

2 Thessalonians (4)- Pray for Us

(2 Thessalonians 3:1-5)

I. Introduction

A. Years ago, theologian Hans Kung published the book *On Being a Christian*

1. This was to be a scholarly and inclusive look at the Christian life.
 - a. When the book was first released, there was no chapter on prayer.
 - b. Kung apologized for oversight & blamed it on publisher's deadline!
 - c. He was so pushed by the deadline that he just forgot about prayer.
2. I think there is a metaphor in there somewhere for you and me!
 - a. We live in a world that is so busy, so filled with urgent things
 - b. We are especially reminded of that during the holiday season, right?
 - 1) Did everyone get your holiday shopping finished on black Friday?
 - 2) Of did you stay inside where it's safe? Got to do it sometime, right?
 - c. Amid an ocean of the urgent, prayer can be shunted off to a corner
3. Ben Patterson suggests that prayer has been de-emphasized in the church.
Prayer is always getting nudged aside, neglected, or perfunctorily performed as more pressing concerns take center stage. Many of us feel we just have too much to do to have time to pray. That's the problem. We don't believe we are really doing anything when we pray—other than saying the words, that is. That attitude is one of the most subtle and pernicious forms of worldliness infecting the church today.
 - a. Is he right? Prayer downplayed because we see it as passive, not active?
 - b. Few attitudes would make us more different than the first Christians
 - c. The first Christians were taught that prayer was powerful and active

B. In **2 Thessalonians**, Paul is writing to a young church to encourage and teach

1. In **2 Thess 2:13-17**, Paul reminds them of their identity as the church
 - a. They are God's beloved, God's chosen and God's sanctified people
 - b. God has called them through his gospel so they can share in Christ's glory
 - c. They must "*stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you*"
2. Paul must also "*stand firm*" as he continues his march across Europe
 - a. Thessalonica won't be the last place where Paul faces persecution
 - b. Paul wants the Thessalonians to join him in ministry by praying for him
3. Let's let this short text remind us to pray (**Read: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5**)

II. Pray for Us: The Thessalonians

- A. Paul ends **1 Thessalonians** with the plea, “*Brothers, pray for us*” (**1 Th 5:25**)
1. He picks up that same theme here; Paul wants his readers to pray for him
 - a. The “*finally*” indicates a transition of thought in his letter at this point
 - b. Paul had just prayed for their strength and encouragement (**2 Thess 2:17**)
encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.
 - c. Now he wants them to pray for him—his strength and encouragement
 2. Paul often asks his churches join him in ministry through prayer for him
 - a. In Ephesus, he asks them to pray for fearlessness in preaching (**Eph 6:19**)
Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel... pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.
 - b. In Colossae, he asks the church to pray for an open door (**Col 4:3-4**)
³*And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.* ⁴*Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.*
- B. Paul wants the Thessalonians to pray for him as well—two different prayers
1. **First**, Paul asks them to pray that Lord’s message would be spread rapidly
 - a. Word is literally “*run.*” “*speed ahead*” (ESV) or “*take off and race*” (MES)
 - b. Paul wanted the gospel to speed its way across the rest of Europe.
 - c. And he believed that the prayers of the Thessalonians would help
 2. **Second**, also wants them to pray he is “*delivered from wicked and evil men*”
 - a. Paul left Thessalonica due to “*lewd fellows of the baser sort*” (**Acts 17:5**)
 - b. That opposition followed Paul to Berea and points west... and east
 - c. Paul asks these Christians to pray for his safety as he worked for God
- C. Paul’s request for the prayers of his church shows Paul faith in prayer
1. Paul thinks that their prayers for him will **make a difference** to God.
 - a. The Colossians will become part of his mission activity as they pray.
 - b. Paul saw Philippi as “*partnership [fellowship] in the gospel*” (**Phil 1:5**)
 - c. As Colossae prayed for Paul, they become a partnership in prayer.
 2. Paul is confident God “*will strengthen and protect you from the evil one*” (**v. 3**)
 - a. But he wants them to be praying for him. Why? Because prayer works
 - b. God provides strength to us, and the way He works is through prayer.

III. What If We Don't Pray? (Fulenwider, *Prayer Driven Church*)

A. **First**, we miss the blessings that God truly wants to give us (**James 4:2**)

You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.

1. When we try to do things all by ourselves, we often make a mess of things
 - a. We try to get what we want by ourselves and create conflict.
 - b. Prayer is our pipeline to a God who is the giver of all good things
2. Jesus assures us God is the loving father who gives good gifts (**Mt 7:11**)
 - a. Ask God for bread, he won't give a stone; He knows how to answer!
 - b. Fail to spend time before the Father and you will miss His blessings!

B. **Second**, we thwart the work God wants to accomplish in us (**2 Chron 7:14**)

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land

1. God wants to heal his people and bring them back to Himself
 - a. What is He waiting for? For them to humble themselves and pray
 - b. What is it that God want to do in our lives, but He is waiting for us to ask
2. Our God can do anything, but sometimes He waits to be asked (Atchley)

"It is the sovereign will of the sovereign God not to accomplish his sovereign will until He is asked to do so by His children."

 - a. When we fail to pray, we can hinder the word God wants to do in us!
 - b. God wants to partner with us in His work, but we must rely on Him

C. **Third**, we betray a basic lack of faith that God can do anything (**Matt 19:26**)

²⁶ *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

1. **Question:** Can God do great things, miraculous things today?
 - a. I'm not asking are all that claim to do miracles really from God
 - b. Healthy skepticism about TV faith-healers isn't a lack of faith in God
 - 1) Peter Popoff was once caught with communications equipment
 - 2) He wasn't receiving messages from God but a Bluetooth receiver!
2. We can be so skeptical that we doubt that God really does much at all!
 - a. Prayer really does asks God to step into our reality and change things
 - b. If we believe in a God who can do anything, then we'd better pray!
3. To fail to pray is really to betraying a lack of faith in God's work today.

D. **Fourth**, we betray a laziness that looks for quick answers rather than God.

1. Paul describes Epaphras and his struggle over the Colossians (**Col 4:12**)

Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured

a. Prayer wasn't a telegram that you send once and forget—it was a struggle

b. Remember the **Prayer of Jabez** was so popular several years ago

1) Maybe the reason it was so popular is because it was pretty easy

*Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain (**1 Chron 4:10**)*

2) Repeat this request each day and God will increase territory—*simple*

2. But that's not the prayer we see modeled for us in the New Testament

a. What we see is Jesus clawing the dirt in Gethsemane as he prayed

1) We see Epaphras struggling daily as he prays for Colossae

2) And we see Paul here inviting Thessalonica to join him in prayer

b. Jesus wants us to constantly pray and never give up praying (**Luke 18:1**)

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

1) He tells the story about a widow who kept on asking for justice

2) **Point:** God wants us to continue to seek Him in prayer (**Luke 18:7**)

And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?

IV. Conclusion

A. **Old Story:** Church that waged a campaign against a nightclub opened near it

1. Members conducted all night prayer meeting asking God to strike it down.

a. Lightning struck the club, and it was completely destroyed by a fire.

b. So the owner sued the church; church argued they hadn't done anything.

c. The judge dismissed the lawsuit, but he included statement in ruling

It's the opinion of the court that, wherever the guilt may lie, the tavern keeper believes more in prayer than do members of this church!"

2. How much faith do we put in prayer and the God who hears prayers

B. Here's what I want you to do this week (following our Thanksgiving Day)

1. Sit down with the bulletin and the church directory—pray for 15 minutes

2. Pray with confidence that God changes things, and prayer changes God