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**1 Timothy 2:1-7; Psalm 113; Luke 16:1-13**

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If God is All-knowing, does prayer serve a purpose? If Jesus is the only mediator between God and humanity, are intercessory prayers appropriate? What is the Church’s function in collective prayer?

Jesus is indeed the only mediator. He is also the one who encourages us to pray for one another starting with the *Our* Father.[[1]](#footnote-1) Following his example, spiritual leaders such as Paul, James, and others ending with the testimony of the Book of Revelation have encouraged believers to pray for the needs of the Church.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Church at prayer is Christ at prayer. The Spirit of God praying in us purifies our heart and raises our concerns to God. We pray in Jesus’ name when we let him take over and his Spirit in us utters “groanings too deep for our words” (Romans 8:26)

Paul advises: “Pray for kings and anyone in high position.”

At any given time and depending on our political leaning, we either recoil in anger or gladly comply by offering such a prayer. By itself, prayer is not a blessing or divine endorsement of the powerful. It’s a practical way for Christians to remember that they are in the world but not of the world: since they are citizens of a local nation, they are called to participate in the life and well-being of that nation.

When we pray for those in authority, we pray for wisdom and guidance, for prudence and right judgment, for justice and right governance, for truthful speech and honesty.

By praying to a higher Authority, namely God, we automatically refuse to declare that the king, the governor, or anyone else in authority is divine and above others. By itself, prayer is a strategical boundary setting tool – each person in their proper place: the earthly king is not divine, and the praying faithful is not a judge – and a reminder of the duties of the Christian as a good citizen.

Prayer for those in places of authority is “an implicit critique of any claims [they] might put forward concerning their absolute authority.”[[3]](#footnote-3) In fact, the Church lifts them up to God who sits higher. Kings and princes may *act* as if they were god, but through the Church’s offering of prayer, they are reminded they are not. At the same time, the Church at prayer is emboldened to assume its ecclesial and prophetic role and encouraged to trust the spiritual power of the promised presence of Jesus, the wounded and humble servant, until the end of the age.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Psalm 113 proclaims that truth powerfully!

Consider “the name of the LORD,” a phrase repeated three times in the first three verses of this psalm.

We may recall the first of the Ten Commandments instructing us not to use the Lord’s name in vain.[[5]](#footnote-5) This includes any abuse of the name of God masqueraded in lavish pietism for the purpose of promoting one’s agenda. How often do we wrap our greed in religious sounding language but underneath we hide our political self-interest and militaristic over-reach? We have gone to war way too many times in the name of God, spilled blood and stolen lands, and made it all sound a holy endeavor wanted by God. That is pure blasphemy!

We understand we ought not use the Lord’s name wrongfully. But how do we use it rightly? How are we supposed to use it?

God’s name is above all other names[[6]](#footnote-6) and is to be praised by all people and nations, from dawn to dusk, from East to West, now and tomorrow and always the psalmist tells us. God’s name is packed with saving action: it tells us a little bit about God and God’s intentions for us. The many names for God,[[7]](#footnote-7) in fact, refer to the many different ways God relates to us.

Praising the name of God, we glorify God for all God’s goodness and mercy toward us. If we want to know God’s name, all we have to do is to look back and remember how God has been part of our life.

The psalmist sings that the Lord is higher than all nations, even higher than the heavens. He muses: Who is above God? Indeed, there is no one more powerful than the Lord. God is the real thing: our God is the true and only God. God has all the right to expect our worship and obedience. The implication is that no other god and no self-declared divine being is worthy of our consideration and total allegiance.[[8]](#footnote-8) No power-grabbing leader and no self-ascribed savior can reproduce the grace and mercy that only God can procure.

Our praise of God is not the result of fear.

We *do* fear God (in fact, the Book of Provers teaches us that “the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom”)[[9]](#footnote-9) but that fear is more reverence and awe than the terror of being struck down because of our sins and mistakes. God is merciful, therefore we praise God!

Our praise of God is the result of the revelation of God’s goodness to us. God’s governance is not heavy or oppressive. Our faith memory testifies to the fact that God listens to the cry of the oppressed and stands by the powerless and afflicted.[[10]](#footnote-10) Our God acts mercifully, and the supreme example of that for the psalmist is the blessing and reversal of barrenness.[[11]](#footnote-11)

It is in pain that Israel has known God: “The One that sits enthroned in splendor is known to be peculiarly allied with the broken-hearted, who cannot help themselves (Isaiah 57:15).”[[12]](#footnote-12) In light of this faith, the poor stands in hope and praises God.

Thus, when we say that praise is due to God, we don’t mean to say that God needs our praise. In fact, the One who created heaven and earth doesn’t need anything from us. God is not some narcissistic lord in the sky. Our praise of God comes as an uncontainable awe and wonder, an act of thanksgiving at the name of the one who created the infinitely expansive cosmos and continues to care for each individual creature who lives in it. It is an exclamation of joy that cannot be contained.

We praise God because…how could we not?

Yet, it seems hard for us in our Western, affluent world to explode in that proclamation of joy at the beauty of the Lord. Perhaps we have become too accustomed to sunsets, or the vastness of the ocean, or the colors of nature, or to the food and water and minerals of the Earth. Perhaps, we have become so distracted by our busy life – the frenzy activities as well as the ready obtainable entertainment – that our ability to wonder and remain in awe has diminished. How often has our heart exploded with joy in praise of God by pondering: “Who is like the LORD our God?!” (verse 5).

Praising God is not for God but for us. It’s meant to open our eyes in wonder and our hearts in gratitude. It’s meant to confess and proclaim that there is only one God and to this One only is our allegiance due. God alone we worship and honor.

In our praise we acknowledge that no human being is more just, honest, compassionate and merciful than our God. God is the source of our joy and salvation: God our life and our truth.

God, who is high above the most powerful nations and gives life even to the most arrogant and power hungry human being, is the One who “raises the poor from the dust and the needy from the ash heap;” who protects the widows and the orphans; who restores the dignity of the oppressed and who nurses the wounds of the afflicted.

Let us always pray for those in leadership positions. Let us praise the only true God, Maker of heaven and earth, Creator of a good conscience and right mind, Supplier of true justice, Healer of divisions, Source of our peace and Giver of eternal life.

May our wonder and awe increase our gratitude and our desire to love and serve God above all and in all. Amen.

1. Luke 11:1-13; also Matthew 9:36-38; 18:19,20; John 15:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 1 Timothy 2; James 5:13-14; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 John 3:20-23; Revelation5:8; 8:3-4 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Luke Timothy Johnson, The First and Second Letters to Timothy [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Matthew 28:20 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Exodus 20:7 and Deuteronomy 5:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ps 95:3; Ps 96:4; Ps 97:9; 1 Chronicles 16:25; and developed in Ephesians 4:4-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [What are the different names of God, and what do they mean? | GotQuestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org/names-of-God.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Exodus 20:1-6 and Deuteronomy 5:8-10 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Proverbs 1:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See the Song of Miriam in Exodus 15:20-21 or the Song of Hannah 1 Samuel 2:1-10, beautifully captured in the Magnificat, the Song of Mary in Luke 1:46-55 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Psalm 113:9 recalling all barren women: Sarah in Genesis 11:30; Rebekah in Gen 25:21; Rachel in Gen 29:31 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Walter Bruggemann, The Message of the Psalms, p. 162 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)