

# Teach Us to Pray - Part 2

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[ 0 : 00 ] For those of you who keep up with the news would be aware that this past week the already! struggling economy of Grand Bahama received yet another devastating blow when the Memories! hotel announced that it was closing and some 400 employees would be let go.

I think by any scale on any of our islands that's significant but for an island like Grand Bahama that's been troubled for many many years economically depressed affected by the hurricane I was there just a few weeks ago and saw many homes and buildings still with tarp over the roof evidently because people aren't able to repair them yet. And so this under any set of circumstances would be devastating but in particular for Grand Bahama this is a very devastating bit of news concerning that hotel which was the largest hotel that was still open and providing employment for a large number of people. I mean you think about the trickle-down effect that's not really affecting 400 persons it's affecting their families and also the businesses and services that those individuals would normally patronize.

no doubt among those who were laid off are some Christians. The Bible talks about how the storms of life come to all of us when we come to Christ we're not exempt from trials.

We face the same trials and difficulties of living life in a fallen world as unbelievers. we face the same trials. We face the same trials. And I wonder this morning if you had to pray for those Christians who were laid off how would you pray for them?

What would be your priorities in prayer as you prayed for them in the midst of their trying circumstances? But let me bring the question a little closer to home and ask how should we pray for our brothers and sisters in this local church?

[ 2 : 28 ] Brothers and sisters who are facing health trials, financial problems, marital problems, grief over the death of loved ones.

Brothers and sisters and sisters and sisters and sisters and sisters and sisters and sisters. And the other trials and stresses that come our way from time to time. How would you pray for them? What would be your priorities? What should be our priorities as we pray for them?

And how should we pray for those who are on the road of blessing? Those whose lives reveal no apparent trial or trouble.

But the sun seems to be shining on them. What would be our priorities in prayer for them? Well, I believe that we would be in a better position to answer these questions about how we would pray for these different categories of persons by considering how the Apostle Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, which he writes about in the second letter to them.

And so this morning, as we continue with part two of our sermon series, Teach Us to Pray, we're seeking to learn this morning prayer lessons from the Apostle Paul.

[ 3 : 47 ] Last Sunday, we considered what Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer. And this morning, with the Spirit's help, we are going to learn prayer lessons from the Apostle Paul and how he approached his prayers for a group of Christians he dearly loved.

So if you have not yet done so, please turn in your Bible to 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1. We'll be reading verses 3 through 12.

2 Thessalonians, chapter 1, verses 3 through 12. 3 Thessalonians, chapter 1, verses 3 through 12.

3 Thessalonians, chapter 1, verses 3 through 12.

3 Thessalonians, chapter 1, verses 3 through 13. And to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

[ 5 : 46 ] they will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

When he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

To this end, we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray together. Father, we are so grateful this morning for the privilege of being able to gather in this place to lift our voices in song to you, to come to your table and be reminded of your great love towards us through Jesus Christ.

And then now, Lord, to sit under the preaching of your word. Lord, have your way with us. Lord, would you superintend the preaching of your word and apply it to our hearts.

[ 7 : 20 ] You know what we need, Lord. As a congregation, you know what we need individually. And we trust you to minister much grace to your people this morning.

Father, I ask once again that you would help me to faithfully proclaim your word and care for these whom I love, who are gathered here this morning.

We ask these things in no other name but the name of the Lord Jesus, our great Lord and Savior. We pray in his name.

Amen. From the very outset of this letter, we're able to see that the Thessalonian Christians were facing tremendous persecutions and trials.

We're able to see this in verse 4 where the Apostle Paul encourages them for their steadfastness and faith in the persecutions and afflictions they were enduring.

[ 8 : 20 ] And so as we consider how the Apostle Paul prays for them, we want to bear these circumstances in mind. This is what they're going through.

Paul is very much aware of their trials and their afflictions. And when we bear this in mind, what we would see is how his priorities in prayer were still shaped for them.

As we consider how the Apostle Paul prays for the Thessalonians, here's what I trust that we'll see. I trust that we'll see that when praying for believers, regardless of their circumstances, the common theme of our prayers should be the grace of God and the common goal of our prayers should be the glory of God.

I think when we see how the Apostle Paul prays for this church, we're able to see those two threads in his prayer. We see the common theme of the grace of God and we see the common goal of the glory of God.

Now this is not to say that every prayer that we pray for believers should be exactly alike. No, not at all. They should not be exactly alike. Specifics will vary based on the people, based on the circumstances.

[ 9 : 49 ] But the common theme should be the grace of God and the common goal should be the glory of God.

For those of you who are taking notes, I've organized my thoughts around these verses under two headings and they are number one, the context of Paul's prayers. We find the context in verses 3 through 10.

And then the content of Paul's prayers. We find the content of his prayer in verses 11 and 12. At the very outset, I want to acknowledge my indebtedness for much of what I will share this morning to Dr. D.A. Carson and his insightful thoughts on these verses in his book, A Call to Spiritual Reformation.

I've been greatly helped by his reflections on these verses. And certainly any deficiencies are all mine. So first let's consider and let's learn from the context of Paul's prayers.

Notice in verse 11 that we're able to see that Paul's prayer has a context. Notice how he introduces it.

[ 11 : 12 ] In the ESV, he begins, to this end, we always pray for you. I think the NIV does make it sharper in terms of the context.

The NIV reads, with this in mind, we constantly pray for you. And when Paul refers to with this in mind, what he is actually referring to is he is looking back to what he had said leading up to verse 11.

Certainly starting from verse 3. I don't think necessarily the opening two verses, but starting in verse 3, he's saying, with this in mind, with these things in mind, with this context in mind, we constantly pray for you.

Paul's letting this church know that in a regular, ongoing way, he prays for them. And he's saying, we pray for you with this in mind, with what he's been sharing.

And how encouraging it must be for them to know that as Paul prayed for them, he was aware of their trials, he was aware of their persecutions, he was aware of the many afflictions that they faced.

[12:33] Now when we consider what Paul had in mind in verses 3 through 11 as he constantly prayed for the Thessalonians, we see two dominant considerations.

First of all, we see that Paul is mindful and thankful for evidences of grace among the Thessalonians. And what is meant by evidences of grace is conduct or fruit in people's lives or circumstances that point to the activity of the saving grace of God, God's work in their lives through salvation.

That's what we mean by evidences of grace. That we can look at a person's life or we can consider a set of circumstances in that person's life and watch how they respond, how they conduct themselves, how they live and there would be these telltale signs, these evidences.

Yes, the grace of God has come to them. God has saved them. There's this very interesting passage in Acts 11 where the church at Antioch, they'd received the gospel and they sent Paul, they sent Barnabas, sorry, to go and check it out.

The apostles from Jerusalem did and scripture says that when Barnabas went, he saw the grace of God and he was glad. And so what we see the apostle Paul doing from the very outset of these words that he shares with the Thessalonians to let them know how he prays for them and what he's bearing in mind, we see that Paul bears in mind he is mindful of evidences of grace in their lives.

[14:23] that God had come to them in saving faith and they were evidencing that how they lived. Paul identifies three evidences of grace.

The first one in verse 3 is growing faith. He identifies that the Thessalonians were growing in their faith.

He is thankful that their faith is growing abundantly. He is thanking God for their faithfulness. Their faithfulness to Him and His gospel as seen in their trust in the Lord and in the gospel.

And here Paul is not talking about magical faith. There are some people who believe in magical faith. Magical faith that if you just have enough faith you know you can cause this to happen cause that to happen you can get this and you can ward that off.

Now that's what Paul is talking about here. Paul is talking about an evidence of grace faith in God trust in God. He is saying that he is thankful to God that there were evidences that they were growing in their trust in God.

[15:39] God. And as I thought about Paul highlighting this evidence of grace in the Thessalonians and in that church I thought about evidences of grace in our own midst as well.

I thought of the evidences of grace that I'm able to see in an ongoing way in the lives of so many of you. there are those among us who are growing in their faith in God even as they continue to trust him in the midst of illness.

There are those among us who are growing in their faith in God even as they continue to trust him as godly desires and dreams remain unfulfilled.

There are those who are trusting God in the midst of prolonged trials and adversities some of which seem like they will last forever. Paul identifies God's grace in the Thessalonians growing in their faith and he encourages them.

The second evidence of grace that the apostle Paul identifies that he is mindful of as he prays for them is brotherly love.

[16:59] He identifies the increasing love for one another. This too is in verse 3 where Paul says the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

This brothers and sisters is an evidence that the grace of God and salvation has taken root in our life. That our love for one another is increasing.

The apostle John writes in 1 John 3 14 he writes this we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.

Whoever does not love abides in death. The apostle John says an evidence that you have passed from spiritual death to spiritual life is that you love the brothers.

And a further evidence of grace is when this love is increasing. And Paul is aware of this. No doubt heard of particular circumstances in the church how they were loving one another how they were laying down their lives for one another.

[ 18 : 14 ] And he highlights it and he's basically saying to them when I pray for you I am mindful of the grace of God in your life your love for one another is increasing.

Again not speaking in a vacuum Paul would have obviously had particular situations and circumstances particular examples that reminded him that the love of the Thessalonians under very difficult circumstances for one another was increasing.

And then the third evidence of grace that the apostle Paul identifies which is in verse four is persevering under trial.

He's saying to them when I pray for you I am mindful that you are persevering under enormous pressures enormous trials enormous persecutions and afflictions.

Now Paul doesn't express this evidence of grace in the exact same way that he expresses the first two. He says that they boast to other churches that the Thessalonians are persevering in the midst of persecution and trials.

[ 19 : 38 ] And we're not told exactly what the persecutions and trials were but we can pretty much be sure that it was more than just verbal harassment. No doubt their very lives were at stake.

We learn in 1 Thessalonians how the apostle Paul had to actually abruptly leave Thessalonica because of the persecution that had come and so these people were living in a very hostile and difficult set of circumstances.

And Paul's point was that they were not just enduring it. They were not just going through it. No, he says you are persevering through it, meaning that they were remaining faithful to God.

And truth be told, when circumstances are difficult, when we face trials in our lives, we can fall away. We can, many times, disgrace our Lord and the very testimony that we have.

We see it in the life of the apostle Peter. When under great trial and difficulty and fear, he denied the Lord not just once, not just twice, but three times.

[ 20 : 52 ] But Paul says about them, when I pray for you, I'm mindful that you're persevering in the midst of great trials. Now, obviously, Paul was not saying that there were only three evidences of grace among them, but these are three that he highlighted, highlighted perhaps because he felt that they would be the most encouraging to make them aware of as he writes to them and says to them, when I pray for you, I bear these things in mind.

So the first lesson that we can learn from the apostle Paul this morning is when praying for fellow believers, ponder the evidences of grace at work in their lives.

Consider how God is at work in their lives because a lot of times, especially when we're walking through trials and difficulties, we are blind to the evidences of God's grace. Sometimes we are in despair and we are thinking God is so far away from me and it requires another set of eyes to be able to say, see and say, oh, here's how God is at work in your midst.

And to the Thessalonians, Paul was those other sets of eyes. Now, as important as evidences of grace are, that's not all that Paul bears in mind as he prays for the Thessalonians.

In verses 5 through 10, we're able to see that as he prayed for them, he was also mindful of eternal reality. He was mindful of evidences of grace, but we also see that he's mindful of eternal reality.

[ 22 : 43 ] notice what he says in verse 5. In verse 5, the Apostle Paul points to the coming day of God's judgment and the coming of his kingdom, and he links present suffering to it.

And in verses 6 and 7, he reminds the Thessalonians, and he reminds us as well, that God is just.

And in essence, Paul is saying to them, all your sufferings and afflictions and injustices will come to a final end at the coming of Christ and his kingdom.

God will repay affliction to those who afflict you, and he will grant relief to you. Now, brothers and sisters, this is most essential.

Again, this is especially essential and important for people who are walking through suffering. Paul is reminding them that you're living in this difficult world, and the things you are facing are not eternal.

He says, when we pray for you, we're bearing in mind, we're bearing in mind that there's coming a day when the Lord will return, and the Lord, the just judge, will afflict those who are afflicting you.

[ 24 : 05 ] He will punish those who are troubling you. He is going to usher in his kingdom where there's going to be a new heaven and a new earth, and sorrows and sickness and mourning will

pass away.

Paul is saying, when we pray for you, when we're mindful of all that you're going through, we have eternal reality in view. We have an eternal perspective.

perspective. Paul really is inviting us to cast our sights as well on eternity, because how easy it is to lose sight of eternity as we go from day to day, and we are just bombarded by all of the issues of life.

And we can give this life a greater sense of permanence than it really has, but not so for the apostle Paul. As he prayed for the Thessalonians, he bore in mind, these things are going to pass.

And he now writes them and he says, when we pray for you, we are reminded that there's coming a day when Christ will return, and these things will be no more.

[ 25 : 21 ] God will be glorified in God. But not only does Paul help us to see that he prays for the Thessalonians, that as he prays for them, he bears in mind the fact that God is just and that he will judge all things.

He also helps us to see that he prays for them, mindful of the coming day when God will be glorified in his people, and he will be marveled at among all who have believed in him.

You know, in some ways, we are, we can be like a person who has a relative, who has left them an enormous inheritance.

They've seen the will, they've seen the trust document, and it tells them that this enormous inheritance is coming to them, but not yet. And they go about living life, and sometimes as they're living life, they're forgotten, I've been promised this enormous inheritance.

We're like that, brothers and sisters. So often, as we live life, we can forget that there's coming a day when God is going to be glorified in his people, when God is going to return, and he is going to be marveled at by all those who believe in him.

[ 26 : 44 ] it's not just we escape hell, and we kind of live this safe existence somewhere. No, it's more glorious than that. He tells us that we have this promise, that the Lord Jesus is going to return with all the holy angels.

He's going to be glorified in his people. And we are going to marvel at him. again, no doubt this was an encouragement for the Thessalonians to be reminded.

Paul is saying, when we pray for you, we remember this. God is going to return. Not only is he going to punish those who are afflicting you, but he is also going to be glorified in you, and you are going to marvel at him.

that's a wonderful, indescribable promise that we have that is ours, that is secure if we belong to Jesus Christ, that nothing can change it.

The apostle Peter says that it is kept in heaven for us, preserved and secure, and it'll never fade. it'll never be tarnished.

[ 28 : 00 ] The apostle Paul bore this in mind as he prayed for the Thessalonians. This was their ultimate hope. But one day, Christ will return.

We've glorified in his people, and we'll be marveled out among them. And so the second prayer lesson that we can learn from the apostle Paul is this.

When praying for fellow believers, never lose sight of eternity, especially when people are suffering. See, because when we lose sight of eternity, they can believe that what they're going through with is eternity. And they would be tempted to make more of it than they ought to do.

But the truth is, whether it is in suffering or in blessing, we must keep eternity in view as we pray for brothers and sisters.

[ 29 : 12 ] Because truth be told, even when we are walking through blessing, we know that nothing in this life lasts. life is in And we be able to to give us money. No amount of money that we can secure, no amount of resources we can amass can give us any certainty about life in this uncertain world.

So even as we pray for those who are walking through blessing, we keep eternity in view as well.

again, what a great encouragement for the Thessalonians to hear of this reality and that this is what Paul bears in mind as he prays for them.

And I pray that it informs our own thinking as we pray for others as well. Well, that's the context of Paul's prayer.

Let's now consider the content of Paul's prayer. In verse 11, Paul first prays that God may make them worthy of his calling.

Look at what he says. He says, to this end, we always pray for you that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power. [ 30 : 37 ] Paul is not talking about them working to come to a place where they are worthy to earn something or receive something from God. I'm not talking about that at all because that's an impossibility.

The Bible says that our best acts of righteousness are like filthy rags. So trying to earn something from God, trying to be worthy in God's sight by our own hands.

We will work our knuckles to the bones and it still would be an impossibility. But instead, Paul is simply reminding them that God has called them to himself.

He has called us to himself. He has saved us and our lives are to be appropriately reflective of his high and holy calling. And he's reminding them that it is something that God must enable us to do. But we can't do it on our own. We cannot do it without God's help. And Paul was mindful of this.

[ 31 : 46 ] Of all that was going on with the Thessalonians, aware of how easy it was for them to not live lives that were worthy of the calling that they had received.

in the midst of all their persecution, sometimes being forced to renounce and curse the name of God. Paul says, no, we prayed for you that God would make you worthy of the calling that you have received.

This is a worthy petition. Lord, help them to live lives that appropriately reflect what it means to be a Christian. That is what Paul was praying for them.

In the case of the Christians in Grand Bahama, who have been recently let go from memories hotel, it is a worthy petition, a worthy priority in prayer for them to pray, Lord, help them to live lives that are worthy of your calling.

Lord, help them so that this crisis would not so engulf them, teach them to trust in you, that they would grow in their conviction that their help truly comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

[ 33 : 12 ] Lord, help them to be trusting and not bitter, patient and not angry, and to respond differently from those around them who do not know you as Savior and Lord.

And the same prayer to ask that the Lord would make his people worthy of the calling that they have received is appropriate to pray.

Whatever the circumstances, whether they face a health crisis or divorce or financial challenges or unfulfilled dreams or persecution, whatever the adversity, it's a worthy prayer to pray.

And see, the reason for this is when the Apostle Paul, in verse 11, says, prays that God would make them worthy of the calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith.

He is pointing to something that is supposed to be a reality in every single person's life who has truly come to Christ. But there must be within us, as an evidence that we have truly been converted, this resolve for good, this desire to do good works.

[ 34 : 34 ] The Bible says God has foreordained good works for us. They don't save us, but they give evidence to our salvation. They point to the fact that we have been saved.

And this work of faith that we are pursuing in faith, in trusting God, whether it's reaching out to a co-worker or praying for a family member or serving someone in need.

All of these things Paul is praying that God would bring to pass. He would fulfill them in the lives of these people and that he would do it by his power.

In short, what the Apostle Paul is praying, Lord, help them live as a Christian. Help them to live as a Christian.

In addition to praying that God would make them worthy of his calling, in verse 11, the Apostle Paul, I got ahead of myself, the Apostle Paul prays that God may fulfill every resolve for good and every good work by his power.

[ 35 : 55 ] Again, this is a natural outflowing of the of the first part of the prayer, that God would make us worthy of our calling.

In addition to that, that he would fulfill every resolve for good, every work of faith by his power.

And so here, I would say, the third prayer lesson that we can learn from the Apostle Paul is to not lose sight of God's power to work in the lives of people despite the trying circumstances they may face.

You know, when we consider how Paul is praying for them, if we didn't know the context, if we didn't know that these people were being persecuted and harassed and faced with many trials, we would,

these words may not seem as striking to us, but when we understand what they actually faced and how the Apostle Paul was praying in spite of that, we can see that Paul is appealing to God's ability, God's power, to bring these things to pass despite the difficult and limiting circumstances that the Thessalonians face.

So we too should not lose sight of God's power to work in the lives of people despite the trying circumstances that they may face.

[ 37 : 47 ] But how easy it is to be guided by those circumstances and to pray in accordance with those circumstances instead of praying in accordance with God's great power.

And then why does the Apostle Paul pray this way? Or to put it another way, what is his goal in prayer? We're told the goal in verse 12.

The goal of Paul's prayer is the Lord's glory. What he's saying in verse 12 is that as believers live lives worthy of the Lord, God is glorified.

That's the goal of Paul's prayer. And he's telling the Thessalonians, when we pray for you, ultimately we are praying that as you live lives that are worthy of the Lord, that God is going to be glorified.

And he helps us to see how he expects this to happen, how is he expected all to happen again in verse 12, according to the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 39 : 06 ] And so our fourth and final prayer lesson that we can learn from the Apostle Paul is this. When praying for others, let our ultimate goal be the glory of God.

Now again, does this mean that when we pray for others that we are not to be mindful to pray specifically for their needs?

In particular, when we think of the people in Grand Bahama who've lost jobs, maybe they're in churches this morning, does that mean that we just pray these things over them and we are indifferent to what their needs are?

No. We pray for those needs to be met. We pray for God to open doors for them, for God to make a way in the wilderness. We pray all those things for them. But the larger point is that regardless of their circumstances, the common theme of our prayers should be the grace of God, not losing sight of the grace of God at work in their lives and then remembering that the common goal, the ultimate, is to be that we are praying for God's glory.

You know, God is able to bring glory out of even hard circumstances. God is able to glorify himself even in our worst trials. And we should never shrink back to pray in that regard.

[ 40 : 52 ] So in closing, how should we pray for Christians who, like the people in Grand Bahama, have lost jobs or they're walking through bewilderment and difficulty and disillusionment and all the things that can happen to us in a fallen world.

We should pray for them in the same way that we pray for all Christians. We should ponder evidences of grace. We should pray in light of eternity.

We should pray with an awareness of God's power. and we should pray with a desire for God's glory. I pray the Lord would help us to pray for one another in ways consistent with Paul's example as he prayed for these Christians who faced many trials that we would bear these things in mind. Let's pray. Yes,