

God wants all to be saved

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- These are my rough preaching notes shared with you for the purpose of helping those who were not at the service to get the gist of the sermon, and for those who were to have a reminder of what was said. They are not corrected and polished for printable publication.
- If not done so already, questions for reflection and discussion as well as an audio recording of the sermon in MP3 format, will be posted on the webpage shortly.
- Making these resources available in this way is a new venture. If you do make use of any of them I would value your feed back and comment.

1 Tim 2:1-7

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Introduction

This is the third sermon in this series looking at Paul's first letter to his young protégé Timothy. In this pastoral letter we get a window of understanding into a matter that is of central importance to us at this time in our life as a church – namely discipleship.

Paul is investing in this young man's life and ministry. He is not only concerned to see the church in Ephesus get back on track and for the pressing issues there to be dealt with, he is concerned about seeing Timothy grow in his confidence and trust in the Lord and become an effective minister of the gospel of Jesus.

This is something that I believe is of central importance to us as a church at this time, and so I am looking at this letter with that focus. I invite you to do the same.

What lessons do we learn about making disciples as we read this letter from the great Apostle Paul to his young protégé Timothy?

What principles can we apply?

What practices can we put into place as we similarly invest in others and seek to grow them as followers of Jesus?

Be they members of your cell group, people you are in a mentoring relationship with, members of your immediate or wider family circle, or those who work with you or for you.

As we look at this passage call to mind those relationships and ask God to speak to you about what he wants you to do as you respond to the call – the command in fact – to make disciples.

We have already got some understanding from chapter one (and the first sermon in this series) about what the issues were in Ephesus at that time - **false teaching, inappropriate living and bad leadership.**

How is the young Timothy to tackle these big issues?

Begin with prayer!

That is the first point I want you to note from this passage.

Prayer, that universal action of last resort, is to be Timothy's starting point. So often we see prayer as the last thing we do, when all other attempts at addressing a problem, or sorting out a mess have failed.

That is usually when we say, well all we can do now is pray. We have tried everything else, we have done our best, we have worked hard, we have got in the experts, we have done the research, we have brought in the consultants, brought out the big guns, we have worked our butts off we have poured in resources - it has all failed, all we can do now is pray – this is our last and weakest option.

Paul writes ... (vs 1)

2:1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--

I know that very often when faced with a problem my first response is to draw on my expertise and experience and come up with a good "Duncan solution" to the problem and then persuade everyone to see it my way.

Maybe Paul saw that same failing in Timothy. The point is not getting people to see our solution, it is helping us all to see God's solution.

So Paul urges, exhorts, beseeches Timothy to begin with prayer.

And he uses four words (*requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving*) which open a window on what Paul had in his heart for Timothy and what he longed to see in him as he addresses this letter to him.

The first word “**requests**” carries the idea of *desire or need*.

At the heart of prayer there is a need. There is a deep desire for things to change. *This can not continue. This must stop.*

I guess in this instance Timothy would express his need as “HELP!”

The church here in Ephesus is a mess. I don’t know where to begin. HELP!

What is the need you are aware of that would fuel your prayers right now?
What intractable situation, what no-win dilemma do you face, or does the person you are discipling face?

Get in touch with hat. Feed it! Feed the desire in you to see things change.
Put yourself in a place where the need impacts you.

The second word Paul uses is the one most often translated simply as “**prayer**” which always signifies *praying to God*. Prayer is bringing the need, the desire to God.

The third word translated here as “**intercession**,” has the sense of “conversation”. It suggests the idea of a free bold confidence to come into God’s presence. It is about laying out the need in a conversational way and engaging with God.

“Lord, this is what burdens me in this situation, what do you see happening here?”

Lord, what is your desired outcome?

What strategy do we use to get there?

Lord, how is the enemy coming against your plans and throwing us of course?”

A conversation means asking questions and listening to the response.

The fourth word is “**thanksgiving**” which should always be a part of all our praying.

Recognizing and acknowledging what God has done will strengthen our faith to believe that he will meet our needs in the future.

A picture that I find helpful to illustrate the prayer journey these four words take us on, is the healing of the man who was let down through the roof by his friends and placed at the feet of Jesus. It is recorded in Luke 5:18ff.

There is a **need** that consumes them. Their friend is paralyzed.

They take the need **to Jesus**. They push through the crowd and bring him and place him in front of Jesus.

A **conversation ensues** as Jesus speaks to the man about sin and forgiveness.

The paralyzed man stands up and takes his bed and goes home and everyone is amazed and **gives thanks** to God.

A need; taken to Jesus; a conversation with a friend; and thanksgiving.

Timothy, that is where you start. That is the first port of call.

Friends this is an example for us to follow, both for ourselves but also as we seek to make disciples and grow them into effective ministers of the Gospel of Jesus where ever he calls them to serve.

We are always going to come up against opposition. We are always going to face tricky situations. The enemy will always try to outwit us.

We start by getting in touch with the need – the issue, what is at stake here? We take it to Jesus – we carry it as it were and push to the front of the queue and say Jesus look at this situation.

Then we wait and watch and listen to what he says to us. What revelation, what insight, what perspective changes in us as we do that?

Be aware of what in us says, like the Pharisees who over heard the conversation between Jesus and the paralyzed man, “He can’t do that! That is not allowed. That is off limits.”

What shifts in us as we carry the need to Jesus and engage in conversation with him?

That is what needs to happen in us. That is why we begin first of all with prayer. It is about us being aligned with God, rather than us getting others to see things our way.

So begin with prayer.

The second thing to note in Paul’s instruction to Timothy is this.

Pray for everyone

*2:1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for **everyone**—*

God is concerned about everyone. No one is beyond his care. His desire is that all should come to salvation – to full abundant life.

A few things to note.

First Paul urges prayer for ... verse 2

Everyone ... for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

The word he uses is a clear reference to the Emperor who at that time was the cruel monster Nero.

So we pray for all those in authority. Our prayers are not limited to Christian leaders alone or to the ones who are to our liking.

The fact that we see Robert Mugabe as a monster, the fact that we don't relish the thought of Jacob Zuma being elected as President of the ANC, does not give us permission to exclude them from our prayers. We need to be feeling the need, and carrying all those in authority to Jesus in our prayers and placing them before the Lord just like anyone else. The situation in Zimbabwe is no less dire than what Timothy faced in Ephesus under Roman rule.

Second note that Paul uses an inclusive phrase when he says pray for "all those in authority".

That would include in our context our bosses or the owners of the company we work for. It would include those who have authority in the places where we study or are at school or in any other place.

Are you praying for your boss, your head of department, your school principal?

You see as we are aware of a need – a desire for change, and as we bring it to Jesus and enter into conversation and listen to him, something in us will shift. God will change our hearts and bring us more in line with his will.

Third note what Paul says Timothy should pray for in this regard.

The fruit we desire is that those in authority discharge their duties in such a way that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. In essence we pray for a well ordered and managed society, work place, school, college.

Vs 3: "This is good and pleases God"

Paul adds, and in the same sentences goes on to say ...

3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior,

4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

There is no doubt that Paul saw the Pax Romana – the order and freedom of movement that Roman rule brought to the known world at that time - as a huge advantage for the spread of the Gospel. It enabled him to travel freely and his Roman citizenship protected him on more than one occasion.

Good governance allows the gospel to be proclaimed. I think we can see that as being partly behind his prayer for those in authority, but there is also the sense that this is good because good government is a blessing for all people.

What this says to us is that our prayers for those in authority, be they Christians or not, should come from a heart attitude that longs to see society **blessed (good governance)** and **converted (come to faith in Jesus)**. It is not fueled simply by personal need – what I and my family need.

So for example when I see the traffic lights up the road on the corner of Main Road and Summerley Road are being repaired, I can I give thanks for our local counselor, Ian Iverson, who sent out a questionnaire asking residents if anything in the neighbourhood needed repairing. I give thanks that he is responsibly serving this community and responded to the reply I sent him.

I pray for the workers as they do their work that they would be safe.
I pray for the many vehicles and their drivers and passengers who pass through that intersection, that people will obey the traffic lights so that all may pass safely on their way.

That will be both a blessing to society.

It will also enable people to come here safely for the Alpha Course, to Open House, to services. It means the proclamation of the gospel can go on and that people can, using Paul's words, ...

4 ... be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

What you praying for as you bring those in authority in your neighbourhood, work place, school, ...?

So begin with prayer – that is the first point.

Secondly - pray for everyone.
Why? Because, thirdly (verse 4) ...

God wants all people to be saved

This is a central thrust of what Paul says in these verses. In fact he states it four times in these seven verses.

Verse 1 – Pray for everyone.

Verse 4 – God wants all people to be saved.

Verse 6 – Christ Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all people.

Verse 7 – Paul is appointed herald and apostle and is a true teacher of the Gentiles. In other words this message is not restricted to being for Jews only. It is universal, for Jew and Gentile.

God wants all to be saved!

I wonder if Paul reckoned that Timothy needed reminding about this.

Maybe he did. Maybe in their interaction Paul saw a tendency in Timothy to just have a concern for those who were with him – those who supported him, who liked him and whom he liked – those who were in his camp, who ate the same food as he did, spoke the language as he did, smelt as he did, did the things he did.

Now I am sure none of us need reminding about this, but Timothy did.

God wants all to be saved, Timothy. Even the ones you don't particularly like. Those false teachers who are causing so much trouble; those leaders who are leading others astray and indulging themselves at the same time; those cult prostitutes in the Temple of Artemis; the leaders of the New Women movement throwing social norms in Ephesus into confusion. God wants them all to be saved.

And he adds ...

“and come to a knowledge of the truth”.

The word “knowledge” here means “to recognize”. He wants them to recognize the truth about God and themselves and their need of God and knowing that, be set free to be the people God intended them to be.

That is the vision, Timothy. That is God's plan, young man.

But you can't long for, and work for, and invest your self in that, while you believe that God is a tribal partisan God, who is interested in you, and not them.

God wants all to be saved, because, Paul continues, **there is only one God and one mediator**. Verse 5 ...

*5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Jesus Christ himself human,
6 who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.*

The logic is obvious if you think about it.

Central to the Biblical witness is the fact that God is one. Because there is only one God, he must be the God for everyone.

The most holy of all declaration made by Jewish people in the Old Testament is the Shema.

*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, **the Lord is one.***

It is repeated by the prophets, notably Isaiah.

*Isaiah 45:5 I am the LORD, and **there is no other**; apart from me there is no God.*

It is repeated time and again in the New Testament.

*1 Cor 8:6 there **is but one God**, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live;*

It has already come up in 1 Tim 1:17 which we looked at last week. It is in that declaration of praise.

*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, **the only God**, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Now this is not very politically correct is it? The declaration that there is only one God sounds very unaccommodating, intolerant and unloving.

But it is only unloving and unaccommodating if we fail to recognize that because there is only one God, he is the God for everyone and that he wants all to be saved.

The implications of that are that we see in every person some one God wants to bring to freedom in Jesus.

Why did Paul spell this out so emphatically to Timothy?

Maybe Paul detected in Timothy the seeds of an attitude that said,

*“Oh well if they want to teach that stuff let them.
You do it your way. I will do it my way.
You follow your god. I will follow mine”*

If we are making disciples of Jesus, that attitude has to be rooted out, because it undermines the gospel of Christ. It flies in the face of all that Paul has been labouring to achieve. That is why he is so insistent about this.

7 And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle--I am telling the truth, I am not lying--

That is pretty emphatic language isn't it!

Paul is reminding Timothy that there is one God, and that he has sent his one and only Son to make a way for the whole human race to be restored and set free. That is the truth, Timothy. Don't forget it.

The truth is that ... (John 3:16ff)

*"God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

This is how Eugene Peterson puts that verse in The Message.

*¹⁶“This is how much God loved the world:
He gave his Son, his one and only Son.
And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed;
but by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.
¹⁷God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was.
He came to help, to put the world right again.*

Now it was vital that as Timothy addressed the issues in the church

- the false teachers who are causing so much trouble;
- the leaders who are leading others astray and indulging themselves at the same time;

and as he addressed the issues in the wider society in Ephesus at that time

- the cultic prostitutes in the Temple of Artemis;
- the leaders of the New Women movement throwing social norms in Ephesus into confusion

as he was confronted with all of this, with all these people –

it was vital that he remembered that God wanted all to be saved.

It was essential that in the forefront of his mind he held the fact that there is one God and one mediator between God and humankind, Jesus Christ who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

A ransom is paid to set people free. God wants everyone to be set free.

Does that open your eyes a little as you look at the people around you at work, at varsity, at school in your street?

The God we worship and serve is their God too longing for them to be saved, to be set free too, and come to a knowledge of the truth.

So lessons for disciple makers.

- Begin with prayer
- Pray for everyone, because
- God wants everyone to be saved.

We will continue next week and look at the tricky verses in the second half of chapter two. But for now let's ask God to speak into our hearts as we reflect on these verses.