

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, December 1, 2021 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



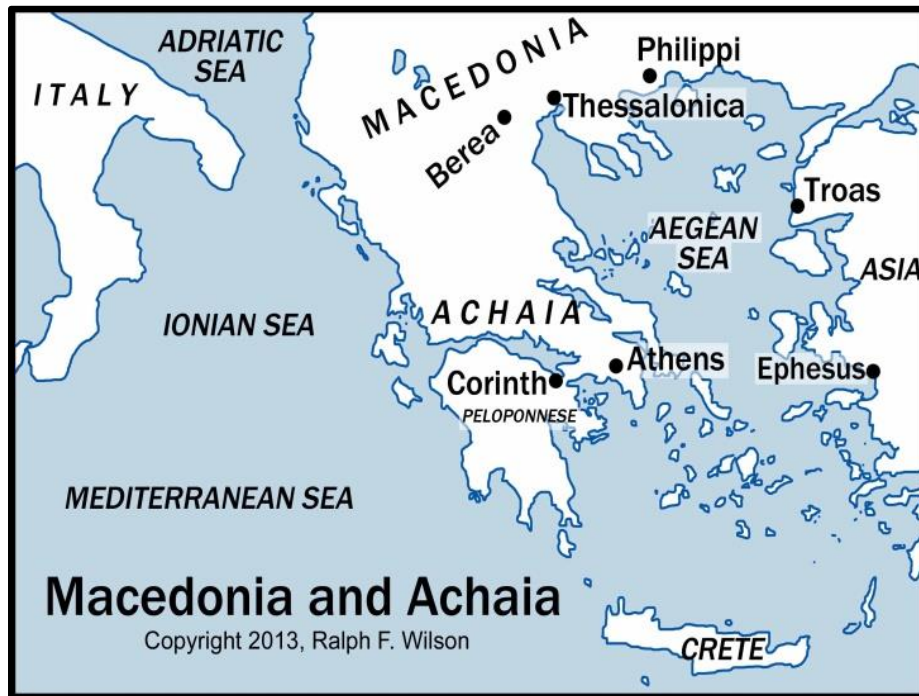
"Praying for Others - A Must"
2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

"¹¹ Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, ¹² that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." -2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 (NKJV)

Let's give a brief overview of 2nd Thessalonians again just to help us get the picture in historical context...

An Overview of 2nd Thessalonians:

- (1) **DATE OF THE LETTER:** 2nd Thessalonians was most likely written from Corinth in approximately A.D. 51-52
- (2) **AUTHOR OF THE LETTER:** The Apostle Paul, with Silas and Timothy
- (3) **PURPOSE OF THE LETTER:** The letter served to quell false teaching that had infiltrated the young church in Thessalonica and to encourage and commend the believers in the midst of persecution and suffering
- (4) **BRIEF HISTORY OF THESSALONICA:** The city of Thessalonica is known today as Salonika and is the second largest city in Greece. It came into being in 315 B.C. Founded by the Greek general Cassander, who later became king of Macedonia. Thessalonica developed into a major commercial port and military launching point. At the time that 2 Thessalonians was written, Thessalonica was the capital and the most populous city in Macedonia, boasting over 200,000 people.
- (5) **FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA:** During Paul's second missionary journey (A.D. 49-52), he and Silas persuaded many in this bustling seaport town to follow Christ. The city's jealous religious leaders incited a riot bringing charges of sedition against Paul and Silas for worshipping Christ over Caesar (Acts 17:5-7). The two men were forced to flee by night to Berea (Acts 17:10).



It had to be tough. While the apostle Paul was earnestly preaching in Corinth (Acts 18:1-5), his dear Christian friends in Thessalonica were going through the wringer of persecution. How he must have wished he could do something, anything, to help these believers he loved so much.

It is tough to be somewhere else when those we care about are suffering, isn't it? Even when we're there, we often feel powerless to help. And somewhat apologetically, we say, "I'll pray for you," feeling somehow it's not enough, like it's our last resort. But nothing could be further from the truth.

A.J. Gordon reminds us, **"You can never do more than pray until you have prayed."** Prayer is our first priority and our most powerful means of helping. Why? Because in prayer, we actively participate in what God is doing to bring about His will in the situation. We're co-laborers with God!

Paul recognized what a gift prayer is, and he modeled for us not only how to intercede for others but also how to give them new strength in the Lord so that His will is done.

PRAYER: AN INVALUABLE DISCIPLINE

To fully appreciate this privilege God has given us, let's get a handle on all that prayer is and what it does. Let's look at some essentials...

2 Essential Questions on Prayer:

1. What is **prayer**?
2. Why is **praying important**?

Let's consider these questions...

What is Prayer?

Prayer is making deliberate contact with God in word or thought. Dr. Charles Swindoll says, "Prayer is the voice of faith, whose whisper can be felt across the street or across the world. It is what pries us from our seats as spectators and places us as active participants with God!" I love that! *What do you think he means by that?* Prayer expresses itself in many ways:

6 ways prayer expresses itself: (not exhaustive)

- (1) As an outpouring of praise –
- (2) As a confession of wrong –
- (3) As a request for help –
- (4) As a declaration of need –
- (5) As a statement of thanks –
- (6) As an intercession for others -

Through prayers we... (look these up...)

- Through prayer, we draw to God with confidence (Hebrews 4:16) – *"¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*
- Through prayer, we ask, seek, and knock at the door of His generosity (Matthew 7:7-8) – *"⁷ Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."*
- Through prayer, we release anxiety (Philippians 4:6-7) – *"⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*
- Through prayer, we gain wisdom (James 1:5) – *"⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."*

Prayer is a part of the "Armor of God" for the believers and is always appropriate for our needs. Paul said in Ephesians 6:18, *"¹⁸ Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."* And prayer is a way we align ourselves with the Lord to see as He sees and want what He wants.

Prayer is, in fact, such an invaluable discipline that we are used to "pray with out ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This doesn't mean non-stop verbal praying... it means an attitude of prayer. According to Donald Grey Barnhouse, praying without ceasing is defined this way, "Praying without ceasing means to live with Christ in such a way that you can talk to Him, or listen to Him at any moment." There should be nothing between your soul and the Savior. Praying without ceasing is consciously living in each moment in the presence of Christ.

Why is Praying Important?

4 Reasons Pray is Important: (not exhaustive)

- (1) **Prayer is important because it refocuses our perspective** – Without prayer, we see only the visible, with prayer, God shows us the hidden dimensions of life. That is why we see things differently as believers, with fresh eyes, with eyes of faith, with a Christian/Biblical perspective. That is why we may view life, life's difficulties, and even tragedies differently. Through prayer God gives us a perspective that is purely filled with hope, and comfort, and purpose, and peace, and joy, etc.
- (2) **Prayer quiets our fears and calms our nerves** – We may come to prayer fearful and anxious, but when we give our worries to the Lord, we come away calmed and assured. Paul writes in **Philippians 4:6-7**, *“⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*
- (3) **Prayer transfers our burdens** – It takes the big load we've been carrying and shifts it to the shoulders that can handle its weight. Jesus, Himself, calls us in **Matthew 11:28-29**, *“²⁸ Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am ^{is} gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”* And in **1 Peter 5:7** we are reminded... even called to *“Cast all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you.”*
- (4) **Prayer upholds others who are in need** – It is the way we help bear one another's burdens and lift them to the One who knows best. In **Colossians 4:12**, Paul introduces us to a model intercessor, *“¹² Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”* Intercession occurs when we “labor fervently” in prayer for others, emotionally and spiritually bearing their burdens and carrying them to the Lord. Paul does this and more in his prayer for the Thessalonians

PRAYER: AN ESSENTIAL INVOLVEMENT

So far in his letter, Paul has...

- Expressed thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' growing faith and love (2 Thessalonians 1:3)
- Affirmed the Thessalonian believers for their perseverance in the midst of persecution (2 Thessalonians 1:4)
- Reassured the Thessalonians of God's justice (2 Thessalonians 1:5-9)
- Encouraged these believers at Thessalonica in the hope of the Lord's coming (2 Thessalonians 1:10)

In the next passage, the one we are focusing on this evening (vv. 11-12), Paul interceded for them... these Thessalonian believers. Notice our passage in **2 Thessalonians 1:11-12**, *“¹¹ Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, ¹² that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Note the constancy of Paul's prayer... his heart was *“always”* occupied with these believers, wanting three things for them in light of the Lord's glorious return...

3 things Paul prayed for the Thessalonians Christians: (in light of the Lord's return)

- 1. He prayed that God would count them worthy of their calling**
- 2. He prayed that God would fulfill their desire to goodness and the work of faith with power**
- 3. He prayed that the name of Jesus Christ would be glorified in them (these Christians at Thessalonica)**

Let look at each of these three parts to Paul's prayer individually, and see if we can't begin to get a hold of how essential and important this idea of intercessory prayer for other really is even for our lives...

***Worthy of Their Calling* - He prayed that God would count them worth of their calling**

Paul first request in prayer is reminiscent of 2 Thessalonians 1:5, "... *that you (they) may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you suffer.*" Instead of asking that God might take away or remove their suffering and hardship and stop the persecution, Paul asked that the suffering believers might live up to their high calling, which was no only to believe in Him (Jesus Christ), but to suffer for His sake. That is how Paul put it in Philippians 1:29, "*For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.*"

When faced with pain or difficulty, our usual inclination is to toss up an "emergency S.O.S. flag" kind of prayer... a sort of helpless rescue prayer. We ask God to make the hurt stop. We beg Him for relief from the pressure and strain. Paul does not ask the Lord to take away the Thessalonians' affliction. It's not that he didn't care about it or care for them – he did very much. But Paul wanted these persecuted believers to grow in their kingdom perspective. He wanted them to stay focused on the eternal glory God had in store for them and to lead them in keeping their destiny and planned purpose for their lives in Christ.

- *What might this be telling us concerning our own personal trials and struggles, pain and heartaches?*
- *What does this say to us about perhaps how to pray in those times? Should we pray for God to take it away? What should we pray instead?*

***Goodness and Faith Fulfilled* - He prayed that God would fulfill their desire to goodness and the work of faith with power**

In Paul's second request, he prayed that the Lord would bring to pass the Thessalonian's intentions to do good. Essentially, he addressed their attitude in the midst of their suffering. The word "*goodness*" ("agathosyne" in the Greek) points to "moral excellence" and is listed among the fruits of the Spirit and of the Light (Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 5:9). When suffering strikes, it's easy to want to strike back or give up on God and His ways... and take matters into our own hands. Paul's words to the Galatians encourage us in Galatians 6:9, "*And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*" I love that verse! Oh how many times I have falling on that verse. The Thessalonians longed to emerge from their siege of suffering full of goodness, with their trust in God and their kindheartedness firmly intake. Paul prayed that their hopes would be fulfilled.

Paul the prayed for the Thessalonians “work of faith,” wanting their faith to reach full maturity in a harvest of good works (see Ephesians 2:10), 1 Thessalonians 1:3). The testimony of the Thessalonian believers had spread throughout the region (1 Thessalonians 1:7-8), yet they were plunged into difficulty. However, in the midst of affliction, they wanted to be known as people who walked by faith... even in their struggles and hardships.

So Paul prayed along these lines, asking the Lord, who had inspired the Thessalonians toward faith and good works, **to accomplish their desires with His own power**. Simply put, he asked **“that God (would) enable his people to demonstrate the reality of their faith in action.”** Again note that Paul didn’t ask for the testing to cease or for relief from the pressure. Here we have another example of the truth that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8).

- **We want relief; God wants dependence of character...**
- **We want out; God want to see us through...**
- **We want to say it’s over; God want to say that the testing did its full work...**

The purpose of all this can be seen in Paul’s third request...

Jesus Christ Glorified - He prayed that the name of Jesus Christ would be gloried in them Paul wanted the Thessalonians to fully live out their faith in the midst of suffering so (v.12) **“that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** The word “name” in Scripture’s language stands for the person named, his character, conduct, reputation, and everything else about him. **Christ’s reputation is directly impacted by how we, as believers, live...** we either exalt Him or we make a mockery of Him through our choices and conduct.

By humbling Himself to filter His glory through us God give the highest dignity not only to us but to our suffering. And by His grace, He glorifies us though Christ (v.12). As the moon reflects the glory of the sun, without light of its own, so will we someday share the glory of Christ, and be set in the heavens as a testimony to His beauty and faithfulness.

ENHANCING YOUR INTERCESSORT PRAYER

Real joy comes in seeing our prayers align with God’s work in the world. To help us move out of the realm of spectator and into being active participants in the thins of God, here are some suggestions on how to pray more perceptively and purposefully.

How to pray with perception and purpose?

1. **Be specific** – Specific prayers are answered in specific ways. A brief glance at the rest of Paul’s letter reveal show specifically he prayed. **What did Paul specifically pray for in the follow places?**
 - **He prayed that the Thessalonians would be comforted and have their hearts strengthened** – 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, **“¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and ^[a]establish you in every good word and work.”**
 - **He prayed that the Thessalonians would have peace in every circumstance** – 2 Thessalonians 3:16, **“Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all.”**

2. **Read God's kingdom into the situations of others** – Look at what others are experiencing through kingdom eyes. *What do you think this means?* And remember, suffering is a part of kingdom life. By understanding this, you'll not only have empathy but depth of perception as well.
3. **Reflect on the developments of other people's faith** – Reflect on the person's faith as much as you do on his or her pain. This will give you peace you otherwise wouldn't have had.
4. **Remember the ultimate goal** – For the believer, the ultimate goal in life is to glorify God. Keeping this in mind will give you objectivity. Effective intercessory prayer is not necessarily praying for relief for the afflicted or even for removal of the affliction. It is praying purposefully in light of a kingdom perspective. It is praying with an understanding that there is a purpose to another's pain.

David V. Day writes in his piece of "Suffering," "It is easy to forget that at the heart of Christianity is a crucified God. God does not watch his suffering world with detachment. He comes into people's pain; agonizes and bleeds with them. This is the way he has chosen to repair the damage by working patiently and painfully inside the problems... Even for Jesus there were some things that could only be learned through suffering. Paul discovered that God's grace was enough for him only through being tormented by a thorn in the flesh. Christians are called to believe, sometimes in the teeth of the evidence, that God can transform every situation."

Won't you join the Lord in His work of meeting people in their pain and bringing them encouragement and healing? You're just an intercessory prayer away.