Good morning, Family. The past few weeks, we have focused our time together on the privilege, the gracious gift, of prayer, connecting and communing with God. So, how’s your prayer life? Would you say with an honest and humble heart that prayer is truly a priority in your life? Have you come today prepared and “prayed up” for worship? In our New Testament reading for today, the Apostle Paul is writing to the young preacher Timothy to encourage him in his role as overseer of the work of the Ephesian church.

In essence, 1Timothy is a leadership manual for church organization and administration. In its first chapter, Paul reminds Timothy of the importance of prioritizing and guarding the full truth of the Gospel. Scripture must be put first, and the truth must be preached. Then in Chapter Two, Paul turns his instruction to the importance and priority of prayer (see 1Timothy 2:1-8 at the end of this sermon’s text). Prayer is a mark of the faithful Christian disciple. It should be the DNS of any church. While prayer is a privilege, it is also a necessity for the active, growing Christian and the effective, growing church. In praying individually and corporately, we life up more than words. We offer our time and our hearts, and we set our spirits before the Lord of Hosts.

Prayer, Family, shapes the church. It aligns our will with His, promoting unity among the brethren. Prayer wages war against the enemy and brings peace and purpose to our souls. Family, listen: Prayer is special access to the divine. In Acts 17, we witness the power of praying in church in the story of Peter’s miraculous escape from prison:

12 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. 4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.

8 Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. 9 Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. 10 They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

11 Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”

12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. 13 Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. 14 When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!”

15 “You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”

16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. 17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.

--Acts 12:1-17

Note that in verse 5 of this glorious tale, the church “was earnestly praying to God for him (Peter)”! A review of the Greek word for “intense,” the verb in verse 5, actually means “to stretch out,” as in a muscle being flexed. The same word appears in Luke 22:44, used to describe Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane. These uses make clear that it was easier for Peter to get out of prison than it was to participate in the church’s prayer supporting him. The power of God becomes enhanced and then dispersed by the interceding saints. This was and is the empowering and affective nature of corporate prayer.

Prayer will never be embraced as a discipline until it is embraced as a priority. It is a special access to the divine as opposed to mere obligation. Prayer does not make us fit for greater work: It IS the greater work. It is an act of will and obedience and a holy obligation. Prayer imparts the power to walk and not faint. Prayer, as a privilege but also an obligation, develops the Christian character as we commune with our Holy God. Praying is an act of worship—praying for the advancement of the Gospel, the most important work of the church.

Prayer begins by embracing the relationship with our God! Pray big! Pray expectantly! Pray boldly! Family, prioritizing prayer brings about our constant attention and awareness of His presence and power. It is a humble declaration of our faith and our dependance upon Him. Excuses like “too busy” or “I don’t know how—don’t know what to say” simply won’t do. Look at this truth: Prayer was a documented priority for Jesus. How much more, then, should prayer be a priority for us? Very simply put, *prayer is not an option for the Christian.* In fact, it is essential. Just think on the privilege of access to our Holy, Sovereign God! There are 168 hours in a week. How much do you devote to God? How many of those hours do you pray—do you engage the relationship with your Creator through prayer? Instead of separating the secular from the sacred, what if we simply commit our whole week to the Lord?

Prayer is, in fact, essential, and it is the privilege of direct access to our Holy God! To prioritize prayer helps us to remain faithful. It engenders obedience. It is about a life lived in response to His Grace. Prayer is a generous gift of grace. In it, we are reminded of our Heavenly Citizenship, that we are not earthly beings but Children of God just passing through this life. Earnest, prioritized prayer reveres God; it honors God. And THAT should be the desire of every Christian—to revere and to honor our Holy God. And I say this from lived experience. I find that the better my prayer life is, the better my life is. Prayer means more joy, more peace, more positivity, and more awareness of God’s presence in my life. Christian, each of us in on a mission; it helps us, as the psalmist put it, to “keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies.” (Psalm 34:13). Remember, Family, there is nothing outside of the reach of prayer. So, how’s your prayer life? Devoted? In need of some work?

Exalt the Lord with me! Let’s exalt His name together; let’s be workers together with Him.

Passages in Support of this Sermon:

Psalm 25 Of David.

1 In you, Lord my God,

I put my trust.

2 I trust in you;

do not let me be put to shame,

nor let my enemies triumph over me.

3 No one who hopes in you

will ever be put to shame,

but shame will come on those

who are treacherous without cause.

4 Show me your ways, Lord,

teach me your paths.

5 Guide me in your truth and teach me,

for you are God my Savior,

and my hope is in you all day long.

6 Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love,

for they are from of old.

7 Do not remember the sins of my youth

and my rebellious ways;

according to your love remember me,

for you, Lord, are good.

8 Good and upright is the Lord;

therefore, he instructs sinners in his ways.

9 He guides the humble in what is right

and teaches them his way.

10 All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful

toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.

11 For the sake of your name, Lord,

forgive my iniquity, though it is great.

1 Timothy 2:1-8

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. 7 And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth; I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.

8 Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.