

# How Now Do We Pray?

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[ 0 : 00 ] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

1 Timothy chapter 2, beginning at verse 1. 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, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

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 a knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.

[ 1 : 10 ] Which is the testimony given at the proper time. This is the word of the Lord. Like every other Sunday morning, he stood up to pray.

It was 1120 in London on June 18, 1944. The British Empire that had controlled nearly a quarter of the world's land was essentially over, and the capital of that empire, London itself, was under attack.

Sirens blared. Chaos reigned in the streets. People ran about in terror because of the routine air assaults from German planes.

But they also ran because of the remote-controlled bombing that had begun only days before by the Nazis. Nevertheless, it was Sunday morning, and Martin Lloyd-Jones had a congregation to lead.

Even though at this point in the service, everyone in the church began to hear a bomber plane closing in overhead, Lloyd-Jones began his long prayer, his pastoral prayer, and did not stop.

[ 2 : 40 ] He continued to pray until the noise overhead was so loud that he could not even hear himself any longer. The congregation braced for the explosion.

The bomb fell. The chapel structure cracked. Bits of ceiling and dust fell from the roof.

The congregation arose to their feet, assuming the service was over. But after a brief pause, Dr. Lloyd-Jones continued his prayer as though nothing had happened.

The congregation sat down again. After he concluded his prayer, Lloyd-Jones advised anyone who was nervous to move underneath one of the galleries.

Then he climbed the steps to what he called the old sacred desk and began to preach. Though the world was at war, and though war was literally at the door, Lloyd-Jones believed it was no time to stop leading the congregation to worship the king of all kings.

[ 3 : 53 ] This morning, though, war is not at the door of the church. We are in the midst of a difficult cultural moment. In the next several days, there will be elected a new president of the United States.

The differences between the candidates and their platforms are significant. The division over those who are for Harris and those who are for Donald Trump is stark.

There is much we must do as followers of Christ and citizens of this country. We should, we must vote, and we should remember that our vote is not an evangelism tract.

Our vote is not a full-scale agreement with any candidate's position or character. It's a careful consideration of the candidate's position or platform and policy and the potential consequences of their administration for the greater good of all Americans.

We should vote. We should engage politically in appropriate ways to do good to others and love our neighbors. But most of all, we should pray.

[ 5 : 07 ] In fact, in this letter to Timothy, Paul urges him to stay in Ephesus, which is our city right now. Urges him to stay in Ephesus because of false teaching there.

There's false teaching about the law. People are adding to the gospel and saying you must do these things to be right with God. There's an ascetic-like teaching saying that the things of this world, like marriage and food and drink, are forbidden by God.

Things he's blessed are forbidden. There's a prevalence of irreverent, silly myths. There's so much Paul wants Timothy to do.

He urges him to remain because of all the things he wants him to set back in order. But he says, first of all, Timothy, I want you to pray. He's not telling Timothy in order merely.

Here, he's giving him a positive priority and above all, a most important command. Pray, Timothy. Prayer is not just something Paul urges him to do.

[ 6 : 18 ] Prayer is the most important thing Paul says he can do. In this cultural moment, I think it's the most important thing for us to do.

The greatest good in a world where we're going, the church can do for the people of this world, is to pray to God on their behalf. The greatest good the church can do for the people of this world is to pray to God on their behalf.

And break this out in a couple points and unpack, I trust faithfully, this text for our time. Firstly, we pray to acknowledge our God is the King of Kings.

We pray to acknowledge our God is the King of Kings. Paul begins this command to pray, this urging to pray, and urges him to pray in no uncertain terms.

If you look down there, he says, I urge supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving. He piles up four different words for prayer. Now, some devote time to separating and defining these different words for prayer, but I don't think that's the point here.

[ 7 : 24 ] There's so much overlap in the way each of these words are used for prayer in the New Testament. It's not as distinct as we might seem. I think the point of these words is that our prayers should be frequent and extensive.

Our prayers should be frequent and extensive. If you notice, each of those definitions for prayer, words or titles or terms for prayer, are plural, supplications, not supplication.

Prayers, not prayer. Intercessions, not intercession. Thanksgivings, not thanksgiving merely. We sometimes think the importance of prayer is by its length.

Sometimes you're sitting down to eat, and someone clearly has an idea that the importance of prayer is because of its length as the food gets cold. I like what Martin Luther said.

Prayer should be brief, frequent, and intense. Brief, frequent, and intense. That's what the apostle's saying here. Yes, I'm going to command you to do a lot of different things, Timothy, but what you must do most frequently, most intensely, is pray.

[ 8 : 40 ] These four terms also point to the fact that our prayers should be extensive. These verses push us to pray about more than our aches and pains, more than our people, or something like that.

They push us to pray for all people everywhere. It's pushing our prayers way out from this county to the end of the earth, to all people, those who know the Lord, and those who don't, to the highest of the highest places of position and influence and authority, and to those who have nothing.

Our prayers would be extensive, great, and vast. Most importantly, though, prayer and this call to prayer is an acknowledgement of God's authority and power over all things.

We pray because none can rival His position as King of all. None can rival His power in ruling over all.

Is there a better acknowledgement in times of political instability and cultural upheaval than the truth that our God is the King of all?

[ 9 : 48 ] That He rules over all. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is no local deity, no puppet king, no all-pomp and no power king.

He is no pawn propped up by a political party. Our God has set His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ to do with it that which He wills.

He is the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, and His power. So He has a position, but His power is unmatched.

All things work according to His sovereign decree. It is God who puts down one and elevates another. By His decree, kings rule.

Daniel said, It is He who changes the times and seasons. He who removes kings and sets up kings. Jesus said to Pilate, You would have no authority unless my Father gave it to you, unless it was given to you from above.

[ 11 : 03 ] John Newton famously said, There is one political maxim which comforts me. The Lord reigns. So, regardless of who wins this election in a few days, the Lord reigns.

The Lord reigns. But it's this truth also that impels us and compels us to pray.

If none can rival His position as king and none can rival His power, we labor in prayer because of what we long to see.

We long to see His will done on earth as it is in heaven. Now, if we're honest, in the midst of this cultural moment, prayer can seem so pathetic.

Like bringing spitballs to a gunfight. But do you not know that the king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord?

[ 12 : 11 ] He directs it wherever He will. Do you not know that the pagan ruler Cyrus was His anointed? Do you not know that the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar only did what He sent him to do?

When we pray, we're appealing to Him who has no rivals to act on our behalf. Prayer is not pointless drivel. It's where the action is. Prayer accesses the control center of the universe where God works for those who wait for Him.

Sometimes we think of prayer as something we must do when we have nothing else we can do. We must think about prayer as what God purposes to bring about all the things we cannot do in and of our own strength.

It's ultimately only prayer that can storm the Bastille. Only prayer that can get inside the Oval Office to move the heart of the leader of the free world.

Only prayer can move the direction inside the walls of Congress. Only prayer can turn the cultural wind. Do you not know? Do you not remember? What did the disciples do when Peter was arrested?

[ 13 : 23 ] They went up in the upper room and prayed. One of my favorite passages. Peter comes knocking on the door. They say it's not even him. What's happening? He's in jail because the Lord delivered him.

That's the way the Lord is. Do you not know how much of our political instability and cultural upheaval is a result of the people of God not devoting themselves to prayer? We must pray.

We, point two, we pray for all who are in power to keep peace, praise good, and punish evil. We pray for all those who are in power to keep peace, praise good, and punish evil.

Paul urges for all people, for us to pray for all people, but especially kings and all who are in high places. You see that in verse two. For four kings and all who are in high places.

Paul is urging Timothy to pray for Nero here. The same man that lit Christians on fire so he can enjoy a barbecue in his backyard.

[ 14 : 35 ] But also for government, all governors and government officials. For all who are in high places, not limiting prayer to governing officials merely, but for all people of consequence, we could say, and of influence.

And so we pray. We should pray for the president, two houses of Congress, for our government, for all of our other elected officials, for judges throughout the land, for those of political influence.

But what should we pray for? This is what the apostle is getting at. If you look, we pray that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life.

A peaceful and quiet life. Now that's similar to what the apostle Paul has said in other places. In 1 Timothy, he says, we should aspire, talking to all Christians, aspire to live quietly and to mind your own affairs.

What exactly does that mean? You know, it seems to be a loaded phrase that we load in things. I think in this context, we're praying for the state to keep the peace. That we may live a quiet life.

[ 15 : 47 ] Biblically, the role of the state and government is to protect life, to promote peace, praise good, and punish evil. In the garden, there was no government. There was no state.

There was no need for it. But we see it arise, at least in Genesis 9, when murder is forbidden and punishment is assigned to those who commit the act of murder.

Someone is called to bring, to adjudicate that charge. And so we see the rise of government. We see it in the theocracy of Israel and throughout. And so, one of the first things government is called to do is to protect life.

1 Peter 2 points in more specifically. He says, Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be the emperor as supreme or the governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

So you see, why would I say to protect life? To promote peace. But also, to praise good and punish evil. To bring peace and order, if you will, is the call of government.

[17:08] We are praying, we should pray for the government to stay in its lane and do its God-given job. Several years ago, one of the best commercials from the Super Bowl was from AT&T.;

It was one with the tattoo artist. You probably remember it. A guy hops in the chair and the tattoo artist asked him, or he asked the guy, Is this your first tattoo?

He says, Relax, amigo. It's going to be okay. He's like, Only okay? No worries, boss. I am one of the tattoo artists in the city.

You mean, one of the best tattoo artists in the city, right? Yeah, yeah. Something like that. Then he starts to work on the guy's arm. He says, Aren't you supposed to draw it first? Stay in your lane, bro. Stay in your lane. And so, there's a similar desire for us to pray. That the government stays in its lane to protect life, promote peace, praise good, punish evil.

[18:22] We are not anarchist. We believe government has an assignment from God to protect life, to praise good, punish evil, to bring peace and order.

But how do we know if the government or the state is out of its lane? One way of discerning this is when the government or state declares something as political that is, in fact, theological.

When it declares and acts as if something is merely political that is, in fact, theological, it is out of its lane, I would argue.

And there, you know, this is dicey stuff. I think one helpful grid for discerning these types of things is I think one author describes them as straight line issues and jagged line issues.

So there are issues confronting us right now in a culture. And the decisions on how the government should be involved and how we should vote accordingly or act accordingly should be guided by this idea of straight line and jagged line issues.

[19:33] The idea is that a straight line issue is one that's, it forms a straight line from a biblical text to its policy application. A straight line.

I mean, it's an easy connection. That's the point. There's others that are jagged line issues where it's a multi-step process from a biblical text to a political position.

I would argue that particularly in straight line issues where the government treats something as merely political that is theological because of the straight line.

They're out of their lane. There are a number of straight line issues where we must pray for God to work, bring justice, and make things right.

One is abortion. I realize that in a gathering this large, some of you may have had an abortion.

[20:37] And for that, I pray all the forgiving grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ over you. I would love to talk to you, but biblically, abortion is the greatest, or I mean, I guess globally, abortion is the greatest human rights atrocity in the history of the world.

Last year, we aborted 73 million babies globally, and 60 million people died of natural causes. We aborted.

We killed more babies than people that died naturally. And some people say, what about a woman's right?

What about these contexts where an abortion seems to be the best logical movement of incest or rape or the fear that a woman would lose her life in childbirth?

And those are complex, ethical questions, but the first ethical thing we must consider is it is God who gives life. Life is a bestowal of the Creator, God.

[21:53] It is He, Psalm 139, who forms us in the womb fearfully and wonderfully, making us in a place where no eyes can see. It is His privilege to give life and determine when the end of life should come about.

It is the height of arrogance to take life in defense of what we might think or feel or believe is best or are right. And it is completely reprehensible for a state or government to enshrine in law the ability to take life as we feel.

In the womb but all the way to the tomb. That's why we stand against euthanasia and other things. So, it is a breaking of the fifth commandment. It's an undermining of the foundational purpose of

government to protect life.

Now, we should not, we do not care about abortion because it's a Republican issue. We care about abortion and defend life because it's a theological issue.

It's very important. It's not wrong to define things theologically as believers in this age. Another issue I would argue is the aggressive assault on the created order.

[ 23 : 12 ] Especially the rise and attempted normalization of transgenderism. It is an assault on the created order. That's what's going on here. God says we're made male and female in His image.

Divine image bearers come in two distinct genres. Male and female. There is no third or fourth or fifth or 39th category. Transgenderism, therefore, tells a lie.

That's a lie that's going on all over this culture, but it's a lie that what you really are is something distinct from your biology. It's something inside you. distinct from your anatomy.

You can have a gender identity that's different from your gender. And it's not surprising that someone would have gender confusion in this culture. We're gender confused. So welcome.

The statistics are devastating how easily and often people get out of that gender confusion. Well over a majority and so it's so dangerous to not define it theologically.

[ 24 : 23 ] Massive concerns flow from what's going on with this rise of the normalization of transgenderism. And so we should respond accordingly.

Now some would say isn't that legislating morality? Isn't that Christian nationalism? Christians coming into the voting accordingly? Well, that's not no.

No, it's not. Well, I mean if in fact I'm called by God to lead my life and to do everything in a way that pleases Him and therefore I find the blueprint for that in His Word then yes call me a Christian nationalist.

I will vote accordingly. But the fact is all people have beliefs that inform the way they relate in the public sphere and voting and political things. All people have moral standards that they follow and a future that they try to they vote accordingly and try to impose on other people.

And so it's just a fact of doing life in this world. It's not wrong for others to bring their moral beliefs into the public sphere and therefore it must not be wrong for Christians too.

[ 25 : 33 ] And it's clear biblical truth and we know that deviation from God's design doesn't need a hand slap but deviation from God's design leads to all manner of disorder.

And so we fight for these things not to build this earthly kingdom but to protect the assault of the enemy and the ensnaring of him.

So we pray to promote peace praise good and punish evil. Now it's important to say Paul encouraged Timothy to pray this prayer but I doubt he expected it to be a cakewalk.

I don't think he could suddenly assume that all of his affliction and adversity would stop persecution would stop he knew that Jesus said in this world you will have trouble and so we make this prayer without that assumption too and assume following Christ is always the narrow road.

Point three we pray for believers to be free to pursue godliness dignity and mission. We pray for believers to be free to pursue godliness dignity and mission.

[ 26 : 50 ] Paul continues and defines why he prays for peace and order. The reason is that believers so that believers can devote themselves to their God given priorities.

Look at the way he continues for kings and all who are in high places that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life godly and dignified in every way.

These first two priorities of a Christian life are there godliness and dignity. We pray so that we can pursue godliness and dignity. Godliness is a vital theme running through 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus.

If grace is what when God intervenes and invades our life godliness is our full scale response to him our desire to bring everything in our lives in conformity to him to no longer be conformed to this world but transformed to him and godliness if you've been a Christian for any length of time is hard won.

It's not a given. In the same way that an older man or older woman is not necessarily a wiser man or woman an older man or woman is not necessarily a more godly man or woman.

[ 28 : 04 ] Growth in godliness requires great focus stamina and self mastery a desire to overcome worldliness fatigue distraction and many other threats.

This prayer reminds us we have a goal. It is not political stability or cultural peace. Our goal is to be like Christ that all of our life will be brought under his sway.

So these things that we argue for and vote for do we pursue in a godly way? Jonathan Lehman says you who call for immigration reform do you practice hospitality with visitors to your church who are ethnically or nationally different than you?

You who vote for family values do you honor your father and mother? You who talk about welfare reform do you give to the needy?

How much do you keep? Do you give? You who proclaim all lives matter a couple years ago do all your friends look like you?

[ 29 : 23 ] You who fight for traditional marriage do you love your wife cherishing her as you would your own body and washing her with the water of the word?

I say that not for a sucker punch but because godliness demands a lot more than a verbal profession it demands the renovation of our hearts and lives continually to be more like him so if godliness is this full scale response to what God has done in Christ dignity is the weight or the gravitas it flows to a godly man or woman there's a dignified air or aroma to their life much like the smell of sizzling bacon the dignity of a godly life is noticeable it's sniffable the way they walk into a room has an obvious effect on the room that is the effect of godliness that is dignity rising up just like the proverbs 31 woman commands the children to rise up and bless your mom not because it's something you better do son but because a dignified life a godly life demands praise because it's the fruit of god fruit of his work and there's a third reason he prays for peace and order a third priority here mission we pray for peace and order we pursue godliness and dignity but also mission look at verse 3 and 4 this is good he says talking about a godly and dignified life and it is pleasing in the sight of

God our savior it's a precious reminder that the life of the godly is a happy life it's good and pleasing in the sight of God our savior who desires all people to be saved and to come to of gentiles not just for males but also females not just for the free but also the slaves not just for the well-off but also for the poor there's no one for whom this gospel is not it's for all people all kinds of people under heaven and we have a mission to proclaim this gospel to him

I believe these days could and can be a gift to the church to cultivate a mission mentality if you've read about world war two there was a wartime mentality that women went to the factories the men went to war everyone was united in sacrificing for the cause of the war we need a similar war I mean a mission mentality there's a constraining effect years ago the apologist the great defender of the faith Francis Schaeffer made a provoking insight about evangelical Christians that are Christians that proclaim or believe the Bible is an inerrant word of God and proclaim that Jesus Christ is the only way to know him walk with him Schaeffer said the post world war two generation and their sixties children were of the same temperament now that's a striking thing you're saying the leave it to beaver people were the same as the

Woodstock people he says because they both had the same values personal peace and affluence at the end of the day the world war two generation and the sixties generation held on to the same values affluence and personal peace if those are our values we will see so much right now I think these days are reordering our values to godliness dignity and mission one author says we are in what he calls a negative world now maybe in Athens Tennessee it's not so bad this idea that there's a certain day in which it was a positive good for you to be a Christian you know that might be something you put on the business card put that fish on your bumper sticker or something like that but it helped you out in the community to be a

[ 34 : 55 ] Christian after that it was a neutral world where it didn't matter one way or the other if you are a Christian but now we are as many argue I believe is pretty much true we are in a negative world where it's a net negative to profess Jesus Christ because it assumes the assumption is in the world of bigotry and things like that and so it's a reordering of our values are we willing to be numbered with Jesus Christ we live willing to lose our seat at the table to lose our job to hold on to the things scripture commands us to hold on to I hope so these days are reordering of our passions and our longings too our hope is not for a transformed culture or control of our earthly structures our hope is in the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ so we're wanting to live a life that makes sense in that day of celebrating

Jesus Christ and being found in him point four we pray for all unbelievers to come to a saving knowledge of the truth through Jesus Christ we pray for all unbelievers!

to come to a saving knowledge of the truth through Jesus Christ undergirding all that he has said the apostle says there is one God and one mediator between God and men the man Christ Jesus

who gave himself as a ransom for all there is one God a most central religion the Lord our God is one and he is the one God over all it's fundamental to the Christian or to Jewish religion and to the Christian religion and it's foundational to the mission the idea there's no other gods but this one God it's what propels us into the world to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ there's only one God to whom you will give an account only one right in the end and there's even more one mediator between God and man the man Christ Jesus there's no question we need a mediator between us and

God God is holy we are sinful we need someone to mediate but the striking thing is Jesus does not mediate like other people mediate you call in a mediator when the family problems are just too much you call in a mediator to help you figure out who's right you know you 45% right and they're 55% right or what's going on who needs to own what who needs to confess what but that's not the way Jesus mediates he mediates by putting himself in exchange for the guilty party to give them something else he gives himself as a ransom for all that's the way he brings this mediation in exchange for forgiveness peace and acceptance to all who hear Paul says this is the testimony we have the testimony given at the proper time it is a gospel it is a good news story it's not advice not counsel not three things you must do it is news of what

God has done how he stepped in it's a message for all people because God desires all people to be saved and gave himself as a ransom for all people and so we're sent on the mission to proclaim martin Lloyd Jones who I began this sermon with was one of the best preachers of the 1900s in his biography they tell a story of a man named Staffordshire Bill in the town where Lloyd Jones preached Staffordshire Bill was known throughout the town as a drunk a foul man with very few moral standards and filthy language he was sitting in the pub one night perhaps just miles away from where Lloyd Jones was preaching alone helpless and depressed he overheard someone talking about the church down the street and how the preacher said nobody is helpless there is hope for everybody

[ 39 : 46 ] Staffordshire Bill immediately sobered up and began to wonder if there was hope for him he set off to go to church the next week he was too scared to go he set off to go the second week after hearing this news but they were already singing and he was late so he turned around and went back home he set off to go to the church the third week he was lingering outside when someone said are you going to come in Bill come in and sit with me that night the town drunk Staffordshire Bill passed from condemnation to life the old passed away all things became new in his life he's passing one member of the church on the way out of the assembly on the way out of the meeting when someone said

Miss Jones Miss Jones this is Staffordshire Bill they say that Bill had an agonizing look on his face as if he had just been dealt a blow he said oh no oh no that's a bad name for a bad old man I am William Thomas now Bill was never the same his transformation was obvious to the town his battered old face beat up in years of heavy drinking radiated he was at the church every time the doors were open no longer in the pub three years later Lloyd Jones and his wife were called in to be at his bedside as he went to be with the Lord completely at peace guys that's our mission to take the gospel to those the world says there's no more hope for him there's no more hope for her there's no more hope for them

Christ died as a ransom for all people Christ died for you you may be here and your life not look much different from this man this is a message we have for you the message of Jesus Christ God has come the rich has come for the poor that he might raise up the poor he's come for the hopeless and the broken he's come to reconcile you to God you're aware of some of your problems maybe financial or relational or marital or whatever but he's come to reconcile and bring about a change in your most serious problem your sin against God there's one God to whom you must give an account the holy God and he has come to offer you salvation through him through Jesus Christ he is the way and the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through him this is the message we have and this is why we pray may

God help us father in heaven we cast ourselves onto you run to you and we pray we thank you we have access to you through Jesus Christ we thank you that we know you truly we thank you that we have a mediator advocate thank you that all of our anxieties and worries are in your hands trust ourselves to you completely and sincerely now and always in Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Syneky for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at trinity grace Athens dot com di