

## Prayer for All 1 Timothy 2:1-7

When I was in the second grade, my family moved from our home in Nashville to a subdivision far outside of town, called Brentwood.

At that time, Brentwood was “in the country.” If you are familiar at all with Nashville these days, Brentwood is viewed as being just down the street.

But in those days, Brentwood was barely developed, a place where a family could buy a house and even get some land to go along with it.

My family bought a home with an acre of land for a backyard. Behind that acre was a huge field that seemed to go on forever.

As I remember it now, it must have been a cornfield, because we could run through it and be completely hidden by the stalks that grew taller than we were.

For a second grade boy, it was the perfect place. It was our field of dreams.

I invited a classmate over to play one day, and we decided to play hide and seek in the cornfield.

I hid first. He gave me the regular count to hide, and then into the maze he came.

When I heard him get closer to me, I took off running. Because of the tall plants, the game was a combination of hide and seek and chase.

Eventually, he caught me, but in the process, tackled me. And it hurt.

He was much bigger than I, and those stalks hurt when I fell into them.

I never invited him over again!

Later that evening, I was telling Mema about it. Mema was my grandmother, who lived with us at that time.

I told her how mad I was. After all, I invited him over to play!

He was my friend, but now he was my enemy.

Mema was very understanding; and when I was done, she said, “*Let’s pray for him.*”

I was expecting her to pray some good prayer of revenge that God would send a painful punishment into his life.

Instead, she bowed and really prayed for him. She prayed that God would be with him and his family, that he would do well in school the next day, that he would make friends, and that he would stay healthy!

It was everything that I did not want for him! To be truthful, I felt betrayed by Mema.

She stopped praying, but she never said, “*Amen.*” Thinking that she might have fallen asleep, eventually I opened my eyes and looked up.

She looked at me and said, “*It’s your turn.*” She expected me to pray for him.

I remember that lesson. It was one that Mema taught us over and over again.

I have since learned that she did not invent the idea of praying for our enemies. She got it from her Bible.

It is the instruction of the Apostle Paul in today’s text.

*“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone” (1 Timothy 2:1).*

Simply put, we should pray for everyone, even classmates who take hide and seek too seriously.

1 Timothy is what we call a pastoral epistle. The senior minister, Paul, is writing letters of instruction to the younger minister, Timothy, who is pastoring in Ephesus.

These letters are very different in nature and content from most of the other writings of Paul, because they focus much more on church organization and form.

These instructions resemble a “how-to” guide rather than a theological essay or a love letter.

Paul begins by talking about worship, and the first thing that he says is that we must pray for everyone.

It is the right thing to do to pray for the business person who hurt you last quarter.

It is the right thing to do to pray for your ex-spouse.

It is the right thing to do to pray for your child’s enemy.

It is the right thing to do to pray for your competition.

It is the right thing to do to pray for the person who vilified you behind your back.

It is the right thing to do to pray for people whom you know and people whom you don’t know.

It is the right thing to do to pray for our nation’s allies and our nation’s enemies.

It is the right thing to do to pray for the person whom you would much prefer to avoid.

It is the right thing to do to pray for the second grader who tackled you in the cornfield.

Mema knew the right thing to do.

Prayer for all is not only the right thing to do, but it is also the best thing to do. I sense that you might need a little convincing.

### **Prayer for all pleases God.**

*“This is good and pleases God” (1 Timothy 1:3),* writes Paul.

It pleases God, because it is God’s nature to reach out to the whole world.

There have been many biblical scholars over the years who have tried to tone down the universality of this passage.

They have been uncomfortable with such repetitive references to *“everyone,”* to *“all men,”* and even that Paul considered himself called to *“the Gentiles.”*

But we cannot deny that it is the focus of these words. Pray for all people.

It is the nature of God.

Jesus told a parable one day in an attempt to teach His disciples how wide God’s love was for all people, not just the one’s who lived obediently within His fold.

He told a brief story about a man who owned 100 sheep. One day, one of the sheep wandered away.

Did the man write off that sheep and celebrate that he still had 99? Did he “cut his losses” as we might say and decide to be content with what was left?

No, the man went looking for the wandering sheep. Jesus even went as far as to say that once he found the stray sheep, he was happier about that one than all the others that he left grazing on the hillside (Matthew 18:12-14).

That is the way God is. That is why Jesus told the story.

The problem is that most of us are like Simon Peter who responded to the story of the lost sheep by asking, *“Lord, how many times shall I forgive” (Matthew 18:21)?*

In other words, how many times must I go after the lost sheep? Apparently, love has its limits to Peter.

For God, love has no limit. It is the nature of God to care for all the sheep, all the time.

If you want to be truer to the image of God in which you were made, I suggest that you put even the people you oppose on your prayer list.

### Prayer for all imitates Christ.

Since Christ is the incarnation of God, it should not surprise us that Christ is the embodiment of the nature of God.

If you want to know what God is like, look at the way Jesus lived.

Praying for all imitates what Christ did.

We do not have to go any further than what Jesus said about praying for all in the Sermon on the Mount to find out what He was like.

Whether you knew it or not, you learned to quote part of the Sermon on the Mount many years ago.

In fact, you repeat it every week. We call it the Lord’s Prayer.

*“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name....”* The prayer is recorded in Matthew 6:9-13.

Or rather I should say that most of the prayer is recorded there.

If you look closely at the text, you will see that it ends with the words, *“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13).*

The doxology which includes the closing, *“For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever”* is not normally included in the body of Matthew’s text.

Some of you grew up in traditions that did not include this doxology at all, even in the recitation during worship.

Since the earliest manuscripts of Matthew’s Gospel do not include this triumphal conclusion, it is most likely that these words were added later in Christian practice.

Probably, Jesus ended His prayer with the words, *“Deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13).*

Have you ever noticed what Matthew records that Jesus said right after He spoke, *“Deliver us from evil”*?

Matthew quotes Jesus to say, *“But if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14-15).*

You can almost feel Jesus interpreting our thoughts. We pray that God will deliver us from evil people, and that prayer will release us from all association or responsibility for them. Jesus says, *“Oh no, you must forgive them. You must pray for them.”* You cannot merely be delivered from them.

Jesus Himself lived out these words on the cross where the first word He spoke was a prayer for His killers.

*“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).*

We pray for all, even our enemies; and it imitates Christ.

### **Prayer for all transforms others.**

I offered this solution of prayer to someone once who was really struggling with hate in his heart for another person.

*“Have you tried praying for the person?”* I asked.

To which he quickly replied, *“That would never work. He will never change.”*

To which I wanted to reply, *“With that kind of faith, you’re probably right.”*

What I needed to say was that whether or not the other person ever changes is not the point.

The lack of response from the other person never releases us from the responsibility to pray for him or her.

Whether or not the other person ever responds positively to our praying is irrelevant to our obligation to pray.

We must pray for all.

The truth of the matter is that we will change if we pray for the other person. Prayer for all transforms them in our eyes.

Your perspective on the person will change.

Try this for a new definition of enemy. An enemy is someone for whom we are not praying.

If you pray for someone, they will not remain your enemy for long.

They may never change their behavior, but your view of them will change.

Prayer for all pleases God. It imitates Christ.  
And it transforms others, in our hearts.

### **Prayer for all quiets our souls.**

Intentionally, I have saved this one for last. One of the final purposes for prayer is ourselves.

We make it prayer priority number 1. It should be prayer priority number last.

In the correct order, the right thing to do for our own well-being is to pray for all.

One of the examples that Paul shares for those for whom we ought to pray is the *“kings and all those in authority” (1 Timothy 2:2a)*.

The government leaders in Paul’s day were not Christians. They were persecutors of Christians if they had any relationship with believers at all.

The purpose of the prayer was so *“that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (1 Timothy 2:2b)*.

Prayer for all brings peace to our souls.

This sermon calls for a pretty large order. If you hear these words and believe them, you are going to pray this week for some people whose names you have never uttered except in disgust.

I’m calling you, through the Scriptures, to step beyond what is normal and beyond what is comfortable.

What if I put it this way?

How many of you would like to please God?

Most of us would respond affirmatively, whether we really were committed to it or not.

You have to admit a “no” to that question is not a good church answer.

How many of you would like to be like Christ? That sounds appealing to believers.

We might put limitations on how much we want to be like Him, but we would still answer “yes.”

How many of you would like to change other people? Now I know I’ve got you all with me!

How many of you would like to have peace within your souls?

Yes, we would say. That is one of the most sought after goals in life.

To please God, to imitate Christ, to transform others, and to quiet your own soul can best be sought by praying.

But not praying that all those things will come true, but rather praying for all.

For friends and foes alike.

Mema went to heaven about a quarter of a century ago. She would agree with this sermon.