

PRAY FOR OUR LEADERS



Scripture:

Psalm 113

¹Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD; praise the name of the LORD.

²Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time on and forevermore. ³From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised. ⁴The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.

⁵Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, ⁶who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?

⁷He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, ⁸to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!

Before I read this first letter to Timothy, you should know that despite the author being named as Paul, the majority of biblical scholars now believe that it was written later in the first century and by a person who wrote in a different way with different themes than Paul wrote in his authentic letters.

The inclusion in the Biblical canon of the books of 1st and 2nd Timothy was hotly debated when the Bible was first being formed at the end of the first century AD. Marcion was a powerful bishop who put together an early version of the Bible without including 1st and 2nd Timothy. He believed the characteristics of Jesus as a liberator and egalitarian were not consistently shown in these letters. He also rejected the violent depictions of God in the Old Testament as incompatible with the teachings of Jesus. Yet, the writings in the more controversial sections of the Bible can still inspire us to think for ourselves about what we believe about these topics and how we live authentically a life as a Christ follower in this society that we find ourselves in today.

So, let's read 1st Timothy 2:1-7, and listen for God's message to us today.

1st Timothy 2:1-7

¹First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone,

²for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. ³This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God; there is also one mediator between

God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, “who gave himself a ransom for all —this was attested at the right time. 7For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



PRAY FOR OUR LEADERS

Supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings should all be made for everyone, including kings and others in high positions. The author of this letter is basically saying that when we pray, even if we pray for kings and leaders in high positions that we may not agree with, prayer gives us a sense of quiet and peaceful lives while role-modeling godliness and dignity as well.

Easier said than done, right?

An old adage I was often told in my growing up years in Iowa was: “It’s important to not just freely spout out your mouth but to pray for wisdom first before you speak.” I wish I always followed that advice all my life. But it is a good goal to have!

We live in an age of political divisiveness. Doing our best to promote harmony is the call of Christ. So how do we promote harmony and still stand up for what we believe in as Christ followers: to advocate justice for the oppressed, to include the excluded, to insist on good stewardship of our planet, and promote care for the refugees and imprisoned.

This passage does not say to ignore the call of Christ to stand up for all that I just mentioned. It says that we are to pray for our governing leaders in order to “live peaceful lives of Godliness and dignity.”

GROUNDWATER CONTAMINATION

Prayer is the way to not lose hope and to promote wisdom and peacefulness when we are exasperated with the decisions our leaders make. For example, I felt especially exasperated last

week when our administration rolled back regulations to prevent coal ash contaminants from being deposited near ground water sources. Before that action, the first comprehensive, national study of coal ash pollution found widespread groundwater contamination already happening in our country’s groundwater in unsafe levels of toxic pollutants at ninety-one percent of two-hundred-sixty-five sites across the United States, especially in Texas, North Carolina, Wyoming, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Maryland, Utah, Michigan and Kentucky.

To say it another way, in March of this year, ninety-one percent of US coal-fired power plants were already contaminating groundwater with "unsafe levels of one or more of the pollutants in coal ash." Some groundwater in Texas already showed concentrations of pollutants more than one-hundred times above what is considered a safe level.

(<https://earthjustice.org/news/press/2019/first-comprehensive-national-study-of-coal-ash-pollution-finds-widespread-groundwater-contamination>)

Rather than rolling back the regulations further, we need to be tightening up current standards that are not doing enough to protect our ground waters. I grew up with well water, so I know what it is like to be dependent on clean ground water.

THE NEED TO PROTECT OUR CHILDREN

Praying for our leaders to come to their senses about the need to protect our children from contaminated water or from mass shooters with access to assault rifles is an important prayer. Praying for our leaders to stop separating children from their parents at the border and reunite those still separated is an important prayer. Praying for the care of our global environment is another important prayer. Praying for our leaders to have empathy and compassion

for those in the most vulnerable places in our society is important. A study of the effects of climate change around the world shows that the poor are the hardest hit first because they live in the flood zones, the hot zones, the melting zones, and the places where famine is causing starvation, and these people don't have the resources to escape. The wealthy have other means of survival. Yet we are all in one family of God, and the environmental destruction in one spot, like the Amazon, is eventually going to cause damage to us all in this generation and especially in the next.

THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

The idea of sending "thoughts and prayers" has lost favor in our society because it seems like just a platitude rather than a meaningful action. Action is needed to provide a safer country and world for our grandchildren. But so are thoughts and prayers needed, too!

Prayer is not inaction. Prayer is a daily activity for fifty-five percent of Americans according to a Pew Research Center's Forum study.

<https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/frequency-of-prayer/>

Even twenty percent of people who consider themselves non-religious pray daily.

Prayer is proven to change those who pray. Neuroscience research finds that prayer radically transforms the brain. Andrew Newberg studied brain scans of daily prayers and found a quieting of the parietal lobes and an activation of the frontal lobes causing a sense of peacefulness. Sara Lazar, who expanded upon his work, in 2014 at Harvard found that meditating in Yoga classes even had an effect on the patterns in the brain and a shrinking of the amygdala where anxiety, fear and stress are activated. Those in Lazar's studies found that an ability to stay focused in difficult situations, less fear and more empathy resulted from praying twenty minutes a day. She said there was an overall enhanced sense of well-being.

But will prayer and meditation help stop gun violence? Prayer promotes a clear empathic way

of thinking, so prayer may inspire better policy solutions and better mental health in general.

Three out of four Americans believe that prayer is a direct connection to God who cares about the world and about us personally. In the Christian tradition, God is not a removed entity looking from a distance. God set the natural laws in place, but God also bends down to listen and inclines her ear to those who pray. Prayer is a powerful mystery, but it may be that prayer can move nations like it can move mountains and cause justice to be done for the victimized and innocents who are damaged by pollution. Great social change such as the civil rights movement has been brought about by prayers for freedom and inspired actions of those who were prayed for and with.

Prayer can be an outlet for frustration as we plead for the God of the Universe to inspire our law makers with rational decisions for justice and peace for our whole world's benefit.

**Philosopher, Mark Nepo says,
"The work of prayer is to restore
our connection to the powerful
healing currents of life."**

PRAYER IS A RESPONSIBLE REACTION TO TRAGEDY

Turning to prayer before tragedies is the best way to prevent them from happening. But when they do happen, turning to prayer should be the first thing we do when something like a mass shooting happens. Whatever we believe about God, praying is a responsible reaction to tragedy, and it gives our brains focus and time to think about the next responsible action we should take. We humans can not heal the world's pathologies on our own without appealing to the Holy Spirit for help and guidance. Everything we do should include first appealing to God's power and strength. That is why we start every church committee meeting with prayer. God's power is not completely understood, but we can bet

connecting to our Divine power source can't be a bad thing at any time in any place.

OUR LEADERS

So, there are five-hundred-thirty-five women and men who serve as our nation's members of Congress (which is both the House and the Senate). The President, the Cabinet, the judiciary, our state and local leaders are all faced with difficult decisions every day, while trying to balance their personal lives with their families, too. It is easy to forget there is a person behind the political office they hold. We must take a moment to remember their humanity and see them all as children of God who need prayer like you and I need prayer. Eighty-eight percent of our current Congress profess faith in Christ and the rest are also made of body, mind, and spirit that deserve our prayers and positive healing energy on their behalf.

LET US PRAY

Let us pray: Holy Creator, we thank you for the women and men who serve our country in leadership roles. We pray for their ability to use compassion, empathy, and wisdom as they make decisions that affect their constituents and our planet now and for future generations.

Help their governmental offices operate with a prayerful, peaceful, devoted focus for the good of all the people and not just for those who give them campaign donations.

May the decisions made in the highest office in our land be decisions made with wisdom, intelligence, creativity, integrity, and with a passion for justice, equality, liberty, harmony among the nations, and peace for all the world. May the decisions about our planet's safety and environmental security be made based on scientific facts and not on political whims and opinions.

May our country's leaders be inspired to uphold the noble legacy of being a country that welcomes the refugee, the tired, the poor, and "the huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

And may we as good citizens pray for and do all we can to encourage those brave enough to run for office have the ethical fortitude to represent all our citizens for moral reasons and not with greed or a lust for power. Help us all live up to the expectations and dream of our forefathers and mothers who helped create our "one nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all." Amen

Benediction:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen



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