



YOU: Connect. Grow. Serve. Go!
Winter 2018-19 Leader Commentary

Unit 1: You on Mission

Session 1: Mission Petitions (see pp. 102-105)

The Question: How can I pray for missions?

The Point: Jesus commanded His followers to pray for missions.

Background Passage: 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Matthew 9:35-38; Acts 4:23-31

Focal Passage: 1 Timothy 2:1,3-4; Matthew 9:36-38; Acts 4:29-31

This commentary is designed to help you think about the question, “How can I pray for missions?” and drive home this one truth: Jesus commanded His followers to pray for missions.

Focus on These Points

Pray for Conversion
(1 Tim. 2:1,3-4)

Paul wrote 1 Timothy to encourage Timothy, his protégé in ministry. False doctrines focusing on genealogies and myths had diminished the Ephesus church reach and stirred confusion (1:4). The negative effects of these false teachings infiltrated their worship; improper attitudes and behaviors surfaced.

Paul underscored the need for prayer by citing four examples. Only subtle differences exist between each of them. *Petitions* are requests made for specific needs. *Prayers* is a general word to describe our reverent approach of and communion with God. *Intercessions* suggests making a sober request of God in complete confidence and trust. *Thanksgivings* commonly characterized Paul’s attitude in his prayers. Even when a rebuke followed, Paul typically started his letters with thanksgivings for God’s people. Are we thankful for God’s people, too? Even more so, are we thankful that He desires for us to draw near to Him? God is not distant. He is concerned about the affairs of His people.

Paul knew evangelism begins with prayer. Prayer shows our dependence on God to save. Paul reiterated that “God [is] our Savior” (v. 3). Our efforts alone won’t save anyone, but our prayers for others’ salvation please God because He “wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (v. 4). Praying like this—according to God’s revealed will—moves our focus toward God and away from self-centeredness. Some Christians express difficulties in knowing what to pray. A good place to start is by praying for those things we already know God desires—those things He clearly points out in Scripture.

In Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus, the term truth refers to the gospel. When Paul talks about coming to know the truth (conversion to Christianity) and being saved (repenting from sin and placing our faith in Christ) (v. 4), he’s implying a relationship with Christ. Christians must know

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Jesus personally as the “one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Salvation is also about yielding to Him as Lord, experiencing the life transformation He gives, and relying upon the power from the Holy Spirit who indwells all believers.

Pray for Compassionate Workers **(Matt. 9:36-38)**

Many people encourage us to follow their advice, but not their actions. However, Jesus wasn't about lip service. He was a living example for His disciples. When He sent The Twelve out to preach the Gospel and minister to people's needs, they were to mimic what they had seen Him do. Jesus didn't send them out ill-prepared; He not only instructed them but commissioned them for service. The more Jesus moved around Galilee, the more burdened He was by the spiritual condition of the people (v. 36). The Greek word translated *felt compassion* literally meant to be moved inwardly and deeply as in a longing of the bowels or intestines. The bowels were considered the seat of gentle, affectionate emotions like kindness, benevolence, and compassion. The spiritual state of the Galileans was gut-wrenching, and Jesus responded with empathy.

Jesus met people who were “distressed and dejected” (v. 36); “harassed and helpless” (v. 36, NIV); and “weary and worn out” (v. 36, HCSB). He described these people with two metaphors. First, He said they were “like sheep without a shepherd.” In Scripture sheep were commonly used to describe God's people. Leaders, whether political or religious, were referred to as shepherds. Elsewhere Jesus identifies Himself as “the good shepherd” (John 10:11). He was ready to sacrifice Himself for them.

Assessing the vast number of people to be reached, Jesus, in His humanity, could not minister to them all. He sought help from His disciples using a second metaphor using agrarian imagery: “The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few” (v. 37). He compared the people to a field that was ripe and ready for workers to harvest. Jesus commanded His disciples to pray for more workers (v. 38). The literal meaning of *pray* is “to ask” or “to beg.” Their prayer was to be made to “the Lord of the harvest,” a title referring to God as the Owner of the field. God would recruit workers, give out assignments, and as Owner, control harvest times. By praying that God would “send out” (v. 38) additional workers, the disciples would literally be asking God to “thrust out” help. This gives the notion of lighting a fire under workers who perhaps had grown numb to others in need.

Pray for Courage **(Acts 4:29-31)**

Many believers have fears about sharing Christ with others. It sounds like some of us could take a few pointers from Peter and John—two incredibly bold disciples. When Peter professed the resurrected Christ, religious authorities had him arrested along with John. The men refused to stop preaching about Jesus, making their intent clear: they would never stop preaching Christ. Nevertheless, the Jewish leaders let them go free.

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Sometime after their release, Peter and John told the assembly of believers everything that had transpired. Beginning with Acts 4:24, they prayed corporately. When they prayed, they acknowledged God's sovereignty with praise (v. 24). They recalled Scriptures (Ps. 2:1-2) concerning previous threats aimed at stopping the spread of Christianity (vv. 27-28). They also asked God to move in the assembly and to use them in mighty ways (vv.29-30).

Instead of asking God to take them out of their threatening situation, the believers asked God to give them "boldness" (v. 29) to continue spreading the gospel. And, when they asked God for *parresia*, the Greek noun translated "boldness," (v. 29), they were literally asking for the ability to speak "your word." Essentially, they requested freedom of speech. Evidently, their interests weren't focused on protecting themselves or running away from the problem. Instead, they were more concerned about the preservation of God's message of salvation.

Before closing out their prayer, the believers made a final request. They wanted God to use them in miraculous ways to make Jesus' name known (v. 30). This would validate their message, and again, more people would believe in salvation through Jesus. The group's prayer was answered immediately, and God caused the meeting place to shake (v. 31). Perhaps it was rolling thunder or an earthquake. Whatever it was, it signified the Holy Spirit's presence "and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 31). This filling resulted in exactly what they requested: the ability to "speak the word of God boldly."