

EXCELLENCE IN MINISTRY

Starting Strong—Doing What’s Right in the Work of Ministry

What’s **First** in a Meaningful Ministry?

1 Timothy 2:1–4, 8



LET’S BEGIN HERE

A successful industrialist once addressed a large body of executives. Speaking on the topic “Following the Leader,” he revealed two difficulties most leaders face. First, leaders struggle with getting people to think—to really think. Second, leaders struggle with getting people to establish and maintain priorities. This message focuses on the second challenge—establishing and maintaining priorities for a meaningful ministry. What’s true in business is true in the church and in the home. We all wrestle with doing things in order of importance. One of the reasons for this struggle is that we often don’t know what deserves our immediate attention. For ministry, our first priority is clear: prayer.



LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. Common Misconceptions about Prayer

Prayer must be our top priority. It is the first of the first things in our spiritual lives. Nevertheless, many people have unbiblical notions when it comes to prayer. Four misconceptions seem to dominate.

- Turning prayer into a public performance
- Limiting prayer to a specific time and place
- Using prayer as a substitute for action
- Making prayer a last-resort option



Quotable

*In our prayer
time with God,
it’s helpful
to turn our
grumbling into
gratitude.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. God’s Directives Regarding Prayer (1 Timothy 2:1–4, 8)

We’ve seen that prayer is the first of the first things. But what exactly is prayer? Whom should we pray for? Why, besides obeying God’s command, should we pray? And how do we go about praying? Paul addressed all these questions in his letter to Timothy.

What exactly is prayer?

Whom should we pray for?



A CLOSER LOOK

Prayer as a Civic Duty

Jeremiah commanded God’s people to work and pray for peace—*shalom*—in our city, state, and nation (Jeremiah 29:7). Paul echoed this same sentiment in 1 Timothy 2:1–2. Following the lead of Jeremiah and Paul, some of the early church fathers instructed the church to continue the practice, even under the most unlikely circumstances.

To our rulers and governors on the earth—to them Thou, Lord, gavest the power of the kingdom by Thy glorious and ineffable might, to the end that we may know the glory and honour given to them by Thee and be subject to them, in nought resisting Thy will; to them, Lord, give health, peace, concord, stability, that they may exercise the authority given to them without offence.¹

—Clement of Rome, ca. AD 96, during the brutal reign of Domitian

Wherefore I will rather honour the king [than your gods], not, indeed, worshipping him, but praying for him. But God, the living and true God, I worship, knowing that the king is made by Him. You will say, then, to me, “Why do you not worship the king?” Because he is not made to be worshipped, but to be revered with lawful honour, for he is not a god, but a man appointed by God, not to be worshipped, but to judge justly. For in a kind of way his government is committed to him by God. . . . Accordingly, honour the king, be subject to him, and pray for him with loyal mind; for if you do this, you do the will of God.²

—Theophilus, ca. AD 181, shortly after the death of Marcus Aurelius, during the reign of his notoriously capricious and corrupt son, Commodus

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Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged; for security to the empire; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest, whatever, as man or Caesar, an emperor would wish.³

—Tertullian, AD 160–225, written during the reign of Septimius Severus, a brutal persecutor of Christians.

Why, besides obeying God’s command, should we pray?

How do we go about praying?



LET’S LIVE IT

The priority of prayer in the life of any believer, not just the professional ministry leader, should be paramount. As Paul made clear, making prayer a priority leads to a peaceful life, brings glory to God, and may cause others to respond to the gospel. Therefore, in making prayer a priority in our lives, let’s *form a habit* of praying, *set no limits* on our prayers, and *resist all substitutes* to prayer.

How does your prayer life compare with the commands in 1 Thessalonians 5:17–18 and 1 Timothy 2:1–4, 8? And what, if anything, can you do (must you do) to make prayer the top priority in your life?

ENDNOTES

1. Clement of Rome, “1 Clement,” 61, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, ed. and trans. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 10:247, quoted in Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 36.
2. Theophilus, “Theophilus to Autolytus,” 1.11, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:92, quoted in Swindoll, *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 36.
3. Tertullian, “The Apology,” 30, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:42, quoted in Swindoll, *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 37.



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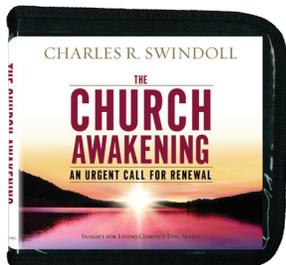
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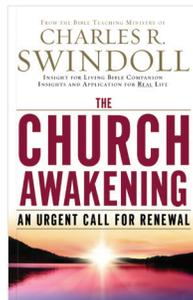
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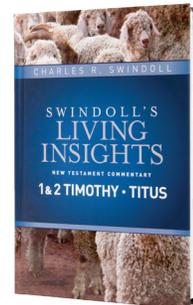
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