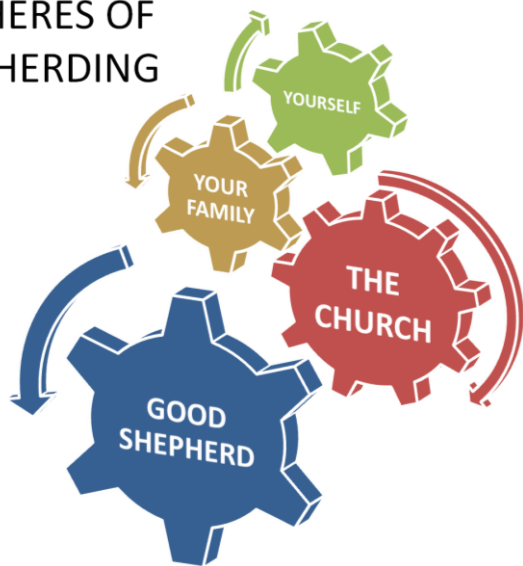




1 Timothy 2:1-8

As we start moving our way through the second chapter of 1 Timothy, let me remind you of the theme of both 1 and 2 Timothy—Letters to a Shepherd. If you recall, there are three phases of

3 SPHERES OF SHEPHERDING



shepherding—shepherding yourself, shepherding your family and shepherding the church. Of course, Jesus the Good Shepherd is the driving force behind all of these.

In chapter two, the type of shepherding that comes into focus is prayer. But not just prayer in a general sense, but prayer for the lost—praying for God’s harvest field which he has prepared for us.

*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for **all** people, 2 for kings and **all** who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in*

*every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires **all** people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for **all**, which is the testimony given at the proper time. 7 For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.*

8 I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

There are four key principles here but first I want you to notice the importance of this subject. Paul begins this chapter and this subject, writing, “first of all.” The subject of praying for the harvest was not only the first thing he wanted to talk about but it was also first in terms of importance. The phrase literally means of first importance. Most Christians are not good at evangelism and sharing our faith and a primary reason for this is due to the fact that we do not pray for the lost.

The great British preacher Charles Spurgeon has a good word to start us off.

One thing more, the soul-winner must be a master of the art of prayer. You cannot bring souls to God if you go not to God yourself. You must get your battle-axe, and your weapons of war, from the armoury of sacred communion with Christ. If you are much alone with Jesus, you will catch His Spirit; you will be fired with the flame that burned in His breast, and consumed His life. You will weep with the tears that fell upon Jerusalem when He saw it perishing; and if you cannot speak so eloquently as He did, yet shall there be about what you say somewhat of the same power which in Him thrilled the hearts and awoke the consciences of men.¹

I particularly like that phrase, “If you are much alone with Jesus, you will catch his Spirit.” You will likely not witness to the lost unless you first pray for the lost and you will not likely pray for the lost until you get Christ’s heart for the lost and you will not get Christ’s heart for the lost unless you are “much alone with Jesus.” Paul doesn’t explicitly say this but it is certainly true throughout Scripture. Now onto our principles.

1. Pray without prejudice—vv. 1-2

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions

The immediate and obvious application of this principle is to pray for people like President Obama, Nancy Pelosi and Scott Walker. These three and others, represent our “kings and all who are in high positions.” They also are a good application of this principle because they hold positions that are contradictory to much of the Bible’s teaching. They make us angry and upset and we are therefore much less likely to pray for them. Most of our political leaders support things like abortion and gay marriage so we spend the vast majority of our time fighting these men and women but rarely if ever praying for them.

The Washington Post reported that while still an Illinois senator, *Obama twice voted present (no) on Partial Birth Abortion Ban Acts. He also voted present twice against Parental Notification of Abortion Acts, twice against laws to protect live-born children of abortions, and he even voted against a bill defining “born-alive infant” to include infants “born alive at any stage of development.”*²

This is evil in every sense of the word but let us remember for who Paul was urging prayer—Emperor Nero. Under Nero, Romans had laws regulating infanticide—not outlawing it, but regulating it. All deformed males and unwanted females were thrown into a ravine or left to die

in the elements. It was common practice to kill young babies as a sign of grief. For example, when the emperor Caligula died, many parents killed their children as a way of demonstrating their grief.³ This was all true yet Paul urged fellow believers to pray for him and other leaders.

“Yes, however...” some of you will complain, “Obama defended gay marriage in his second inaugural address.” I agree that this was something that was unprecedented and unthinkable for even the most liberal presidents. Less than two weeks ago he said, “Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law. For if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well.”⁴ So how can we genuinely pray for a man like this?

Let’s go back to Paul’s prayer for Nero. Not only did Nero regularly practice homosexuality but he also celebrated gay marriage. Nero married two men in extravagant public ceremonies, once playing the groom and once as the bride.⁵ And still, Paul—as of first importance, said to pray for him.

But Nero went much further and deeper in his depravity than what we have ever seen in America politicians. The Roman historian Seutonius recorded the following terrors, specifically, the persecution of Christians.

The tyrant scrupled not to charge them with the act of burning Rome; and he satiated his fury against them by such outrages as are unexampled in history. They were covered with the skins of wild beasts, and torn by dogs; were crucified, and set on fire, that they might serve for lights in the night-time. Nero offered his gardens for this spectacle, and exhibited the games of the Circus by this dreadful illumination. Sometimes they were covered with wax and other combustible materials, after which a sharp stake was put under their chin, to make them stand upright, and they were burnt alive, to give light to the spectators.⁶

Lest you think that Seutonius was in any way partial to Christians, listen to how he described believers. “Punishment by Nero was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.” But Nero was worse still. He executed his own mother, exiled his first wife and later brought her back to Rome so that he could execute her. He killed his second wife, while she was pregnant by kicking her to death. Again, Suetonius recorded that Nero “showed neither discrimination nor moderation in putting to death whomsoever he pleased.”⁷ Nevertheless, Paul pressed upon the church in Ephesus and Timothy their pastor to be in continual prayer for Nero and others of high position.

But still some might complain, “Look, it won’t do any good. The hearts of these people are calloused and corrupt and beyond saving.” But don’t you think the exact same thing would have been said of King Nebuchadnezzar? Yet we know how God mightily humbled him for seven long years and afterward he wrote one of the strongest statements on God’s sovereignty in all the Bible.

Don’t you think the same thing was said of the apostle Paul, who before his conversion, was a Jewish Jihadist and passionate persecutor of Christians who dragged them to prison and gave his approval as they were stoned to death by angry mobs? After Paul was radically saved, the believers were still very much afraid of him. And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is

not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" (Acts 9:21) Who could have prayed for such a terrorist as the zealous Paul? Maybe it was Stephen, in his last prayer before he died. "And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." (Acts 7:59)

The false teachers in Ephesus were making the claim that the gospel was not for everyone. Remember that they were Jewish legalists and probably taught that only their brand of Judaism deserved the kingdom of God. They taught that there were whole classes of people who did not deserve the gospel. But we must never be prejudice in our prayers for the lost. The gospel is for all people.

2. Pray for peace and quiet—v. 2

The second principle comes from verse two and it is a result of our praying for the lost—that *we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way*. So the question is, how do our prayers for the lost result in a peaceful and quiet life for us? This passage has one of the most clear and powerful declarations of the heart of God in Scripture. *This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all*. Here's the key question. If the governing authorities of the city of Ephesus convert to Christianity, would that affect the way they run the city? Simply praying for these people would not in and of itself allow you to live a peaceful and quiet life but if your prayers led to conversions, then this would have an effect on the entire city.

Did Paul have enough faith to believe that Emperor Nero and most of the Roman Senate could come to faith in Christ? I really think that he did, especially when you listen to his conversation with King Agrippa. Paul was on trial and headed to Rome but in the meantime he appeared before King Agrippa. He had just shared his own testimony and was passionately proclaiming the gospel to Agrippa, when *Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains* (Acts 26:28-29). You cannot get more bold than that. When it came to praying for those in authority, Paul practiced what he preached.

Another way to pray for those in authority is to pray the way Jeremiah told the Jews to pray for Babylon while they were in captivity for seventy years. *But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare* (Jeremiah 29:7).

3. Pray to please the Lord—v. 3-7

The word "all" is very important in this passage. The believers were to pray for *all* people (1), *all* who were in high positions (2), because God desires *all* to be saved (4) and Christ is the ransom for *all* (6). The conversion of all people is pleasing in the sight of God and therefore, even our prayers for the harvest are pleasing to him. As beautiful as this passage is, it has been filled with contention and controversy. There are at least four ways it has been interpreted by evangelicals.

God desires/wills that ALL men be saved and all WILL be saved. Rob Bell uses verse four to support his view of ultimate reconciliation or “Christian Universalism” which he defended in his book.

A staggering number of people have been taught that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better. It’s been clearly communicated to many that this belief is a central truth of the Christian faith and to reject it is, in essence, to reject Jesus. This is misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus’ message of love, peace, forgiveness, and joy that our world desperately needs to hear.⁸

Here s how Christian Universalists argue this passage.

1. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ paid the price for all of humanity to enjoy eternal life in heaven without any need for repentance.
2. Salvation is unconditional and does not even require faith in Jesus Christ as the payment for mankind’s sin debt.
3. All humanity is destined to life in heaven whether or not they realize it and regardless of religious affiliation.

A faithful witness to Scripture will obviously reject this false teaching but you need to know that it exists. We have had people in our church who have held to Christian Universalism.

The second way that evangelicals have interpreted this is that God desires/wills that ALL men but his will is thwarted and frustrated. By their lack of belief, the unbeliever prevents the will of God from being accomplished. I am not comfortable with this interpretation because it implies that men and women can prevent God’s will from being accomplished.

Interpretation number three is that this verse is referring to God’s will of desire as opposed to his will of decree. God desires that all men be saved, perhaps in a similar way that we desire that all will be saved, but he does not decree that all men be saved. This view makes perfect sense to me but personally, I prefer the last option.

The fourth option is that all does not mean all people as in every last person but all as in all kinds of classes of people. Remember, Paul was appealing to them not to pray in a prejudicial manner, not to leave out any groups of people. It may be that the false teachers were promoting the idea that Greeks and Romans could not be saved. They were excluding whole classes of people. That’s the way prejudice works. If we are prejudiced toward an individual it is because that individual fits into a larger class of people. We don’t like the individual because we don’t like the group. God has guaranteed that all people will be saved because every tribe, people nation and language will appear before the throne of God for all eternity. God desires that all people be saved and he has promised that all people will be saved. Therefore, we need to take the gospel to al people and pray for all people because all people will be saved.

Nevertheless, this passage speaks to God's heart for the lost. He has a desire to ransom people from their sin. This has always been and forever will be his desire. Adam and Eve were cast from paradise but not before he made a blood sacrifice and covered them with skins of an animal. They were sent away from the garden but not before God announced the gospel in advance—that the seed would crush the head of Satan.

Verse four gives that **heart** of God—that all be saved—and verses five and six present the **provision** of God. *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.* You can immediately see the two truths that are offensive to so many people. One, there is only one God and two, there is only one way to this God, through Jesus Christ, the mediator. This is so frustrating and infuriating to the larger world.

Years ago I was in this group discussion with a group of people that included an inter-faith minister. She went into this long explanation of her belief. It lasted for at least ten minutes and she had all kinds of diagrams and descriptions. She got done and I thought to myself, “She could have summed all of that by saying, “All religions lead to the same god.” She would have been just as wrong, of course, but at least she wouldn't have wasted ten minutes of my life! ☺

Muslims don't say that all religions lead to the same god. Jews don't make this claim, neither do Hindus and many Buddhists. The tens of thousands of pagans living in Ephesus would never have said such a thing. They referred to Christians as “unbelievers” because they did not believe in the Greek pantheon of gods. The people who believe this think that Christians are arrogant because we believe that the only way to God is through Jesus Christ. It certainly is a bold and exclusive claim and in one sense I understand why they think they are arrogant, but what they fail to realize is, that saying that all religions lead to the same god is the most arrogant thing anyone could ever claim. You see, for a Christian to say that Jesus is the only way to God, we have to believe what the Bible says about sin, salvation and Jesus, but to make the claim that all religions lead to god, they would have to possess exhaustive knowledge of all religions.

Moreover, they would have to arrive at this conclusion without any revelation from God. You and I have the Word of God as direct revelation from God which tells us about sin and salvation through Christ. But the person who claims that all paths lead to god would draw the conclusion from his or her own reason and experience.

It's not only an extremely arrogant say but it is also very intolerant because in so doing, they are claiming that everyone else is wrong and they are right. They truly believe that they are being inclusive and humble but in reality they could not be more arrogant and intolerant.

There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all. If these two things were not true, then there would be no need to pray for the conversion of anyone. Prayer for the harvest is founded upon the exclusivity of the gospel. If all religions lead to the same god, then why would I need to pray for someone who is not a Christian? If their way is just as valid as mine, then who am I to either tell them what to do or secretly pray for a conversion that they really don't need? Do you see what this means? It

not only means, as Spurgeon said, “the soul-winner must be a master of the art of prayer,” but it also means that prayer is useless unless Christ is the only mediator between God and men.⁹

The final principle comes from verse eight.

4. Pray in every place—v. 8

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling. If I were to paraphrase this verse I would say, “Just do it.” Pray for the harvest. Pray without prejudice. Pray for the lost because it is pleasing to the Lord. Pray for the harvest because in his sovereign and mysterious wisdom, he uses our prayers to accomplish his salvation.

Let me leave you with more words from Charles Spurgeon—an exhortation.

My dear hearers, specially you members of the church, I am always so anxious lest any of you should begin to lie upon your oars, and take things easy in the matters of God's kingdom. There are some of you—I bless you, and I bless God at the remembrance of you,—who are in season, and out of season, in earnest for winning souls, and you are the truly wise; but I fear there are others whose hands are slack, who are satisfied to let me preach, but do not themselves preach; who take these seats, and occupy these pews, and hope the cause goes well, but that is all they do.¹⁰

Rich Maurer
February 3, 2013

¹ Charles Spurgeon, *Soul-Winning Explained*, <http://www.spurgeon.org/misc/sw12.htm>

² http://voices.washingtonpost.com/fact-checker/2008/02/obamas_voting_record_on_aborti_1.html

³ Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*.

⁴ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/21/inaugural-address-president-barack-obama>

⁵ http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/62*.html

⁶ C. Suetonius Tranquillus, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*.

⁷ Suetonius, *The Lives of Twelve Caesars*, Life of Nero 37.

⁸ Rob Bell, *Love Wins*, p. 134.

⁹ More Scriptures about praying for unbelievers

- But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5:44
- Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. Romans 10:1
- And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:3-6
- Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. 2 Thessalonians 3:1
- I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:1-4
- And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:24-26

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- Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.” Acts 26:29

¹⁰ Charles Spurgeon, Soul-Winning Explained, <http://www.spurgeon.org/misc/sw12.htm>