Praying

Believers impact the lives of other believers through prayer.

2 THESSALONIANS 2:13–3:5
How does knowing someone is praying for you change your perspective?

The day started off with the alarm not going off, no coffee to be found, and only enough cereal to cover the bottom of the bowl. It went downhill from there. In the middle of this rotten day, a simple text message from a friend changed it all. It read: “God brought you to my mind, you were prayed for today, that God would see you through.” Praying for another person changes our perspective and theirs. Paul focused on prayer and the impact it makes in this world.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Paul now turned his focus to prayer. The fact that Paul emphasized prayer is not surprising. His previous teaching about the man of lawlessness might have left some feeling apprehensive. First Thessalonians 5:1-11 reveals that some of the church felt this way.

Paul assured his Thessalonian friends of his ongoing love and his ongoing prayers for them. He prayed they would stand firm in their faith and would continue to embrace the truth he had shared with them during his ministry in the city (2 Thess. 2:13-17). He asked God to encourage them and to help them grow stronger in their faith. Paul also asked the Thessalonians to pray for his ministry, specifically that others would be as receptive to the gospel as the Thessalonian believers had been (3:1-5). He knew God would protect both him and them from evil, and he looked forward to the ministry Christ would work through their partnership.
2 THESSALONIANS
2:13–3:5

13 But we ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God has chosen you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit\(^A\) and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, so that you might obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ\(^B\). 15 So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught, whether by what we said or what we wrote.

16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father\(^C\), who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope by grace,

17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good work and word. 3:1 In addition, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you, 2 and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people\(^D\), for not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. 4 We have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command. 5 May the Lord direct your hearts to God’s love and Christ’s endurance\(^E\).
EXPLORE THE TEXT

Paul began this section by expressing his thankfulness for the Thessalonian believers. The congregation needed to know they were loved by the Lord. They may have questioned God’s love for them because of the trials they faced, but Paul assured them of God’s love regardless of circumstances. God’s love for them was consistent and without end. Paul was consistent in expressing gratitude to God for this. Paul also expressed gratitude for their salvation.

How is praying for other believers an act of partnering with them in the sharing of the gospel?

Paul assured the Thessalonians that God would work on their behalf. He reminded his readers that the Lord is faithful. Paul did not tell the church that the Lord will most likely be faithful or was faithful most of the time. Rather, he stated that the Lord is faithful.

What was the importance of Paul reminding the Thessalonians of God’s faithfulness? Was this more for them or for him?

Paul concluded this prayer by asking the Father to direct the hearts of the church to God’s love and Christ’s endurance.

What are some things believers are called to endure today? How can you encourage a brother or sister in Christ to remain confident in Christ?

APPLY THE TEXT

• We can express thankfulness to God for the salvation of others.
• Prayer is a form of encouragement to others.
• Believers are wise to invite other believers to pray for and with them.
• God is capable of helping believers honor and remain faithful to Him.

Discuss with your Bible study group the general focus on the prayer requests gathered by the group. How do the requests compare to the prayer offered by Paul? What needs to change for your Bible study group’s prayer list to reflect Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians?

Paul encouraged the church family during their struggle through his prayers for them. Who is someone that you know to be in the middle of a struggle that you can encourage this week?

In what areas do you need to express more confidence in God? Take time to ask Him to help you and commit to trust Him more fully. Record your prayer here.

Prayer Requests

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
**Day 1: Hold fast to God’s Word.**

*Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15, understanding the call to sanctification.*

Salvation is the result of God’s gracious choice to make salvation possible. The fact that God has chosen is not presented as an act that limits the availability of salvation. The broader passage gives ample evidence that some people choose not to avail themselves of God’s salvation. The Thessalonians’ salvation, while secure for all eternity, was still being worked out through their sanctification. God had saved them, and they were being sanctified by the Spirit through their belief in the truth. The church was actively and continually engaging in this process, and Paul was committed to praying over them. He reminded them that this was not the end; glory was waiting. Suffering for the sake of the name of Jesus was worth it because eternal glory with the Lord was to be the outcome. Paul transitioned from gratitude to commands. The first command was that the church stand firm and hold to the traditions they had been taught. Paul consistently prayed that they would stand upon and hold fast to God’s Word—both what was written and spoken to the church by Paul and his fellow missionaries.

**How do the things for which Paul was grateful motivate you to stand firm?**

**Day 2: Prayer encourages and strengthens the faithful.**

*Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, highlighting verse 17.*

Several things in this section of verses should encourage us even today. The first encouraging thing is that we have the privilege of prayer. Yes, others can pray on our behalf. But because of what Jesus did on the cross, we have the opportunity to talk to Him directly. As we talk to the Father, we are talking to Someone who has loved us dearly. The phrase Paul used here indicates a deep, sacrificial love. This love is evidenced in Christ’s death on the cross for us while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8). God’s love for us is without end, and we can talk to Him directly. In addition to love, our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father have given us eternal encouragement. Because of what Jesus did in their lives, the Thessalonians could rest assured that their future was secure. Believers may not have all the answers, but they do not live with uncertainty about the future. Paul prayed that their works and words would be fueled by the encouragement and strength they experienced in Christ. Paul could have asked God to remove the church from their difficult situation. He could have asked God to change their circumstances. Instead, he prayed that God would encourage and strengthen them to be faithful in the midst of their circumstances. The apostle knew that the Thessalonians needed more than human strength to stand up to the trials and persecutions they faced.

**What are the dangers of attempting to persevere in your own strength?**
Day 3: Pray for God’s Word to spread.

*Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2, considering Paul’s prayer requests.*

Paul’s first prayer request focused on the spread of the gospel. He asked the church to pray that the *word of the Lord* would *spread rapidly.* The phrase *spread rapidly* indicates running without hindrance and attaining new ground. Paul was not asking that his opinions would spread rapidly or his renown would increase. He understood that God works through His Word to change lives. Therefore, the apostle desired God’s Word to spread. The apostle also asked the church to pray for God’s Word to *be honored.* Paul placed a high value on God’s Word and wanted others to hold this conviction as well. As God’s Word is honored, it is better able to spread rapidly. Paul’s next prayer request centers on the divine protection of God’s servants. The apostle had experienced numerous forms of danger throughout his ministry. (See 2 Cor. 11:24-29.) We never find any evidence of him complaining about this. Paul told the church at Philippi that he had learned to be content no matter his circumstances (Phil. 4:11). We see this contentment in this prayer request, as he was neither complaining nor expressing fear. Paul’s main focus was on being able to freely share the gospel with others. Paul, Silas, and Timothy knew that there were people outside of the church who wanted to harm them, and they were asking the church to implore God to protect them from these people.

*How does sharing God’s Word honor Him and His Word? Is it possible to honor God and fail to share His Word with others? Explain.*

Day 4: Have confidence in God’s faithfulness.

*Read 2 Thessalonians 3:3-4, underlining the word confidence.*

The apostle’s confidence was *in the Lord.* Paul was an extremely learned man yet did not place his confidence in his own knowledge. This trio of missionaries had an extensive history of serving churches yet did not place their confidence in their experience. They were able to place their confidence in the Lord because He had proven Himself to be faithful. Paul also had confidence that God’s people would *continue to do* what they had been commanded. Christianity rests on the foundation of God’s faithfulness, but it also grows through the obedience of His people. The church at Thessalonica would not allow difficult circumstances to hinder their progress in living out and spreading the gospel. Paul affirmed them in this and was cheering them on in the midst of the struggle.

**KEY DOCTRINE: Religious Liberty.** The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. (See Acts 4:19-20; 1 Tim, 2:1-2.)

*What was the importance of Paul reminding the Thessalonians of God’s faithfulness? Was this more for them or for him?*
Day 5: Have the love of God and endurance of Christ.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:5, noting the call to love and endure.

Paul had challenged the believers to grow in their love for one another. This would be possible only as they better understood God’s love. Paul didn’t want the Thessalonians to just talk about God’s love. Rather, he wanted them to be overwhelmed by the love of God more and more each day and to live it out for the world to see. Paul knew, however, that the church would have to endure struggles along the path. So he prayed they would have the endurance of Christ to stand up under the strain and pressure of what this life would present them. Christ is the ultimate example of endurance in that He willingly endured our sin on the cross. Paul once again pointed the church back to Christ.

What are some things you are called to endure today as a believer? How can you encourage a brother or sister in Christ to remain confident in Christ?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 2 Thessalonians 2 and 3, sharing with the other members of your Bible study group.

What does standing firm in the faith look like in action?

What can we learn from Paul’s example of repeatedly praying for the Thessalonians?

Give an example of God’s faithfulness. How does the Lord’s faithfulness spur us to be faithful to Him?