

**“Pray”**  
**I Timothy 2: 1-8a**  
**September 16, 2007**

This past Tuesday marked the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of one of the most horrific days in the history of our nation, if not the world. →9/11/2001 was a day that changed the world forever. For those few hours on that otherwise beautiful September morning, it seemed that the world was turned upside down and left the entire planet feeling anxious, uncertain and wondering if we would ever know peace again. It seemed as if the world was falling apart.

However, as fragmented, torn apart and turned upside down as the world might have felt that morning, even as countries, regions, religions and ideologies began choosing up sides in the unfortunate war in which we are still engaged, there was one thing that united, and was held in common by nearly every man, woman, and child on the planet that day. That uniting force was →prayer. In all my 47 years on earth, I can't even begin to think of another day or a time when more members of the human race were joined together in prayer. On 9/11 and for many days and weeks following, it seems that pretty much everyone, including those Islamic extremists were engaged in fervent and heart wrenching prayer.

Arab and American, Muslim, Jew, and Christian alike, we were all engaged in prayer that day. That much is sure. On the surface, this sounds like a good thing. Kind of like that old →Coke-a- cola commercial where all the children of the world joined hands singing, “*I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony,*” the idea of the world being joined together in prayer sounds like a joyous affair. But the reality was far from harmonious. Instead, the reality is that the prayers offered on that day most likely sounded to God like the dissonant chatter of millions of voices, each one singing a different song in a variety of languages and keys.

→The Islamic extremist praised God for the events that day and prayed for the destruction of our nation and the American way of life. →Many in our country prayed for justice, Old Testament justice, eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth kind of justice to be rained down from heaven on the individuals who were responsible for this heinous act. →Many prayed for the safety of their loved ones, while others prayed that even more lives would be sacrificed. You see, there were →millions of voices offering up millions of

ideas indicating millions of suggestions to God as to just exactly what God should or should not do, and to whom God should or should not do whatever in response to the events of that day.

Lots of people were praying, but many of our prayers disagreed, and this reality forces us to address difficult questions concerning the will of God, as well as the place and purpose of prayer in the world of faith. Predictably, similar questions were being asked by a young man in the Middle East a couple thousand years ago. His name was → Timothy, and fortunately for him, there was another older, wiser man named Paul who took him under his wing and offered him tremendous wisdom and guidance concerning difficult questions like → “*What is God’s will?*” and “*What is the purpose of prayer?*”

And I believe that this morning’s passage from Paul’s first letter to Timothy offers us all keen insight into both these questions as we seek to come to grips not just with the spider web of pain and problems that have spiraled out of the events of 9/11, but also with the everyday quagmire of difficult, and even not so difficult questions and decisions that life demands from us on a day to day basis.

And the first thing that we learn from Paul’s letter is that → God’s will, and the purpose of prayer are one and the same. That will and purpose is peace. You see, the image that God had in mind when God created the world and it’s inhabitants, as well as God’s reason for asking us to regularly engage him in the conversation commonly known as prayer is in order that peace might be made known. As Paul wrote to Timothy, → “*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.*” I Timothy 2:1-2

You see, God’s will for you, me, and every single woman, man and child on the planet is that “*we might lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.*” And the way toward achieving such a life is through the offering of supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for all men. To put it simply, → God wants peace, and the way that leads to this sort of Godly, divine peace is a life of prayer. But it’s extremely important that we take note for whom these supplications,

prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be offered, *“all men, kings and all who are in high positions.”*

God is telling us that peace is his will for His world and our lives, and that → peace comes when we begin to pray for other people. And that’s the problem that a lot of us have with our prayer life. Far too frequently we approach prayer as if it were the creation of a → Christmas wish list where we petition our heavenly Santa Claus for our heart’s desire. And if not that, then we come to prayer as if it were a → corporate complaint box where we point out all the ways in which we believe that the boss is not doing things right, right, of course being defined by the way that we think that things should be done.

Now hear me when I say that praying for oneself is not a bad or wrong thing when real need is present. But the problem with so many of our prayers is we never get beyond praying for ourselves, and our wishes. → We pray believing that the job of prayer is to petition and persuade the heart and mind of God to do our bidding. We tell God how we want it and we expect God to listen, and to hop to, re-arranging our lives and the world according to our will and our direction.

When all the while, God’s purpose in prayer is quite the opposite. Once again, God’s will in prayer is peace and → peace comes not when we change God’s mind, but when God changes ours. Peace comes not when our every wish and whim come true, but → when our vision and our passion and our thoughts and our actions come in line with the vision the will, and the passion of God.

For example, on 9/11, as I have previously stated → the men who hijacked the planes on that fateful morning were most likely deeply immersed in prayer. Prayer so fervent and so earnest that it enabled them to sacrifice their very lives for their misguided cause. However, it would be my opinion that these misguided men were also offering up misguided prayers. They were not praying for others, they were praying for themselves and their own ideals. They were praying that God would hear their prayers and join them in jihad and wake up our nation to the truth as they saw it.

They were praying so loud and so hard that it made it impossible for them to hear God’s voice. → They were praying to God, but listening to their own anger. I have no doubt that God was screaming out to them that morning to

turn around and walk away from those airplanes. I have no doubt that God did what God could do to change their hearts and minds that morning, but they were not willing to listen or to change, because they were so intent on directing God's actions and the world's will that day.

But there were others that day whose prayers were very different. → Men and women, policemen, fire fighters, soldiers and other volunteers who heard the anguished cry of God following the devastation that morning. And they descended on the wreckage of those buildings and risked life and limb in the effort to clean up the horrendous mess that hatred created that morning. You see, they prayed to God asking → *“What in the world should I do in response to this disaster?”* And God answered them saying *“Go, try and save your brothers and sisters and offer aid to those who have suffered such a devastating loss.”* Their prayer was about and for others and as Paul said to Timothy, → *“This is good and it is acceptable in the sight of God our savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”*

And the truth is that → peace isn't achieved through hatred, fighting and bombs. Permanent, eternal peace isn't won on the battlefield, it is won in the hearts and minds of men and women who fall on their knees begging God to reveal his will, and the part that he would have them play in the work of bringing God's peaceable kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. Peace comes when we all begin to see the needs of others as more pressing than our own. Peace comes when we can pray as Jesus did in the garden of Gethemene, *“Not my will but thine be done.”*

Pray for all men, and dedicate yourself to the work of peace. As Paul said, → *“I desire then that in every place men and women should pray.”*  
*Amen.*