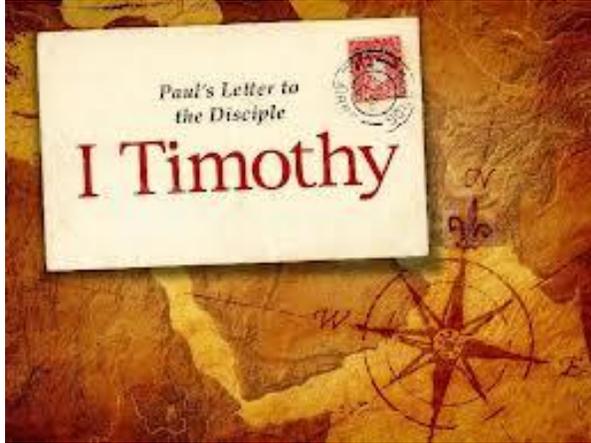


Instructions on Prayer

Psalm 79:1-9 & 1Timothy 2:1-8

Rev. James Ramsey, September 22, 2013, **View From the Ancient Pew** Series #2



It is amazing that Jesus' disciples did not ask him to teach them how to tell a parable, to multiply the loaves or to heal the sick, but they did ask him to teach them how to pray. Jesus responded by teaching a simple, yet complete prayer – what we know as the Lord's Prayer. Disciples throughout the millennia have memorized the familiar words, but they also serve as a kind of template – a pattern for discovering and practicing a way of living with God:

- ❖ Becoming Aware Of God's Presence
- ❖ Inviting God's Intervention
- ❖ Listening For God's Voice
- ❖ Making Our Requests Known
- ❖ Offering Ourselves To God
- ❖ Receiving God's Blessing

Our task is to weave these elements into a seamless garment of relationship with God – a prayer relationship that will sustain us in every experience of life and make it possible for us to live at home with God in this life and the next.

The Lord's Prayer – the prayer example given by Jesus, is not the only resource we have. As we study the Timothy Letters we get a View from the Ancient Pew!

Timothy was a younger follower of the Apostle Paul. While Timothy had settled in the city of Ephesus, he had previously traveled extensively with Paul, his mentor. The letter is written in the tone of a father instructing a son. The Christian church in Ephesus, and other churches in the region, were falling into serious error – a form of heresy known as Gnosticism was corrupting church teachings. Through pastoral letters, the Apostle Paul urged Timothy to remain in Ephesus in order to oppose these falsehoods and maintain spiritual discipline in the church. Always seeking to build and grow a Christ-like community, the older Apostle includes much advice concerning the administration of the church.

1 Timothy confronts the danger of pagan beliefs and practices displacing traditional Christian doctrine.



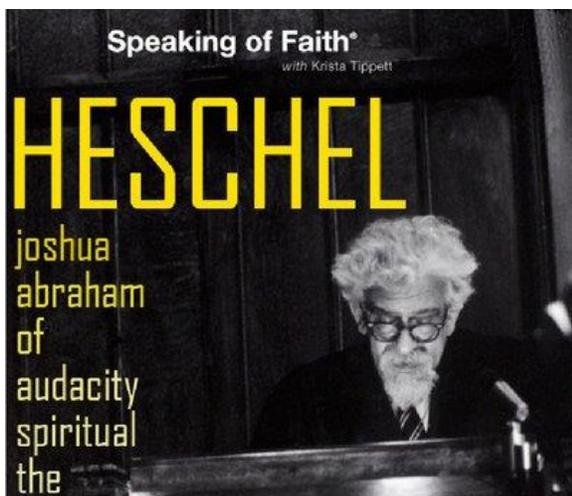
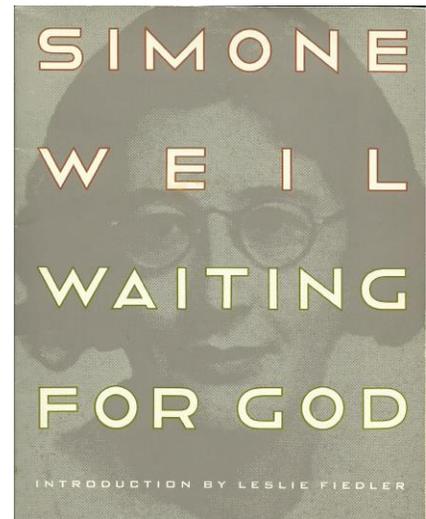
The Greek goddess Artemis was the Ephesian's favored deity—the ancient Temple of Artemis, the remains of which still stand today was a constant draw for many, it was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World—Timothy's charge was to urge the Church to stay true to the Christian faith, even in the midst of a strongly pagan culture.

High on the priority list was Instruction on Prayer. Timothy should:

Remember the priority of prayer. "First of all ..." the apostle writes. Some translations put it, "Above all" The apostle stresses that prayer is essential for the Christian.

The French Christian mystic Simone Weil said, "Prayer is made of attention. It is the direction towards God of all the attention that the soul is capable of. The quality of the attention makes for much of the quality of the prayer. It cannot be replaced by the heart's warmth." This comment reminds us that prayer is not essentially request or routine, but (the Hebrew word is *kavvanah*) that is -- focus, intensity, intention. It is the soul's upward climb.

Let your prayer life be well-rounded. "I urge supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings." – as in the pattern of the Lord's Prayer." A lot of our prayers tend to be rather self-oriented. Yet prayers asking God for this or that for ourselves should constitute a very small part of our total prayer experience.



Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel writes, "Prayer comes to pass when we forget ourselves."

Perhaps our society's increasing focus on the self and our inability to pray are related. As we concentrate on each quiver of self-regard, we push away the self-forgetfulness that is central to prayer. So in contrast to all the places that propose to help you to realize yourself, fulfill yourself, celebrate yourself, perhaps our motto should be: "Forget yourself -- come to church and pray."



Take the seemingly odd prayer of a South African elder. Archbishop Desmond Tutu made several visits to my seminary while I was a student there. He told this story:

Mogopa, a village to the west of Johannesburg, was to be demolished and its inhabitants forcibly removed at gunpoint to a homeland in apartheid's forced population-removal schemes. On the eve of their

departure, a vigil with church leaders from all over South Africa was held in Mogopa. The village clinics, shops, schools and churches had already been demolished. At about midnight, an elder of the doomed village got up to pray, and he prayed a strange prayer that I will never forget. He said, God, thank you for loving us so much.

Several years later, apartheid was dead and the people of Mogopa returned to their village, which they are rebuilding. God did indeed love them very much, it seems.

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Offer inclusive prayers. The apostle says that our prayers should be made "for everyone." – for we ought to remember that God, our Savior desires everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Pray with a bi-partisan, apolitical accent. "For kings and all who are in high positions," he writes. It's kind of like Paul was saying, "Make sure your prayers seek to make a difference for the world around you – in other words, don't just pray for yourself, or even those you know, but pray for the entire world and those who are in power. Don't let your prayers become too narrow, too local, too watered down!"



Too often -- perhaps because of similar influences to Timothy's age, like pop-culture, -- our prayers become too apathetic and banal. They lose real hope and forget to call upon God to right wrongs, overturn injustice and instill peace, *not just in the age to come but in the age that is*. When we fail to do this we are giving up our distinctly Christian voice, which proclaims that God not only "exists" but that, through the prayers of God's people, God is active, loving, and capable of transforming the world around us.

Remember that this God, to whom we pray, has been revealed to us through Jesus Christ. Why is this important? Because Jesus, who was human as we are, and who was given as a "ransom" for us, is our "mediator," the one through whom we can in some way understand God, and come into the presence of God. That's what prayer does for us.



You know the promise – ASK AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE, SEEK AND YOU SHALL FIND, KNOCK AND THE DOOR SHALL BE OPENED TO YOU.

Prayer is a great privilege ... but it is also a responsibility. If Christ gives us access to his mercy and power then there is a moral responsibility for us to use that access to affect the most positive change we can, to bring the most blessing possible to others.

The Apostle Paul listed PRAYER first in leadership "essentials" for Timothy, his young successor. It should be first on our list, as well.

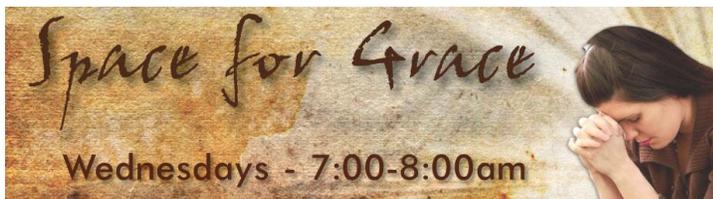
We are still called to be people of prayer, just like Jesus' original disciples, just like Timothy, a people inviting the power of God upon a planet and a population who desperately need it.

The story is told... of the man who came home one day to find that his wife had hung a plaque on the wall which read, "Prayer changes things." Within 24 hours the plaque had been removed.

She asked, "What's wrong? Don't you like prayer?"

He said, "Sure, I like prayer. I don't like change."

- Prayer changes us.
- Prayer changes others.
- Prayer changes things.
- Prayer changes the church.
- Prayer changes the world.



We have at East Union, about 2 and a half months left in our year-long commitment to prayer.

May our prayers remain distinctive and far-reaching.

May we always be a people who don't stop when we have prayed for ourselves – but are known to pray earnestly for our neighbors, for strangers, for our leaders near and far, for the earth in all its diversity.