

A Quiet and Peaceable Life

September 21, 2025

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

1 Timothy 2:1-7

“I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.”

A quiet and peaceable life – that sounds pretty good, doesn’t it? It sounds pretty good to me. I don’t mind a little excitement from time to time, but that excitement can come from things like making music, watching lava fountains on Kilauea, eating something delightful, and, well, I have been known to glide down a zip line.

Just a little excitement, excitement that is consistent with a quiet and peaceable life.

What fosters a quiet and peaceable life?

First, it’s prayer. It’s the extension of our spirits to God on behalf of others, the people around us, the communities we live in and the communities beyond us, for their benefit and welfare. It’s not just for Christians. As Sunggu Yang writes at Working Preacher, “In this passage, it is very interesting to see that the author urges his readers to invoke (the name of) Jesus, the mediator, in prayers for probably—this is very likely—unbelieving gentile Greek kings and those in high political positions. Simply put: prayers for the sake of unbelievers!”

Why? Because quiet, peaceful communities are created and maintained by all the members of those communities. We all know the havoc that’s created by people that steal things, or who commit violence against others. We all know the havoc that’s created by people who drive recklessly or do their work carelessly. We all know the havoc that’s created by people who say one thing and do another. We all know the havoc that’s created by people who put themselves ahead of everyone else.

The first step, then, is to pray for everyone in a community so that they live and act from a spiritual foundation. Right. How effective is that?

The short answer is, I don’t know.

The longer answer is, I think it’s more effective than we might believe.

The reason is personal. Many years ago, one of the members of my family had a medical crisis. I'm not talking about how prayer influenced the course of healing. I'm talking about how the prayers of other people carried me through that crisis.

My family was pretty well known in our UCC Conference – Connecticut, at the time. Well enough that our story went around church leaders, lay and clergy, and even into the congregations. Literally thousands of people prayed for us. In the midst of a lot of stress and a lot of fear, something miraculous happened.

My feet stopped touching the ground.

Not literally, of course. That's the only way I've ever come up with to describe the feeling, though. Those prayers carried me through the scary days and nights. They carried me through the months. They carried me.

One of the reasons I know it was the prayer that did it is that I've had other crises in my life. I didn't share those events with a large number of people. I didn't have their prayers supporting me during those times.

I did not feel the sensation of being carried through my stress.

Prayer will not automatically create caring, compassionate people who act for the benefit of their neighbors. If it did, we'd have been living in the peaceable realm for centuries now, and we're not. What prayer will do is make it easier for people to find and to foster their care and compassion for their neighbors. What prayer will do is lighten their steps through their days.

We start with prayer.

Then we live out our prayers.

In the fourth chapter of this letter, the author advises his readers to "set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." (1 Timothy 4:12) Actually, an example for the believers and the unbelievers. One of the scandals of Christianity – of other religions as well, but the scandals of Christianity belong to us – is that we haven't always treated non-Christians as well as we should. We've made war on Muslims. We've oppressed Jews. We've tortured and executed "heretics," which basically means somebody whose Christian theology isn't close enough to yours.

It's up to us to act better than that. To make sure that there are places for people to live, and to pay people such that they can afford to live there. It's up to us to see that nobody gets persecuted for their religious beliefs or their skin color or their gender or their relationship status or their disabilities. It's up to us to create a community that protects and nurtures everyone.

Pray. Act. And we will live quiet and peaceable lives.

Maybe.

We have a lot of power over our own prayers and actions, but every one of us knows there are times we let our feelings get ahead of us. There are times when we feel like we're not being carried by prayer, but being carried away by some other power within us. That's part of our humanity, and as much as I'd like to believe that prayer and action can prevent that, I don't think they can. Not entirely. We have to keep an eye on that within ourselves.

More than that, though, we have to face the presence of prayer for "kings and all who are in high positions" in this text.

Despite Paul's comments in Romans that we should obey the authorities, the simple truth is that Paul himself disobeyed the authorities multiple times. He got in trouble. A lot. In Second Corinthians he proudly wrote, "Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning." (2 Corinthians 11:24-25) Those, plus his uncounted imprisonments and floggings, were the result of refusing to obey authorities. Some of that would have been due to accusations of heresy – when other people didn't like his beliefs. Some of that was probably due to what we'd call "disturbing the peace" today.

Paul obeyed a good number of the rules of his society, those of Judea and those of Rome, but not all. Not enough. He died at the legal order of a Roman Emperor.

Sometime in the first half of the second century, Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna wrote, "Pray for all the saints. Pray also for kings, and potentates, and princes, and for those that persecute and hate you, and for the enemies of the cross, that your fruit may be manifest to all, and that ye may be perfect in Him."

Did you notice? Pray for the saints. Then pray for a group that includes kings, potentates, and princes, and those that persecute and hate you. I think that Polycarp considered the powerful of the Empire as those who persecuted him and his fellow Christians, because, well, they did. Like Paul before him, he was martyred at the orders of a Roman official in the mid-150s.

How does anyone live a quiet and peaceable life if the authorities have set against you? How does anyone live a quiet and peaceable life if the authorities themselves have chosen to do the things that cause havoc in a community: theft, violence, recklessness, carelessness, lies? How does anyone live a quiet and peaceable life if the authorities enshrine religious, racial, or gender prejudice in law? The simple truth is that those who rule have an outsized impact on everyone else.

We pray for them not because they are inherently right, but because their impact is so great. When they do well, everyone benefits. When they do badly, some benefit, and some suffer. Some suffer a lot.

Keep in mind that as First Timothy was being written, Romans prayed to their emperors as deities. As Christian A. Eberhart writes at Working Preacher, “In this kind of imperial milieu, the request in 1 Timothy 2:2 to pray ‘for kings’ instead of ‘to the kings’ takes on new meaning. It implies most ostensibly that rulers, like everybody else, depend on the guidance and mercy of God. Furthermore, it indirectly implies that they are not divine but mortal humans.”

We pray for the rulers for the same reason we pray for everyone else: that it might be easier for them to do well, to do the things that foster quiet and peaceable lives for their communities. We pray for everyone so that they are not so burdened with their cares that they give way to the errors of self-centeredness and fear. We pray for everyone because it takes everyone to make a just society.

We act so that people have someone else to emulate, to work with, to live quietly with, to live peaceably with.

And we insist that this quiet and peace be for everyone, not just for “us,” because when peace is denied to anyone, it will break for everyone.

For everyone we pray.

Amen.

by Eric Anderson