

The Church's Corporate Prayer

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[0 : 00] And so we're now going to turn to our Bible reading. Willie Phillip, our senior minister, is continuing our time thinking about our corporate calling! and mission as a church. So do grab your Bible, and if you don't have one, we've got plenty of visitors Bibles spread around, red Bibles, the front and the side at the back. If you're not sure where to get one, the welcome team will be looking out, and if you wave your hand, I'm sure I can bring one to you.

And we're going to be reading in a couple of places, so do put your finger in Matthew chapter 9, ready to turn there in a few moments, but then also opening up at 1 Timothy chapter 2.

So page 991 and 814 respectively in the visitors Bibles, but opening first, 1 Timothy chapter 2, and we'll read from verses 1 to 8.

Paul writes, 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 the knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

[1 : 52] For this, I was appointed a preacher and an apostle. I am telling the truth. I am not lying. A teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling. I'll turn over to Matthew chapter 9, then, and we'll read verses 35 to the end of the chapter.

Matthew 9, verse 35. And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every affliction.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, Amen.

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Amen. First of all, at 1 Timothy chapter 2.

[3 : 26] And we'll be looking there and in one or two other places this evening, because if you were here last Sunday, you'll know that we began a new little series, a thematic series on the mission of the church. And we're looking at different aspects of that mission.

And the calling, really, the calling of all of us in the church to play our part in that. And the passage that we read first this evening in 1 Timothy 2, I think, helps us to see, among other things, very clearly, why it is that we have a mission to this world.

Have a look at 1 Timothy 2, verse 5. The Christian church has a mission because, for, there is one God. One God. One God.

So whatever your nationality, whatever your culture, whatever your color, there is only one God.

There is one creator and Lord of the universe. Only one.

And, if you read on, you'll see there is only one way for anyone, in any place, to come to know God.

Do you see? There is but one mediator between God and men. The man Christ Jesus.

[4 : 46] That is the message of the whole of the Bible. The God of heaven himself. Become man in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we might fully know him as not only creator and Lord, but as savior of all who trust him.

And, therefore, if that is the case, and that is the case, then, clearly, all people must hear of him.

Look at verse 4. Because God himself declares, you see, that God, our savior, desires all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

Because there is salvation, no other way. So God has, therefore, given this task of bringing people to the knowledge of his saving truth to his church.

The whole church. Not just a few in the church with particular gifts and callings and ministries.

Remember what Paul says to the church in Philippi.

That he desires that with one mind, striving side by side, they'll be doing so for the faith of the gospel. And that's a call to every single believer in the Christian church.

[6 : 05] To play our part in the church's corporate task of making disciples. Of bringing people to a knowledge of the truth that they might be saved. It's the church's corporate task together.

Not that we should be disciple-making disciples, but that we should be a disciple-making church.

That's the Great Commission. It's to the church together. And so last time we saw that that means, therefore, and this is logical and obvious, that the church's corporate priority must be to prioritize that real gospel mindset.

Unless our own lives, personally, unless our corporate church life does that, then we won't have that fruitful partnership in real gospel mission. It's just basic.

Basic to everything that the Lord Jesus and his apostles show us about what the absolute priority of our lives as followers of Jesus is to be. Seek first a good job and a house and a good school for your kids and then find a church to come to.

No, it's not that, is it? Seek first the kingdom of God. And all these other peripheral things that don't matter nearly as much will be added to you. That's the priority.

[7 : 20] And so unless we see that in everything that we do and everything that we think, everything to be done to the glory of God, you remember we saw last time in 1 Corinthians 10, not pleasing ourselves, not prioritizing our own lives, but living sacrificially, as Paul tells us, for the sake of others, that they might be saved.

Unless that is the priority of all of us, then we won't have that real partnership and mission that Jesus and the apostles are talking about and are telling us his ives.

So we should never think, well, if only we could get a better preacher, a better evangelist, better people like that for our church, then everything would be fantastic. Everything would be better. Well, perhaps it would in some ways, but no, it wouldn't in all the ways that really matter.

Not unless there is a real partnership of people prioritizing a real gospel mindset together as the church for the sake of Christ and his kingdom, seeking first these things.

That is the organ of mission for the church. That's the corporate priority. Well, that was last week's sermon, but tonight I want to move on and think about a second thing that we are all, all of us called to in this fruitful partnership of real mission, and that is prayer together.

[8 : 48] Prayer together for the real gospel means. We are not all called to be apostles like Paul, are we? In fact, none of us today are called to be apostles like Paul.

The apostles were a once and for all time in the life of the church. We're not even all called to full-time service in terms of things like preaching or teaching or evangelism or whatever it might be. We're not all called to do that full-time in the sense that we give up our job and our livelihood and are paid and set apart to do that. But we are all called, according to the New Testament, as the church, all called to prayer and to prioritize prayer, both in our individual lives, but much more importantly, in the corporate life of the church.

To pray together for the real gospel means, for the means of God's great salvation, the means of his mission. If you look again at these verses that we read together, the first few verses of 1 Timothy 2, you will see that that is what Paul is talking about.

You see the first priority for the household of God, the church of the living God, as he calls it in chapter 3 verse 15. First of all, verse 1, I urge prayer.

[10 : 13] First of all, I urge prayer. Now, when you think about it, that is obvious really, because it's God's mission. He is the sovereign Lord.

He alone. And only He can open eyes. Only He can open hearts. Only He can change and transform people's lives. You can't do that. Neither can I.

So above all else, if people are to come to a knowledge of the truth, a saving knowledge of God, then God must be at work in the midst. God's Spirit alone can do these things. That is the means of real mission.

So we need to be asking Him to do these things. And that's why Paul says, first of all, prayer. It's absolutely basic. It is absolutely basic, isn't it?

And yet, I do think that many, many have forgotten that today. Even among evangelical Bible-believing churches. Plenty of focus on action, and events, and courses, and methods, and training, and all of these things are necessary.

[11 : 18] Of course they are, as long as they're properly gospel-oriented, and in terms of their actions and methods, and so on, obviously. They're all necessary and a part of things. But, unless we are very clear beyond all of that, that it's God alone, that it's God's Spirit alone who can change lives, who can work real salvation, real transformation, unless we're absolutely clear on that, then we're in very real danger.

because God will not yield His glory to another. And He won't be at work in grace and power amidst His people, unless it is clear to everyone that it is Him who is at work, and no one else is stealing His glory.

Unless it's obvious that everything that is happening is by His hand and not by us. And so you see, a praying church, a church that is always deeply conscious of the sovereign work of God alone in salvation, that's the only safe church, really, for God to really be at work in power in the midst. Without Christians becoming full of pride, full of self-congratulation, that somehow their latest thing is what's having all the effect here. And that's why, you see, in the New Testament, it's so clear that the first priority and the fruitful partnership of the church's corporate mission together is always prayer.

Pray for the real means of all true mission. And that is the work of God's Holy Spirit through His church reaching the world. Now what we can really do this evening is highlight some important things about this prayer that we're all called to be part of.

[13 : 11] And so I want to focus just on three specific things that the New Testament tells us, particularly, that we are to pray for. First of all, we're to pray for the world. That is for the people who need the gospel.

But we're also told to pray for the workers. That is for those who will preach the gospel, proclaim the gospel. And then, very importantly, the apostles, and Paul in particular, tells us very clearly we're to pray for the Word of God itself.

That is, we're to pray for the proclamation, for the progress of the Word of God in that mission. So first of all, pray for the world. And this is what Paul is focusing on here in these verses in 1 Timothy chapter 2 in the passage that we read.

And we can see how expansive Paul's scope is for our prayers. There's two distinct aspects here of the general prayer for the world and for its people.

First of all, look at verse 1. He urges us to pray for all people. Urges that supplications, prayer, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.

[14 : 23] He's saying all kinds of prayer for all kinds of people. very expansive. It's very comprehensive. And the reason is given, as I've said very clearly there in verse 4.

We pray expansively for all the people of the world because, verse 4, our expansive God desires for all people to be saved, to come to a knowledge of the truth.

What he's saying is we're not to be narrow in our prayers. We're not to be inward-looking in our prayers in the church.

God is not. He's outward-looking towards the world. Not just inward-looking towards us. God so loved the world, says John in John 3.16, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

And just so, Paul says here, it pleases God our Savior, verse 3, when we also look with love to the world. When we cry to God to show his grace and mercy to the people of this world, even to those who are enemies presently of his church.

[15 : 40] Paul himself, earlier on in this letter, is extensive in telling us, reminding us, just how much he himself was an enemy once, an insolent opposer of God, and yet, God turned his life around.

So it pleases God our Savior when that is the focus of our prayers. Pray for people to come to know the truth in Jesus. and to be saved. And when we're praying like that, we can be sure from reading a passage like this that we are praying in the will of God.

We're praying the kinds of things that God wants us to be praying for. I think that gives us great confidence, doesn't it, to know that. To know that we can pray that way because God tells us to.

Sometimes we can be praying, can't we, and we're not sure exactly what the will of God is. But this kind of prayer, Paul is telling us, is pleasing to God our Savior.

So we can pray confidently. You can pray confidently about your friends, about your loved ones, about your family, about your workmates. Pray that they will come to a knowledge of the truth and find salvation.

[16:53] Pray that they'll come along with you on a Sunday to a church service to hear about the gospel and the truth of the gospel. That kind of prayer is pleasing to God our Savior because it is in line with the heart and the mind and the focus of God our Savior.

And so as John Newton was teaching us in that hymn that we sang, come my soul, your plea prepared. Jesus loves to answer prayer, especially that kind of prayer. That should give us great confidence.

And if we doubt, if we think, well, it's just too big a job for the Lord to turn that person's life around, or remember the next verse, you're coming to a king. Large petitions with you bring.

Don't hold back. Don't have too small a view. Look at these words here and see what Paul is telling us about the mind and the heart and the scope and the will of God our Savior. And if we believe that, then it means that a big vision in prayer should mark our church prayer meetings.

I'm not sure that is always true in many churches, is it? Because it's very easy to just quickly focus on the personal things, the things about our own needs, our own concerns, our own life in our own church, taken up with people's illnesses, with people's struggles, and all of these sorts of things.

[18:14] Now, of course, there's a place for that. Of course there is. In everything with prayer and supplication, Paul tells us we can come to the Lord. But if that's all there is and if that's the chief focus and if that's the first focus of the church's prayers, then I think the New Testament would suggest to us, well, there's something wrong there.

That's why, by the way, we try in our Wednesday church gatherings when we gather together for prayer, we always start with prayer for those furthest away. We always start with our partners who are all around the world.

We work backwards and only at the end we're praying particularly for what you might call domestic issues within our own congregation. That's deliberate because we're trying to be looking outwards and having a great vision, a big vision, a world vision in prayer as the Lord Jesus has.

Pray for all people, all kinds of people in all kinds of places because God, our Savior, has His eyes on exactly these. So it's worth us asking ourselves, isn't it, is that the spirit of my own personal prayers?

Is that the spirit in evidence in our church's prayers? But then in verse 2, not just praying for all people but praying for those in authority, for kings, for all who are in high positions that we might lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way which is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior.

[19:48] Well, that's quite relevant, I think, isn't it, in a week when we've got an election to our parliament coming up. I'm sure that that is much in our prayers. But notice, you see, the aim of that prayer too is exactly the same, isn't it?

It's for peace, it's for stability in society. Why? So that, well, what Paul is saying is so that the church can have the best conditions possible for its mission. So the church can go about its task wherever possible.

in a dignified way, enjoying freedom, enjoying, indeed, the protection from the powers that be that the powers that be ought to be giving to those who speak the words of the one who employs the power that be, which is God above all.

It stands to reason, doesn't it, that it's easier and better for Christian witness in a place if their ruling bodies give peace and stability and freedom rather than oppression and conflict and war and so on. Of course, God is at work whatever is happening. But we're being told to pray for things which will ease the work of gospel mission. And again, it's so practical, isn't it?

[21:00] It's so obvious what to pray for our government and nation because if we've got a gospel mindset, then the things that we'll be praying when we think about governments and politicians and leaders and so on will be guided by the things that really matter to favor the mission of the Christian gospel.

So, for many, many years when I was young, it was common among Christian churches for people to be praying for the downfall of the oppressive communist regimes in Eastern Europe so that the

church would have freedom so that people would not be being locked up for serving Christ so that the gospel would be able to spread.

And likewise, I think today we should be praying in the same way for our own and nation that our governments would not pass more laws and rules that restrict our freedom to proclaim the scriptures, to proclaim the Bible.

So-called anti-discrimination laws which so often actually discriminate against those who are seeking to proclaim the truth. Many things impede the gospel. the proposed anti-conversion therapy so-called laws.

But actually what they are is anti-conversion trying to stop anybody preaching repentance and change in the name of Christ for example. That's our priority.

[22 : 23] It's not about our finances much as it would be nicer to have more of our finances looked after. More that it would be wonderful if our jobs got easier and things cost us less and the potholes were filled and all these sorts of things.

Especially the latter actually in Glasgow. But that's not our priority is it? It's praying for things that will see the gospel advance. Now that will challenge us in our politics perhaps.

Everybody here will have different views on different things politically. We'll be on different parts of the political spectrum more to the left or more to the right or whatever it is. More Eurosceptic or more Europhile more pro-Atlantic whatever it is.

That's fine all of those things but the real question is the challenge to pray for that which will most advance the gospel of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we have to be willing to say that the things that will most do that may be the things that most impede my own particular bank balance. well which comes first?

[23 : 37] Pray for rulers. Pray for our own understanding of how we should be prioritizing these things and the voting that we'll do in this coming week.

But notice another priority of this kind of prayer. Paul says first of all I urge prayers yes but notice also in verse eight there's a particular challenge isn't there to men I desire that in every place the men should pray now he's not saying that women don't need to pray because in verse nine the likewise likewise women links it and he's talking there about the attitude in which women should be praying men should be praying without quarreling and without anger and he has other things to address to women but it is interesting that he prioritizes that task to men why do you think that is well perhaps women don't need such a strong nudge as that to get involved in the prayer of the church history and experience would tend to tell you that most church prayer meetings are dominated by women not men

I'm thankful that we have many men at our prayer meeting but it's a challenge isn't it to all of us in the church it's a challenge to men that we have to take there from Paul in most churches the truth is the men are absent largely from prayer well Paul says in every place I urge that men should pray taking the lead in prayer and where we're not seeing perhaps the power of God at work in the church the results that we want in terms of faith being born and churches growing and people coming to follow Christ we need to ask ourselves if the things that Paul makes absolute priority for the church we are making absolute priority for the church the place of prayer in all these ways and particularly the place of men in prayer some of you men don't take this very seriously well Paul's speaking to you I'm just the messenger I'll leave that with you two things God makes us first priority and church history teaches us amply I think that serious prayer and God's mighty power at work in saving people bringing them to a knowledge of the truth those two things go hand in hand remember some years ago reading a book I think it's a chap called Arthur Fawcett a book about the Cambus Lang revival which took place here very near to us in 1742 and it was part of a great movement of prayer not just in this country but transatlantic there were concerts of prayer they called them on both sides of the Atlantic and it was through that and associated with all of that that extraordinary things happened in this country and across the Atlantic in North America well look at history we're not seeing these things maybe we need to at least ask the question what place are we giving to the church's corporate prayer and it's true also isn't it on an individual level nearly always when somebody comes to faith in

Christ it turns out that there's been somebody who has been faithfully praying for them I was speaking to somebody just recently who come to the Lord Jesus Christ having brought up in a Christian home but had gone far away and he said to me my mother has been praying for me every day for all of these years well God answered those prayers and that man is now loving and

worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ so yes it is God's work of course it is and God wants us to be ever conscious that it is his work and that's why he urges us first of all to pray so that we see that when God does work it is God working in answer to our prayers that he can't answer prayer unless we ask in prayer and Jesus says that to us doesn't he very plainly you don't have because you don't ask and what he's saying is don't assume God knows already

[28 : 13] I want you to ask so that I can answer and then you'll know it's God who's done it prayer for the world for the people who need to come to a knowledge of the truth that's the first thing that's the church in real partnership in mission and a church that is in mission in that way will be a church that is marked by constant prayer for the world corporate prayer together expansive prayer informed prayers and prayer that is led not just by women but by men in the church that's the first thing prayer for the world second is prayer for the workers now do turn with me back to Matthew chapter 9 and those few verses that we read at the end because we here have the words of the Lord Jesus himself very well known words but perhaps not always entirely understood one of the real encouragements

I think there is in the church in many places today is that there is a great interest in training gospel workers of various kinds we see all of that in our close relationship with the Cornhill training course for example and training people for real ministry and real mission not just dry academic theology one of the tragedies of theological education which has so damaged the church in recent generations has been not just that so much of the theological training has been liberal and skeptical the antithesis of trusting the scriptures but even where it's been evangelical so often it's been just focused on academia it's been so removed from the coalface of real mission it's been often an ivory tower of abstruse theological abstractions so it's one of the great encouragements today that there is a real interest in training properly within the church for real mission and at some years back there was an organization set up called 938 for that very purpose and it's named after Matthew 9 verse 38 here and its aim is to encourage training of gospel workers but and I'm very for that and that's terrific but I do want you to notice what Jesus actually says here in verse 38 have a look he doesn't say does he send out workers he says pray to the lord of the harvest for him to send out laborers into his harvest field pray for god to call people into the work of gospel labor because it's god's harvest he's prepared it jesus says verse 37 the harvest is plentiful that's a great encouragement isn't it because there are multitudes jesus is saying that god is preparing to call into eternal life to bring to a knowledge of the truth so they should be saved and that's the great thing isn't it that it's the fact of god's sovereignty in salvation that should drive us into evangelism with great confidence because god has declared the harvest is plentiful but what he's saying here is also that it's god himself who calls and gifts the workers needed to participate in that mission there's a very striking example of this in the acts of the apostles in acts chapter 13 if you read it later on you'll see it's when the whole church in antioch a great missionary church when the whole church was praying no doubt following jesus command here lord send out laborers into your harvest field when the whole church was praying we're told the holy spirit set apart saul and barnabas for the work to which i have called them god said set apart saul and barnabas for the work to which i have called them so the church is praying in line with christ's command praying for workers praying for god to raise up workers for his harvest field and god answered them and he called paul and barnabas into that ministry that's a very important verse because there are people around today who who want to diminish the idea that god calls people into particular ministries i've heard people claim that the new testament has no usage of that word calling at all it's all up to us in the church to pull people out to send them out and to train them up well i'm all for identifying people training them and sending them out but i'm afraid in next chapter 13 we're told absolutely explicitly that while the church was praying god called these particular people to that particular task now we're not all called to be specialist full-time evangelists or preachers or church planters or any other specific thing we're not all called to do that god does call certain people to do that in the answer to his people's prayers but we are all called to be part of that mission through united prayer for god to call people to his harvest fields because that's what jesus tells us to do and notice the motivation there in verse 36 you see do you see it's the deep compassion of the lord isn't it for lost sinners that's what what drives him to tell us to pray jesus sees the helplessness of people who don't know him who don't know god we maybe don't even see that but jesus sees that that these people are like sheep with no shepherd they have no leader to show them the way in life they have no guardian to care for them in life and they certainly have no savior to deliver them

into eternal life so if we want to be compassionate people like the lord jesus then he's saying to us well pray pray for gospel workers for those who will proclaim the good news to the lost sheep of this world so that this great harvest of god that god is preparing so that we may be gathered in i would love it if in every every congregation of the christian church today there were committed members to their own 938 movement to people who are praying earnestly!

specifically that the lord would raise up and train and send out workers to his harvest field and i think there's something certainly wrong isn't there in a church like ours if that's not happening if the lord is not calling out people and raising them up and sending them into his harvest field he's doing that i'm praising god for that and we're seeing that we were here on wednesday evening hearing and seeing so many folk of whom that's true over the years and it's been true and it's still true but if we want more we need to be asking god don't we why don't some of you resolve to do that to get together and pray specifically for that for god to call out laborers to his harvest field from young people here even from very young people here all these little ones who a little bit later on will be running around our feet knocking us over and and it's wonderful to see isn't it but praying that the lord would have his hand upon them from these earliest days and that god will be shaping and touching their hearts and their lives and one day when they're older using them in all kinds of different ministries in this nation and in other nations of the world wouldn't that be a great thing for you to be praying for not just as a one-off but regularly making that your mission

[36 : 30] Jesus loves to answer prayer he himself has bid you pray therefore will not turn away you don't have because you don't ask if nobody else will join you well do it yourself it's one of the joys of prayer isn't it that it's one of the things that you can do maybe at a stage in life when perhaps you can't actively do as many other things as you used to be able to do I'll tell you about one of the greatest prayer warriors in this regard that I've known she was a lady a retired missionary in our congregation in Holyrood Abbey in Edinburgh when I was young she had been a missionary all her life she was in China and was thrown out when all the missionaries were thrown out under Mao she then was in other places in Africa Malawi and various other places and she'd retired and just after my father just before my father moved to Edinburgh in 1958 she was living nearby not in the parish but nearby in a retirement home for missionaries and she started coming to the church and actually she would say herself that her chief ministry in life began then after her retirement in fact she would say she never really understood the gospel properly until those days she spent her whole life supposedly on the mission field but never really understood the gospel extraordinary isn't it but she became an incredible prayer warrior she lived till she was just over a hundred and she had a particular burden for prayer for the young children of the congregation and for the divinity students the men who were in training for ministry and there were many of them and she prayed faithfully for those and she had certain favorites one of whom was the son of the minister who's standing in front of you right now and she prayed for me all the time she used to write to me when I went off to university she wrote me a letter a handwritten letter every single week and in it she put two pine notes and two stamps and said the pine notes are to make sure you don't starve and the two stamps are to make sure you write to your parents and tell them how you're getting on so after the end of university

I had a folder of stamps about this fat I used to sell them to make money I don't think I wrote my poor parents a single letter ever but she prayed she prayed for me she prayed for others and you know many many of those young folk that she prayed for so regularly are in all kinds of different Christian ministries today all over the place and probably for her last ten years of life she could never get out to church except occasionally but she prayed and if you didn't tell her what was happening she would be on to you wanting to know so she could pray and I have no doubt that there are many many people serving the Lord in the world today in answer to her prayers her prayers for workers and God answers those prayers because he tells us that this is what we're to pray for we know it is what he wants and it's not it's not a special quality of prayer you don't have to be a specially sanctified prayer warrior the Lord answers our prayers even when they're fitful prayers even when we even when we're not really sure he's going to answer us

I was speaking to the Cornhill students this past week about how Cornhill began and I was saying about how Edward and I at the beginning we were we felt we needed 12 students to make the thing work do you remember Edward and we were praying for 12 students and by the July of that first summer we were due to start in September we had 11 students and I remember saying to each other well that's an answer to prayer isn't it we're not that literalistic and then a month later the Lord

gave us a 12th one so you see he answered our prayers even though we were feeble and weren't really even asking properly but we can all join in this 938 prayer can't we and maybe some of us could have a real particular commitment to that maybe as I've said meet with others specifically to pray for God to be raising up workers for the harvest field labourers both now but also in the future in future generations the children now even those unborn now we're coming to a king large petitions we should bring and it's not just a ministry for older folk although it is a wonderful ministry for older folk you don't have to wait till you're 90 to start praying for these things nothing in the Bible to say young people can't pray some of you maybe think that maybe think that's a thing for older folk if you've never ever been to the corporate prayer gatherings of the church where we pray together for the work of

Christ throughout the world you've no idea what you're missing out on you're depriving yourself I'd encourage you to come although if you're young and you're praying for the Lord to send out workers into the harvest field that's a dangerous thing to pray maybe you should wait till you're quite old before you start praying that in case he might send you somewhere you didn't really fancy going but actually if you think you're safe when you're old you be careful because God sometimes surprises you at any age doesn't he you should read John Piper's book don't waste your life he's very clear there's no such thing as retirement for the Christian life but still it is a very important ministry and I do commend it especially to older members to be praying for these things to be praying for our young people to be praying and asking the Lord to send out laborers to his harvest field and to take an interest in the young folk in our church if a church like ours where children are raised in Christian homes and have

Christian friends and are given Christian teaching from others and are able to look up to those who are a bit older than them and learn from them and so if a church like ours who can prepare people for labor in the Lord's kingdom from their earliest days if we cannot produce Christian leaders of the future then friends there is no hope for the Christian church in this country is there pray for them encourage them take an interest in them mentor them financially support them when they maybe do want to go and get training and so on who knows one of these might be the next Billy Graham or the like prayer for the world prayer for the workers but thirdly a very important emphasis in the New Testament is also prayer for the word itself for the gospel proclamation for the gospel progress when you read the New Testament letters you find that that is what the apostle Paul asked the church to pray for more than anything else at all it's what the church itself prays for

[43 : 40] Acts chapter 4 Lord look upon their threats and grant your servants to continue speaking your word with boldness if you were there on Wednesday night did you notice that when we heard from honey Kumar in India that was what he was asking us to pray for courage and boldness not just for protection if you turn back to Colossians have a look at Colossians chapter 4 just a little passage there I want to just read Colossians 4 verse 2 because this shows us Paul says continue steadfastly in prayer being watchful in it with thanksgiving at the same time pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the word to declare to declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I'm in prison that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak pray for the word for an open door and for utterance he says to be given to me

I want to ask you are you praying regularly for that do you pray that when you come to church on Sunday do you pray for those who are going to stand up here and open the word of God to you brothers pray for us that the word of God may speed ahead and be honored as happened among you that's what he says to the Thessalonian church praying that people would receive it not as the word of men but as they did as the word of God pray for the word pray for the gospel why does why does Paul crave prayer so much for the gospel so precisely well because without prayer it isn't gospel proclamation at all that's what he's saying there's no power of God do you think that's strange listen to what he says in Ephesians chapter 6 you'll know these words very well in Ephesians 6 verse 17 take the sword of the!

which is the word of in the spirit with all prayers and supplication to that end keep alert with all perseverance making supplication for all the saints but also for me that words that utterance may be given to me in opening my mouth to boldly proclaim the mystery of the gospel that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak do you see how closely connected the proclamation of the word is with prayer take in the new testament prayer and corporate prayer especially is so intimately linked to the ministry of the word it's inseparable from it take the sword of the spirit which is the word of God praying at all times you see the logic there there's the sword of the spirit there's the word of God

which is active but it's active it's wielded through prayer and not without prayer and the prayer in view there is very clearly the corporate prayer of the whole church that they would proclaim the mystery empowered by the prayers of the people so what he's saying there is it's not just the preachers who are important it's the prayers you need both otherwise there will be no proclamation no power it's not within the power of the preacher alone to preach with power all of his efforts even his own prayers can't achieve that

Paul is saying without the prayers of the church we need it pray for the preacher that God would give the words and pray for the hearers pray for all the saints he's saying to receive that word! the!

[48 : 10] opening the door, making the message spread.

And thirdly, of course, God himself, the Spirit of God, is at work, moving in the midst, mightily, as his voice is heard through prayerful proclamation.

So we're to pray for the word of the gospel as it goes forth, and in doing so, you see, we are in partnership with one another in that mission. And not just with one another, but with the sovereign God himself, whose Spirit is the true means of all real mission.

That is what the Bible teaches us so plainly. And you see, the Scriptures are so practical about this. People get tied up in knots of unanswerable questions about the mechanics of preaching or the mystery in it and all the rest of it.

But the Scriptures are just so simple. They just recognize very clearly three things. The work of preaching, the work of prayer, and the work of God. And they point to that corporate context in which God himself has chosen to encounter his people through the supernatural gifts of his Spirit, proclaiming the Word in the midst.

[49 : 37] But it happens through the preachers and the intercessors both. And where there's a right understanding of these things in God's church, where the whole church is involved together in prayer for the proclamation, for God himself to speak in power, then we will see evidence of God's power at work in the midst.

Prayer-less preaching isn't really gospel preaching at all. That's what the apostles are trying to tell us. Without the prayers of the saints, the sword of the Spirit is not active.

It's just dead words. And without the sword of the Spirit, there is no spiritual power because God is not at work. Human eloquence cannot change any heart.

No persuasiveness or cleverness or anything of that kind can bring the dead to life. Only God can do that. There's no spiritual power at all in prayerless proclamation.

And I do suspect that that is in large part the reason for the lack of power that there seems to be in so many Christian churches today. Don't let that be the case here.

[50 : 57] Don't let that be so among us. We're not all called to be the preachers speaking God's words, but we are all called to be part of that proclamation ministry through our prayers.

Through our prayers together, because it's the prayers of the saints that wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Now, you may have never quite thought of it like that, but I want you to think of it like that very clearly and to ponder it.

All of our prayers together focused on the proclamation of the gospel. That is what, Paul says, opens the door through which the gospel of grace comes home into people's hearts, touches their lives, changes them forever, brings them to a knowledge of the truth and salvation.

And that's what we're all called to together as part of Christ's church. And Jesus says, when you ask, you'll receive. God answers prayers.

And He does it in such a way that we have to acknowledge that it's His work and not ours. That it's He who is transforming people, not us.

[52 : 10] That He is the one bringing in the harvest, not us. I remember years ago hearing Martin Allen speak at a conference to pastors, and he was speaking about evangelism in their parish.

And I'll never forget him saying that there was a season that they had when they were particularly devoted to prayer, for mission, but they were also putting on all kinds of events, all kinds of things in all sorts of different ways in a great effort to make the gospel known.

And he said the Lord did answer their prayers. He was at work. But not a single person came to faith through any of the special things that they put on. And yet Sunday by Sunday in the ordinary church services, there were people coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he said, you know, the Lord was teaching us that He was honoring our prayers. He was honoring our efforts. He was answering our prayers, but He was doing it in such a way as there was no danger whatsoever that we could think it was because of our activities.

It was because of what He was doing in the midst. And that's the way to fruitful partnership in real gospel mission, where God receives all the glory.

[53 : 25] Pray, all of us, for the real gospel means. Because that's the way God Himself has taught us to pray. Pray for the world, for the people who need the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pray for the workers, for God to raise up and send out those who proclaim Christ. And pray for the Word itself, that doors may be opened for the gospel, that people might be saved.

Pray for the real gospel means. Well, let's pray now. Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have so wonderfully invited us to ask You.

To ask You for things that You will do that are even beyond what we can ask and even imagine. We thank You that You are the God of lavish kindness, who loves to hear and loves to answer prayer.

So help us, we pray. And draw near to us now, Lord, as we come to this table that speaks to us of that great love of all that You have done for us.

[54 : 34] And remind us, therefore, of Your great promise to be with us now and always, to the end of the age, that we should know that we're never alone in this great mission You've given us.

But You are with us in power. If only we will ask. Amen.