was fully God and fully man. He is totally familiar with the way God thinks, feels, and acts because He is God. He understands all our fears, hurts, discouragement, loneliness, and trials because He became fully human as He was born into this world as a baby boy. Jesus perfectly understands God and human being because He is fully both. He is the one and only perfect go between for God and human being.

Please never forget this because our goal is to know God and we do that by knowing Jesus. We become fully human as we imitate Jesus’ life.

Why is knowing God so important? Because as pointed out in verse 6, by knowing God we come to know God’s love. I can’t begin to tell you how important it is for us to actually feel God’s love. Too many Christians are living defeated lives because they have come to believe in an angry God Who is waiting in heaven until we make one wrong move so He can come down and crush us. If that’s your view of God, then it will be impossible for you to ever experience the peace, joy, and contentment God has for us.

The Bible portrays God, and Jesus portrays God as someone filled with incredible passion, joy, and love. How much does God love us? How passionately does God love us? How intimately does God love us? He gave us His One and Only Son Jesus to come and die for us. Each one of us was born into this world guilty, condemned, and with a nature that has a bent towards evil. Add to that, we have all willfully sinned, hurt others, hurt God and rebelled against God. We all deserve to spend an eternity in hell, separated from God and His love forever. On our own, we are helpless to fix this problem. But because of God’s incredible, personal, passionate, and intimate love, Jesus took our place on the cross. Take some time to picture this in your mind. Jesus is suffering on the
cross, about to die, and looks out at the crowd. He says, “Forgive them Father.” He looks at you
and your eyes meet. He says, “I’m doing this for your freedom and salvation.”

How will you respond? Having a right view of God and His love are necessary in order to live a
joyful Christian life. Jesus summed up His love like this:

16 For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes
in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the
world, but to save the world through him.

John 3:16-17 / New Living Translation

Does that make a difference in your life to know that God is a joyful God? God is a God Who loves
us and died for us. He is not angry and waiting for us to screw up. He is joyful and waiting for
opportunities to rejoice with us. It would be tragic to look at Jesus hanging on the cross, His eyes
meeting yours, Him saying, “I’m doing this for you,” and your response being, “I want to be
unhappy and miserable.” God’s will is that we and all people in the world come to know Him, love
Him, receive Christ’s forgiveness, and enter an incredibly joyful, passionate, and intimate
relationship with Him. That’s God’s will. RATHER THAN ASKING GOD TO DO OUR WILL;
POWERFUL PRAYER IS SUBMITTING OUR WILLS SO THAT THEY CONFORM TO HIS WILL.

III. PRAYING TO ACCOMPLISH GOD’S WILL (VS 7)

Once we know God’s will, He has given us the privilege of being a part of accomplishing His will for
this lost and hurting world. In verse 7, Paul encourages us to pray to accomplish God’s will. OUR
PURPOSE IN LIFE IS TO LOVE, PRAISE, WORSHIP, AND SERVE GOD. I don’t know about you, but
that sounds pretty exciting to me.

We are chosen by God. Listen carefully to Jesus’ words to His disciples:

16 You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the
Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.

John 15:16 / New Living Translation

Jesus chose the Disciples to be the leaders in the future church. Jesus chose Paul. Jesus chose you
and me to carry on the work of His church. In his letter to the Ephesian Church Paul said this:

10 For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good
things he planned for us long ago.

Ephesians 2:10 / New Living Translation

We have been chosen to complete all sorts of good works; works that bring glory to His Name and
people to salvation. That’s our purpose in life. We were saved to serve.

God doesn’t ask us to go out and serve Him on our own power. We are gifted by God. We have all
received natural talents and abilities to go along with our life experiences. But when we received
Christ and the Holy Spirit took up residence in us, the Holy Spirit gifted us. Paul received the gift
of apostle. In other words, he was gifted to be a leader and to bring the Gospel to the Gentile world. There are all sorts of spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament. However, if we focus on being humble, courageous, and loving, and as we focus on our purpose in life to love, praise, worship, and serve God, these gifts will appear on their own. Remember the Holy Spirit enables us to carry out the will of God.

The main focus is to faithfully live for God. Paul was careful to make sure his message and his life conformed to the truth of God. What we believe and what we share should be consistent with the Bible. And everything we think, say, and do, ought to be consistent with the way Jesus lived life. When people encounter us, they should leave that encounter with a sense of Who God is and what God is about. That is quite a job. It’s quite a calling. OUR PURPOSE IN LIFE IS TO LOVE, PRAISE, WORSHIP, AND SERVE GOD.

There will come a time in our lives when we will not be able to serve God by giving money, volunteering, or even being able to make it to church because we are sick or disabled. I feel so bad when I hear people say they feel as if they can’t do anything for the church. I always tell them not to feel that way. The right thinking, the Bible thinking, God’s thinking is this. Prayer is the fuel that runs the church. I want to say right here and now that I am thankful for all of you who pray for me. I haven’t stayed out of trouble, not done anything immoral, or not fallen into heresy because I am good, smart, or holy. Your prayers have lifted me up and kept me on the right path. If I continue to faithfully lead and if Devon Church continues to grow, it will be because of the prayers of faithful saints. This is the message of God. PRAYER IS THE FOUNDATION FOR INDIVIDUALS AND CHURCHES THAT SUCCESSFULLY SERVE GOD.