

## WHO DO YOU PRAY FOR?

**Today's Text: 1 Tim. 2: 1-15**

### **Extracts:**

***Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the 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, to be testified in due time, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle- I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying- a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth [1 Tim. 2: 1-7]***

*There is the story of a young pastor who took time off his busy church trip to East Africa to participate in a safari where you hunt with your camera for vivid pictures of wild animals. He got so engrossed that he did not know when the tour bus left him behind. Suddenly, he saw a huge lion heading in his direction. He threw away his camera and ran for dear life. However, no matter how fast he ran, the lion was gaining on him. As he fell down exhausted, he prayed, saying, "Lord Jesus, make this lion born again!" He closed his eyes and waited for a vicious attack from the deadly carnivore. But, to his surprise, the lion came and knelt quietly beside him. He heard the lion praying, "Lord, I thank you for making me born again. Before now, I pursued my prey. Now, they wait for me!" As the pastor sprang up to run for his dear life, he suddenly woke up. He had been dreaming!*

*The lesson we learn from that story is to be careful who/what we pray for. Was the pastor praying for himself or for the animal? Praying is important to the believer because it is our mode of communicating with God. Just as in human communication, some of us pray much better than the rest of us. Even so, most of us tend to be quite selfish about it- we tend to pray only for ourselves and those close to us. But is that all? Who do you pray for? In today's Bible verses, taken from the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to Timothy, the young pastor of the big church at Ephesus that he had mentored, Paul has given him a list of people he should pray for and why he should do so. There is so much that we can learn from that message that can guide our own prayer list. Today's study is thus quite instructive.*

## 1. Background: Of prayers and “pray-ers”

On one occasion in a certain place, the disciples watched as Jesus prayed. Afterwards, they asked Him to teach them how to pray as John the Baptist had taught his disciples. Jesus replied, “When you pray, say: ...” [Lk 11: 1-4]. The prayer He taught them is the now famous “The Lord’s Prayer” which is used in every Christian denomination.

For our purpose, the following parts of that prayer should be noted [vv. 3-4]:

*Give us day by day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins. For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one [NKJV].*

Who is part of the “us” that the Lord has asked us to pray for? We know that the singular of “us” is “me.” The average “pray-er” (the person praying) is quite selfish because everything is about “I-Me-Mine.” My needs and fancies. My family and close relatives. My friends and well-wishers. Sometimes, we add something negative for our enemies! But is that all the list of people that we should pray for? When Solomon newly became king of Israel in succession to his father David, God appeared to him in a dream and said, “Ask! What shall I give you?” Solomon asked for an understanding heart to rule with justice over his people. God was pleased and said to Solomon, “Because you ... have not asked for long life [nor] riches for *yourself* [nor] the life of *your enemies* ... behold ... I have given you a wise and understanding heart” so as to rule well over his people [1 Kgs 3: 1-13]. Solomon prayed for his people and his kingdom, not for himself. Most of us would have prayed for our own selfish interests and make God less pleased with our prayer effort. So, who do you pray for? Who should your pray for?

Paul’s letter to Timothy will help us to answer those questions and more. He enjoined him “to pray for all men” [1 Tim. 2: 1]. The key points to note are as follows:

### a) *Pray for all men*

Paul wrote, “Therefore I exhort first of all that *supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks* be made *for all men*” [v. 1]. Writing to the Philippian church, Paul also said, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything *by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made to God” [Phil. 4: 6]. So, we learn here that prayers, that is, our requests to God, can take different forms. For example, when Abraham pleaded with God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah from total destruction, he was actually interceding for his nephew, Lot, and his family that lived there at the time [Gen. 18: 23-33]. When Herod locked up Peter with the intention of killing him after the Passover, the disciples

gathered in the home of Mary the mother of John Mark “where many were gathered together praying” on his behalf [Acts 12: 1-12]. Sometimes, giving of thanks may be the best way to make our requests known to God. For example, Paul and Silas were chained and put in maximum security prison in Philippi. At midnight, they “were praying and singing hymns to God” which the other prisoners heard. Suddenly, the place quaked and their chains fell loose [Acts 16: 16-26]. Jehoshaphat went to war against several nations (that had surrounded his kingdom) with praise singers in front of his troops, singing, “Praise the LORD, for His mercies endure forever.” Without shooting a single weapon, all his enemies were completely destroyed [2 Chron. 20: 21-30].

*Therefore, there is no formula for praying to God for all men. The circumstances you face will suggest to you the best way to communicate with your Father and your God. It does not even have to be formal for we are told, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” [1 Thess. 5: 16-18].* The Psalmist adds, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer” [Ps. 19: 14].

b) *Pray for kings and those in authority*

Paul made it more specific, enjoining Timothy to pray “for *kings and all who are in authority*, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” [1 Tim. 2: 2]. Kings are heads of state (as in a monarchy like the United Kingdom) or traditional rulers (as *Obas*, Emirs and *Obis* in Nigeria). They are not elected and they remain on the throne for as long as they live or if/when they are deposed, which can be quite rare. In most cases, the position is hereditary, passing from father to son. For example, King David of Israel reigned for forty years. When he died, his son, Solomon, was crowned king in his place [1 Kgs 2: 10-12]. Those in authority can be elected political leaders (such as presidents or prime ministers), parents or guardians, teachers or church leaders, that is, those placed in a position to give us instructions or guidance.

The word of God says, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes” [Prov. 21: 1]. For example, of Cyrus the king of Persia, God said, “I have named you, though you have not known Me” [Is. 45: 4]. But when the time came (at the end of the Babylonian exile) for the children of Israel to return home, God stirred up the king’s spirit to make a proclamation in writing, saying, “[The LORD] has commanded me to build Him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up” [2 Chron. 36: 22-23].

***Therefore, when we pray for kings and those in authority over us, we are actually praying for ourselves.*** We can see in part and prophesy in part [1 Cor. 13: 9] but God sees the end from the beginning. ***When we pray for those placed in authority over us, He can turn their evil plans against us for our good. He can use them to perform His purpose for our lives.***

Praying for all men, kings and those in authority over us, according to Paul, is “good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour ***who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth***” [1 Tim. 2: 3-4]. Therefore, your prayers are part of Christ’s salvation ministry.

## **2. So, praying for others makes you part of Christ’s salvation ministry!**

This is a wake-up call for us. When you pray, according to Jesus, you are to say, “Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name; ***Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven***” and so on [Lk 11: 2-4; KJV]. Your prayers are part of Christ’s salvation ministry! In His great commission, on the day of His Ascension, Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples of all nations, to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, and to teach them to observe all things as He had commanded them. He would be with them always, even to the end of the age [Matt. 28: 19-20]. ***Now, we know that praying for others is one powerful tool at our disposal to achieve the purpose of the Lord for our salvation.*** So, among all men, kings and those in authority, who should you pray for? Here are some critical examples:

### *a) Pray for those who do not as yet know Christ*

In an increasingly globalized world, you may find yourself in a work environment with colleagues from varied cultures in terms of race, religion and world view. Your head of state may have his ambitions to promote his/her cultural values or faith. Your boss may (even if subtly) want to surround himself/herself only with those who share his/her ambitions for corrupt enrichment. In such cases, your prayer focus has been cut out for you! You may not have the human means- power, authority- to fight back, but you can pray!

Take, for example, Daniel’s experience, when his colleagues conspired to get him removed as one of the three governors under King Darius. They got the king to sign a decree (an irrevocable instrument) that whoever prayed to another god other than the king should be thrown into the lion’s den. When Daniel knew of it, he went up to the upper room of his house, opened the window toward the direction of Jerusalem and “prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.” Daniel was arrested and thrown into the lions’ den. The king was unhappy. All that night, he “spent the night fasting ... [and] his sleep went from him.” Was that not Daniel’s prayer at work on him? Darius was the first to come

to the den in the morning! He called out to Daniel, saying, “Daniel, *servant of the living God*, has your God whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” To cut the story short, the king got Daniel out of the den where God had shut overnight the mouths of the lions, and threw the conspirators into the pit where they were voraciously eaten up by the hungry lions. In addition, the king published a decree to permit the worship of Daniel’s God throughout his kingdom. Also, “Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius [and] of Cyrus the Persian [**Dan. 6: 1-28**] that God later used to set the children of Israel in exile free [**2 Chron. 36: 22-23**]. Is it not possible that Daniel’s prayer was what God answered?

So, pray for others, especially those in authority over you because God may be using you to bring them to Christ. Who knows? You may be the only epistle of Christ “known and read by all men” [**2 Cor. 3: 1-3**] around you.

*b) Pray for the persecutors of Christ’s followers*

Persecutors of Christ’s followers can come in different forms. For example, you may be working in a country or of part of it where they practise *Sharia* law, or where Islamic terrorists have seized territory, and you do not need anyone to tell you that you are unwelcome there as a follower of Christ. You may be in charge of signing wedding certificates in a place where they have recently legalised same-sex marriages. In such circumstances, you have to pray for the persecutors of Christ’s followers. Jesus underlined this point at the Sermon on the Mount when He taught His listeners, “pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” [**Matt. 5: 44-45**].

Take the reaction of the disciples after the Sanhedrin, the council of Jewish leaders, had arrested Peter and John for preaching the risen Christ. Before setting them free, they threatened them and commanded them “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” When they rejoined the rest of the disciples and told the story, they raised their voices in one accord and prayed for boldness to face such persecutors. We are told, “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” [**Acts 4: 1-31**]. You can be sure the word spread to their persecutors and they had to leave them alone! That is what God can also do for you.

*c) Pray for Christ’s will to be done in your family and congregation*

The word of God states that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” [2 Tim. 3: 12]. Areas where Satan is doing overtime today include Christian families and congregations. There are increasing reports of broken marriages, barrenness and more emphasis on prosperity sermons than repentance and salvation. Many churches are in court over leadership tussles or fraudulent practices. Therefore, Christ is calling on His fervent followers to pray for their families and congregations.

Our adversary the devil is walking around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Therefore, you must resist him, “steadfast in faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” [1 Pet. 5: 8-9].

Indeed, there are many others we should pray for but “we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the [Holy] Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” [Rom. 8: 26]. *Yes, we can pray for our daily bread and other necessities as we make our tortuous journey on earth towards eternity. Nevertheless, since the whole purpose of our existence is to fear God and do His will [Eccl. 12: 13], salvation for us and for those that we are led in Spirit to pray for should be an overriding consideration on each of our remaining days on earth. Within that framework, we are actually praying for ourselves when we pray for all men (and women), especially, kings and all who are in authority. That is Paul’s message for us in today’s study.*

### 3. Conclusion: Learn from how Christ prayed for His disciples!

Just before His Passion, Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven and prayed [Jn 17: 1-26]. Look at those He prayed for. He prayed **for Himself**, to thank His Father for the authority He had given Him over all flesh [vv. 1-5]. Then He prayed **for all His disciples** “that they may be one as We are” [vv. 6-19]. Finally, He prayed **for all believers**, that is, “those who will believe in Me through (His then disciples’) word” [vv. 20-26]. He prayed for us who would come to know and accept Him over two thousand years later! He prayed for believers yet unborn. He covered the field, so to speak!

*Now you know who to pray for. Focus more on others because before you ask for your personal needs, God has already answered [Is. 65: 24]. May God continue to answer your prayers IJN.*