

# Pray and Press On

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, dear friends, we're working our way through the second of the two letters that the Holy Spirit led the Apostle Paul to write to the church at Thessalonica.

Paul had been there in that city briefly for several weeks, sharing the good news of Jesus before those who rejected the gospel actually drove him out of town.

But the Spirit gave the Apostle Paul the insight he needed to send two letters to the church to encourage them to correct some things that were out of step with the gospel and also to challenge them forward.

And so this morning we come to the third and final chapter of the short, brief book of Second Thessalonians. And I think you'll see here in the scripture reading and throughout the message that the Apostle Paul was led to encourage that church to basically look up and to look forward.

Right. To look up to God, trusting him in prayer and then to press on moving forward in obedience to Christ.

[ 1 : 16 ] And so there's that hymn again, trust and obey. So look up to God and then look forward with God's guidance. Let's go ahead and read now.

Second Thessalonians chapter three. And. All right. Hopefully this will cooperate as we go forward. Here the Bible says, finally, brothers, and this is brothers and sisters, of course, not just the men folk, but really family of God. OK, so finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored just as it was with you and pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men.

For not everyone has faith, but the Lord is faithful and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.

May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance. In the name of the Lord Jesus, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you receive from us.

[ 2 : 41 ] For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it.

On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.

For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule. If a man will not work, he shall not eat. We hear that some among you are idle.

They are not busy. They are busy bodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

[ 3 : 46 ] Now, may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all.

I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

That's 2 Thessalonians 3. And let's also pray and ask God to guide us as we look into this portion of his word.

Shall we pray? Lord God, we thank you for the scriptures. Thank you for your holy word. Truly, it is a lamp for our feet. It is a light for our path. And we ask you now, O God, to open our hearts to receive the truth.

This divine instruction that you have for us this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, dear friends, as we look into the book of 2 Thessalonians again, I'd like to actually take us back to something that we read about last time from chapter 2, but we didn't really say much about.

[ 5 : 00 ] And it all flows out of the fact that, and it's referenced again in our passage this morning, but it flows out of the fact that someone had come to the church there at Thessalonica with a letter, a message that had allegedly come from the apostle Paul.

But it hadn't. I mean, this was like a fake gospel, a fake letter. And one of the things it said is that Jesus had come again. It's like, we look forward to that at the end of this age, right?

The second coming of Christ, when in glory he shall appear, and so forth. And so this was what was being said. And actually, for the church, it was quite upsetting to hear that because it implied that the Thessalonian church there had missed out on the blessing of Christ's second coming.

And so Paul set the record straight, and he tried to set those fears to rest by mentioning a couple of prophecies that still had to be fulfilled before Jesus would come again.

And so here's a verse from chapter 2. Paul said, first of all, there's a prophecy that has to be fulfilled about a great falling away. Many who sort of are attached to the Christian faith, they're going to fall away before Jesus comes again.

[ 6 : 20 ] And also, another prophecy, someone called the man of lawlessness, whom the Bible elsewhere calls the Antichrist, he will come onto the world scene, and he will deceive many.

And the point was that those things had not yet come to pass. And so, in this way, the apostle Paul was saying, don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Don't let anyone disturb you with this talk that says, Jesus has already come again, and you missed out on it.

Of course, at the same time, it was important for the church not to let these prophecies themselves disquiet them.

And it is sobering if you think about these two things, and to realize that before Christ comes again, there's going to be a great rebellion across this world. Led by the Antichrist, who will oppose all that is holy.

And it is sobering, as Jesus said in Matthew 24, to think that before his return, there will be a time when many will turn away from the faith.

[ 7 : 26 ] And as Jesus said, even the love of most will grow cold. Ah, but even in this, there's good news. You see, the fact that Jesus predicted these things shows us that they're not going to take him by surprise.

Not at all. In fact, these and all things are under his sovereign authority. We also know that Jesus, true to his word, will come again, and that no matter what else happens around us, we who follow Jesus, he will never leave us nor forsake us.

Indeed, he is greater than any foe we will ever face. He is greater than any rebellion against his majesty. Yes, the lawless one will be revealed, as prophesied.

But the Lord Jesus will overthrow him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by the splendor of his coming. And so we can picture a carpenter at work in their shop, and maybe they're making a nice piece of furniture.

Maybe like a pulpit. Who knows? But a nice piece of furniture. And this carpenter has been shaping and sanding and using a chisel to shave off and so forth.

[ 8 : 55 ] And he's almost, but there's sawdust everywhere, right? And so what does he do? Well, he just kind of blends over and blows the sawdust away.

And yes, Jesus, when he comes, will come with such majesty, such power, that he will simply, it's like he will just blow away anyone who is resisting his kingdom.

And so his light will pierce and eliminate the darkness. And so, brothers and sisters at Thessalonica, brothers and sisters in Christ today, don't give up.

Keep pressing on. Well, we're coming to chapter 3 today. And actually, we're going to jump down right away to the very end of the passage, verses 17 and 18, because it ties in with what we were just saying about this being like a fake gospel that people had brought to Thessalonica.

And our best guess is that Paul had help when he wrote letters to churches. He would, like, say the words and someone like a secretary would actually write them down.

[10:13] And so these verses show us that Paul would, at the end, at the close of a letter, he would pick up the pen himself and he'd write a few closing sentences with his own hand.

And so you can see that here, how writing to the Thessalonians, he says, I'm doing that now, right? This is my handwriting. This is what my signature looks like.

And, hey, if someone else comes along saying they brought you a letter from me, check the handwriting. It's very simple, but check the handwriting. And don't let anyone lead you astray.

But let's go back also to the beginning of this passage. And here we see that the Apostle Paul urged the church to be looking up to God in prayer.

And you see that in this simple request. Brothers, pray for us. Like we said, the word brothers here doesn't just refer to the men folk. It refers to the whole family of faith.

[11:16] And so Paul was inviting all in the church to be looking to God and to pray for him. Paul knew what he was up against.

He knew what the church was up against. He knew about persecution. Right there in Thessalonica, other places too, Paul had been beaten. He'd been chased out of town. And he knew that there was still opposition to the gospel there in that place.

And Paul knew how tempting it could be to just downplay the truth of Jesus. Downplay the truth that idols that other people were worshiping were just worthless.

There's no power in them at all. Downplay the truth that Jesus is Lord. Do you know how tempting it was to do that? To just not say anything? To avoid being mocked or ridiculed?

Or maybe have people swear at you? Or threaten to beat you up? And so knowing that he himself needed strength from God to continue to share the good news of Jesus with others, he said, brothers, pray for us.

[12:21] Wow, the Apostle Paul, the great Apostle Paul. That's how we sometimes think of him. But if he needed prayer, guess what? So did the Thessalonians.

And so do we, come to think of it. And so as he was encouraging that group of believers to be looking up to God, interceding for him, he was actually teaching them to be looking up to God in faith and in prayer, also for the strength they would need to continue to faithfully follow Jesus.

Boy, we need to do that too. That's interesting that the Apostle Paul didn't say, Oh, brothers, brothers and sisters, please pray that we'll have an easy life.

He didn't say that. That might be what we are tempted to say. Lord, give me an easy life. But no, he prayed that the word of Christ would spread and that more and more people would come to honor Jesus.

Now, he did say, pray too, that we'll be delivered from people who want to silence us. But above all, his prayer was, Lord Jesus, may you be honored. May you be praised.

[13:36] May your words spread. May more people serve you. Pray that for me, dear friends. May more people serve you.

But why do we have hope anyway? Because God is faithful. And why is there opposition to Christ's name? Well, not everyone has faith.

But why don't we give up? Well, because the Lord is faithful. And why do we still struggle against sin? Temptations that war against our souls.

So that we need to pray as Jesus taught us, Oh, deliver us from the evil. Well, not everyone has faith. Why don't we just throw in the towel and say, forget it.

It's not worth it. It's because our God is faithful. There's a lot in this that just explains what we go through also day by day as we follow Jesus.

[15:09] Well, we do pray as we look up to God. And yes, if there's a health crisis, we pray about that. And we say, Lord, if it's your will, please give healing.

And if there's a loss, we pray for comfort. Say, Lord, don't let this destroy my faith. Give me strength to trust you.

And we can learn two things to pray, even from Paul's prayer for the church there at Thessalonica. And you see this too in these verses of chapter three, how he asked God to strengthen and protect the church from the evil one.

And Paul prayed, asking the Holy Spirit to keep working in their hearts so that the church would actually follow through on what they had been taught and actually do what they had been commanded in Christ's name.

And as Paul prayed for them, he didn't just pray for them like physically. He prayed actually for their very hearts, asking that our faithful Savior would just steer and direct and guide their hearts deeper and deeper into the reality of God's love.

[ 16 : 34 ] And that they, in turn, would have a growing love for Christ that would sustain them and inspire them to keep serving Jesus no matter what.

Now, I think if you look at this prayer, you'll find echoes of the Lord's prayer, right? Deliver us from the evil one. Your will be done.

Deliver us from the evil one.

And basically, to trust and obey. We were just singing that, right? Trust and obey. There's no other way. And it was important that the church would do this, that the believers would trust God and also to obey in a way that would correct a problem that had been stirred up by that bogus, fake teaching about Jesus' second coming.

Here's how the problem presented itself in that congregation. Verse 11, Paul said, We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy.

[ 18 : 05 ] They are busybodies. So you can just imagine what that was like. Busybodies. Not busy, but using their spare time, which was more than spare, to annoy each other, apparently.

Busybodies. Busybodies. Well, the fake teaching, again, was that Jesus had already come back for his second return to this earth. And this implied that the impact of Christ's second coming hadn't yet reached Thessalonica.

It implied that the creation renewing power of God would soon, however, be upon them. It's like Christ came. It's like a matter of days, weeks, maybe just a few hours until we're going to experience the renewal of all things.

And so with this in mind, I think you can see this, how some in the church would have said to themselves, why go to work today? Right? It's just, I mean, real soon, the impact of Christ's second coming is going to reach us here in Thessalonica.

And so some people stopped working, and they, like, quit their jobs, and they didn't open up their shop for business, and they stopped planting, for example, if they were farmers, to plant crops in the spring to gather in a harvest in the fall.

[ 19 : 20 ] After all, why go to the trouble of working up ground, planting seed, and so forth, if there's not even going to be a season of harvest because the impact of Christ's coming is like, you can almost taste it.

It's like it's so close. And why do other things? Why get married? Why start a family? Why do any long-term things since any day now, any moment now?

You know how some lawns look at the end of no-mow May? I'm not talking about your yard. I don't want to offend anybody, but you know how yards look like at the end of no-mow May?

Well, imagine people's lives, their lives, looking rather like that. I mean, just imagine if they would decide to step away from the normal rhythms of work and rest, the normal patterns of seed time and harvest because they had been deceived into thinking Christ had already returned.

See, that was a problem. And so, dear friends, Paul was saying, as long as God gives us ability and opportunity, let's serve him.

[ 20 : 45 ] Let's do what God has called us to do. It might be in our homes. It might be in the community. It might be in an office. It might be in a factory. No matter where it is, though, as long as God gives you the ability and the opportunity, do something useful.

Do something that's going to bless people. Provide for your family. And so forth. Paul himself had set an example of this in the brief time he had been in Thessalonica.

And for those who were idle, verse 12, he urged them to follow that example. And he said this. He said, such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.

Don't treat them like unbelievers. But do treat them like mistaken brothers and sisters. And so we can think about this, too, this challenge, which is really to obey God, trust God, look up to him, and then obey, step into the future, obeying what we have been taught from God in his word.

It could be about working. It could be about all sorts of things. God has much to teach us in his word. Many commands, many instructions are there to shape our faith and our living.

[ 22 : 10 ] And I'd like you to see, if possible, hopefully I can point this out to you, the real strong connection. In fact, it's like there's an intertwining of these two things, namely to trust and obey.

We might be tempted to pull them apart a bit because we know that we are saved by grace, faith, and not by our works.

But they're actually quite intertwined. And you can see this, a very practical example, you can see this in the fact that there are some folks who don't trust the government.

Shock, I'm sure you never heard of that. There are some folks who don't trust the government. And you know what? It's like they're saying, we're not going to obey. We're not going to do it with the government because we don't trust them.

You see how that works? If there's no trust, there's much less likely to be obedience. But we're not here to talk about the government.

[ 23 : 14 ] What about God's will for our lives? Do we trust God in order to obey him? See, if we think back to the very beginning when Satan first tempted our parents, we know that the first step he took was to undermine their trust in God.

And basically, Satan was saying, hey, you can't really trust God. You can't take his word at face value because God has a hidden agenda.

You see, when God told you not to eat the fruit from that really good, tasty-looking fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that's in the middle of the garden, he actually did this to oppress you.

He did this to hold you down. He did this so that you would not know good and evil, and you would not reach your full potential. And so, with lies like that, Satan was tricking our first parents first into doubting God's word, that is, the goodness of his word.

And once he had persuaded them of that, it was pretty easy to coax them into disobeying. And so, once the trust was eroded, the obedience, well, it was just not there.

[ 24 : 39 ] And we do well to think about that, too, and to ask ourselves, do we trust God? Do we trust his word?

Do we trust him? And so would we obey him? Satan and his helpers are still at work, and yes, they're trying to undermine our trust in God, our trust in his word.

2 Timothy 3.16 says, All scripture is God-breathed, and it's useful for doctrine, rebuke, correction, training in righteousness. And Satan and his helpers say, oh, really? Really?

You think that? You think the Bible is the inspired word of God? And that it'll never lead you astray?

Ha! Ha!

They laugh. Really? Says Satan. Oh, you don't really believe that, do you, that in the days of Noah, there was a worldwide flood? Ah! You don't really believe that, do you?

[ 25 : 40 ] You don't really believe that the children of Israel walked through the Red Sea on dry ground. I mean, dry ground through a sea?

Ha! You're not really gullible enough to believe that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, dead, and buried, actually came back to life on the third day.

Do you? And people don't come back from the dead. You're not really naive enough to think that Ten Commandments written in a pre-scientific age more than 3,000 years ago can actually apply to us today.

I mean, we've come a long way since Mount Sinai. You think we have to obey? Come on. Now, it may not be stated as starkly as this, but these are things designed by the evil one to undermine our trust in the Word of God and to steer us away from obeying our Savior.

2 Timothy 3.16. All Scripture is God-breathed and useful. Very useful.

[ 27 : 07 ] And hopefully, when we hear the criticisms, it's like we don't ignore them, but we see them for what they are. The things that would call us to question the Word of God.

Indeed, our church's confession of faith has this to say about the 66 books of the Bible, that we receive these books. And these only as holy and canonical, that is, it sets the standard for the regulating, founding, and establishing of our faith.

And we believe without a doubt all things contained in them. That's pushing back against the lies of the evil one.

And I hope you see in this, like we were saying, that actually to trust and to obey are just so closely connected. There are probably parts in the Bible that we don't really like because, in our hearts, we want to do something different.

There are parts that would humble us, would correct us. And guess what? If we don't trust the Word of God, we're not going to obey it.

[ 28 : 32 ] We're just not. So this call to trust and obey is just really important. Not that by our obedience, you know, we score points with God and therefore, you know, God's going to love us more.

But it's still the call. Look up and look forward. Trust and practice.

Trust and obey. Trust and obey. There's a command, church.

Paul said, and I'm praying, I'm praying that you'll take it to heart. That you'll obey. As you also keep looking up to the God of your salvation.

And then that last verse. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. That's what sustains us.

[ 29 : 43 ] That's what keeps us going. The kindness, the grace of our Savior. Amen. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word.

And we thank you that it is true. Indeed, it is truth. And we pray that as we study it together and discuss it in Bible study gatherings.

As we compare scripture with scripture. As we compare scripture with scripture. We pray, Lord, that you'd give us a good, a right understanding of the call to faith and the call to follow Jesus.

So that led by your word and empowered by your spirit. We would both look up and look forward.

Surrender to you and follow you wherever and however you lead. We pray this for Jesus' sake.

Amen.

[ 30 : 45 ] Amen.