

# WHY PRAY?

## Becoming God's Friend

Discussion Guide

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Sermon Title

**Praying for the Thessalonians**

by Paul R. Martin

I Thess. 3:11-13, 5:23-24, II Thess. 1:11-12, 2:16-17, 3:16

### Sermon Outline

**Introduction:** Much can be learned about how to pray for one another as we consider how Paul prayed for the Thessalonian believers during a time of affliction when they were facing strong temptations and during a time when they had allowed truth to get out of balance, thus distracting them from the essential ministry of following Jesus Christ.

#### I. The First Letter: afflictions which could potentially exploit their weaknesses

- A. A reading of the letter indicates that Paul was concerned about them because they were under pressure, relatively new in Christ, and he had observed certain weaknesses among them which he felt were likely to become their temptations leading them away from Christ, namely:
1. a tendency toward laziness and idleness, a lack of industriousness
  2. a possible tendency toward immorality and sexual sins
- B. His two prayer for them consisted of three key requests, all similar in nature
1. that their love would increase and abound, in and out of the church (3:12)
  2. that God would establish their hearts in holiness without blame (3:13)
  3. that God would sanctify them and preserve their spirit, soul, and body without blame until Jesus comes again (5:23)

#### II. The Second Letter: truth out of balance causing distractions to the Gospel

- A. Of all the local churches Paul planted, the Thessalonians were most captured by the "blessed hope," the return of Jesus Christ for His Bride, the Church. Perhaps because of their afflictions they were looking forward to His soon return. Unfortunately, this wonderful truth, out of proportion in their lives, was actually distracting them from the task of the church immediately at hand.
- B. Paul prayed four things for them, all related to balancing their lives and focusing them on the immediate responsibility of the church. In some way each prayer relates to making them effective in ministry right now:
1. that God would count them worthy of their calling (1:11)
  2. that God would fulfill their every desire for goodness AND the work of faith with power (1:11)
  3. that God would comfort and strengthen their hearts in every good work and word (2:17)
  4. that God would grant them peace in every circumstance (3:16)

**Conclusion:** We can see how, in both situations, Paul's prayers for this church identify and address their specific need. In times of affliction and temptation he prays for increased work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification in every part of their being. When truth has grown out of balance and distracted them from practical ministry here and now, he prays that they would become effective in ministry and that every desire they have for goodness and works of faith would be accomplished with power. This kind of praying indicates careful, "diagnostic," and specific intercession according to the particular need of the individual or group at the time.

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 <sup>11</sup>  
*Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; <sup>12</sup> and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; <sup>13</sup> so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.*

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 <sup>23</sup>  
*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.*

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 <sup>11</sup>  
*To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, <sup>12</sup> so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 <sup>16</sup>  
*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, <sup>17</sup> comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.*

2 Thessalonians 3:16 <sup>16</sup>  
*Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!*





3.) What does it mean to be “counted worthy” of your calling?

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4.) Why would Paul pray that their every desire for goodness be fulfilled with power? Doesn't that pose some risk? How can he be sure they will be in God's will?

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5.) What is the difference between having every desire for good work fulfilled and being comforted and strengthen in heart while doing these same good works? (Consider Galatians 6:9 in your answer.)

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7.) How has this lesson helped you to pray more specifically for people you are concerned about?

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*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup> Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, <sup>21</sup> to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*  
Ephesians 3: 14-21 (NASB)

