

PRAYING WITH THE END IN MIND
2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 is a prayer report. The apostle Paul is not praying in these two verses. He writes this passage to let the saints in Thessalonica know that he prays for them and what he prays for them. But he begins this report by telling them why he prays for them. Verse 11 says: “To this end we always pray for you.” The statement, “to this end,” points back to all that he has previously said in this letter, particularly verses 5-10.

Paul, along with Silvanus and Timothy, wrote this letter to challenge and encourage this young church. Their commitment to the Thessalonians is expressed three ways in the opening chapter of the letter. First, there is thanksgiving. Verse 3 says: “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.” Second, there is boasting. Verse 4 says: “Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.” This reference to their persecutions and afflictions led to a parenthesis in thought. In verses 5-10, Paul comforts these troubled Christians with the hope of the SECOND COMING of Jesus Christ. Wickedness may prevail for the moment. But the Lord Jesus will judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous when he returns in glory.

In the final two verses of this chapter, Paul resumes his main thought and makes a third statement of commitment to the Thessalonians. It is prayer. Verse 11 says: “To the end we always pray for you.” In verses 5-10, Paul expresses his unwavering confidence that the Lord Jesus Christ will have the last word in this world. But this confidence does not leave him to assume there is no need to pray. W.E. VINE rightly said: “The certainty of the accomplishment of all the purposes of God does not make prayer either presumptuous or unnecessary.” Paul’s confidence in God moved and motivated him to pray. This confidence also shaped how Paul prayed. He prayed with the end in mind. He knew the glorious ending of the story and it shaped how he prayed through the difficult chapters. Paul prayed backwards. This is the lesson of this prayer report: Effective prayer always prioritizes the ultimate over the immediate. Have you ever prayed for something that seemed so important and urgent? Now you wish you knew then what you know now. You cannot pray your way through the challenges you face right now if you do not pray with the end in mind. How do you pray with the end in mind? To pray with the end in mind is to pray for the right things and for the right reasons.

I. PRAY FOR THE RIGHT THINGS.

Verse 11 says: “To this end we always pray for you.” Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus interceded for the saints at Thessalonica. Their example teaches us that it is good and right and wise to pray for one another. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul exhorts: “Pray without ceasing.” This prayer report in 2 Thessalonians shows Paul practiced what he preached. Verse 11 says: “we always pray for you.” Paul prayed unceasingly. JOHN PHILLIPS wrote: “Paul did not pray just when he was in a tight corner; he also prayed

when he was in a bright corner.” When he prayed, his loving concern for the Thessalonians poured out in petitions to God. Paul did not focus his prayers on material, financial, or physical needs. With the end in mind, Paul asked God for a worthy life and a fulfilled life. This is how you should pray.

A. ASK GOD FOR A WORTHY LIFE.

Verse 11 says: “To the end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling.” The word “calling” means to invite or summon. It is a synonym for salvation that is used two ways. First, it is used for the initial call of God to salvation. We are saved because God called us from darkness to light, from death to life, from sin to salvation. Likewise, the term is used for the ultimate call of God to glory. The term seems to be used in its widest sense here, encompassing both the believer’s immediate call and ultimate call. 1 Thessalonians 2:12 says we should walk in a manner worthy of God, “who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.” And 1 Thessalonians 4:7 says: “For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.” The practical exhortations of 1 Thessalonians become prayer requests in 2 Thessalonians. Paul prays “that our God make you worthy of his calling.” This prayer request does not suggest we can be worthy of salvation. God is holy and we are not. Each of us will have to answer to God for how we have lived our lives. All have sinned and fall short of the glory. There is nothing we can do to win God’s approval, reach God’s standards, or satisfy God’s demands. Our only hope is run to the cross, and trust in Jesus.

God calls us. And God makes us worthy of his calling. We cannot make ourselves worthy of salvation. And we cannot keep ourselves worthy of salvation. The God of the initial call is the God of the ultimate call. And God will not lose between anyone between earth and glory. Romans 8:30 says: “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” That’s the golden chain of salvation. It cannot be broken. The predestined are the called are the justified are the glorified. So what does it mean for God to make us worthy of his calling? It means we should live in a manner that honors the call of God on our lives. Ephesians 4:1 says: “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to talk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” You cannot pay for your salvation. But you can and should live in a way that honors the prize that Jesus paid at the cross for your redemption.

I CAN HEAR THE SAVIOR SAY, “THINE STRENGTH, INDEED, IS SMALL”
“CHILD OF WEAKNESS, WATCH AND PRAY, FIND IN MY THINE ALL AND ALL.”
JESUS PAID IT ALL, ALL TO HIM I OWE.
SIN HAD LEFT A CRIMSON STAIN. HE WASHED IT WHITE AS SNOW.

An upstart business owner was known for his goodness, kindness, and generosity. One of his employees asked him what made him that way. He opened the cash register to show several rusty nails amidst the money. He explained that he kept those nails in the cash register to remind him that his business was about more than money. In light of what Jesus did for him at the cross, he should use his business as a ministry to others. This is

what it means to be worthy of your calling. You cannot pay for salvation. But your life should honor the prize that was paid for you. So you must pray, because only God can make you worthy of your calling. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 says: “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, he will surely do it.”

B. ASK GOD FOR A FULFILLED LIFE.

Verse 11 says: “To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and make fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power.” In a real sense, this second petition restates and affirms the first. What does it mean for God to make you worthy of his calling? It is for God to “fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power.” This latter petition combines divine responsibility and human responsibility. The resolve for good and work of faith were already true of the saints in Thessalonica. Yet Paul prayed about because only God can bring them to fulfillment. The word “fulfill” means to accomplish, make effective, or bring to completion. You may resolve in your heart and mind to do good. And you set your hands to the work of faith. But the fulfillment is a divine act, not a human accomplishment. Philippians 1:6 says: “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Only God can fulfill every resolve for God and every work of faith.

ONLY GOD CAN FULFILL EVERY RESOLVE FOR GOOD. The word “resolve” is about more than a simple desire. It is good pleasure. It is holy purpose. It is steadfast determination. The term is used for the eternal purposes of God. But here Paul is talking about the Christian’s resolve, not God’s. We know this because Paul speaks of “the resolve for good.” God does not have to resolve to do good. God is good and only does what is good. The Greek word translated here “good” is never used of God in the New Testament. It is a term for human goodness – one person doing good to another person. Galatians 6:10 says: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” It is the Christian’s duty to do good. It is also the Christian’s desire to do good. Resolve for good is assurance of salvation. You better check yourself if you think you are on your way to heaven but have no resolve for good. Conversion not only changes your destiny; it changes your nature. 2 Corinthians 5:17 say: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” Saved people live with a sense of desire, duty, and determination to do good. Yet we cannot do fulfill this resolve for good on our own. The flesh is too sinful. The world is too evil. The devil is too busy. So we pray that God may fulfill every resolve for good.

ONLY GOD CAN FULFILL EVERY WORK OF FAITH. The phrase “every resolve for good” is a reminder that we need divine help to live inwardly in a Christ-honoring way. The phrase “every work of faith” is a reminder that we also need divine help to live outwardly in a Christ-honoring way. The two go together organically. One is the pregnancy; the other is the offspring. The resolve for good that does not give birth to the work of faith is spiritual abortion. **SINS OF COMMISSION** grab attention. But sin is not

limited to saying and doing things you should not. There are also SINS OF COMMISSION. James 4:17 says: “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” It is sin when resolve for good does not become work of faith. What is the “work of faith”? This phrase unites two words that often stand in opposition in the writings of Paul. Sinners are saved from eternal punish by faith alone in the blood and righteousness of Christ, not by the performance of good works. Ephesians 2:8-9 says: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” But we are saved by faith alone, not a faith that is alone. The faith that saves is more than mental assent, passive agreement, or even public confession. True faith works. LEON MORRIS said it well: “Faith is always busy.” But the work of faith cannot be accomplished on its on. We must pray that God fulfill every work of faith.

II. PRAY FOR THE RIGHT REASONS.

To pray effectively you must pray for the right things. But your prayers can still be rendered ineffective if you do not pray for the right reasons. James 4:3 says: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” God will not answer if the substance of your requests is wrong. And God will not answer if the motivation behind your requests is wrong. Answered prayer is not to make your name great. It is to glorify the name of the Lord. Verse 12 states the ultimate goal of believing prayer: “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.” Praying for the right reasons requires you focus on glory and rely on grace.

A. FOCUS ON THE GLORY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Verse 12 says: “so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him.” In scripture, one’s name is more than a personal label. It represented an individual’s character. The name of a person was the person. So the “name” of our Lord Jesus here refers to Lord Jesus himself. The reason we should ask God for a worthy life and a fulfilled life is that his name may be glorified. The glory of God is a dominating theme of scripture. Here God the Father answers prayer to glorify God the Son. To glorify is to praise, honor, or esteem. Verse 10 points to the glory of the Second Coming: “when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.” But this prayer report is not about the Lord’s future glory. It is about the present glory. Through answered prayer, Christ is glorified in you and you are glorified in Christ.

CHRIST IS GLORIFIED IN YOU. Verse 10 is about the inevitable fact of Christ’s glory. He will be glorified. Verse 12 is about the personal means of Christ’s glory: “in you.” Christ should be glorified by you. But that is not what Paul says here. He says that Christ should be glorified in you. ALEXANDER MACLAREN said it well: “Christ’s reputation is in our hands.” The glory of the Lord should shine in you. Your attitudes, words, and conduct should bring glory to Christ. When unbelievers see our worthy and fulfilled life, it should bring glory to Jesus. Romans 12:1 says: “I appear to you therefore,

brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” Spiritual worship is more than giving God the praise. It’s about giving God you! D. MICHAEL MARTIN commented here: “In short, Christlike behavior is more important than words of praise in the glorifying of the Lord. For praise from a life transformed by the power of the Spirit rings true and sweet, but godless living makes a mockery of praise.”

YOU ARE GLORIFIED IN CHRIST. Paul blows our mind by claiming that Christ is glorified in you. Then, before we can catch our breath, he adds: “and you in him.” In a healthy marriage, you focus on developing your character and meeting your spouse’s needs. Marriage becomes dysfunctional when you focus on your needs and your mate’s character. When you focus on your character and your mate’s needs, God will meet your needs. So it is with Christ in you and you in Christ. When you live preoccupied with your felt needs, it does not rob Christ of his inevitable glory. It ultimately robs you. But when you live for the glory of Christ, Christ will glorify you with him. Romans 8:16-17 says: “This Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs with God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided that we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” This is the believer’s intimate union with Christ. When Christ is glorified in you, you are glorified in him.

B. RELY ON THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

How can sinful people live in such a way that Christ is glorified in you and you in Christ? Verse 12 says: “so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be gloried in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Christ-exalting glory is the result of Christ-infused grace. JOHN STOTT wrote: “As always, grace and glory go together. Glory is the end; grace is the means to it. There can be no glory without grace.” Christ is glorified in you and you in Christ according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace is the unmerited favor of God. Grace happens when God gives you what you do not deserve. Grace means God did it all. This is how we can live to the glory of Christ. You cannot do it by your goodness. You can only do it by his grace. How are things between you and the Lord Jesus Christ?

In August 2012, a group of tourists visited a volcanic canyon in Iceland. During a stop, a woman got off the bus to change clothes and refresh herself. She returned to the bus that a woman in the group was missing. She didn’t recognize the description of the missing woman. But she joined the search nonetheless. More than 50 people searched for hours on foot and in vehicles. The coast guard prepared to send out a helicopter to join the search. But eventually several searchers identified the woman who had changed clothes as the woman they were looking for. She was searching for herself and didn’t even know it. Such is life. We are lost. We are sinners. We are spiritually helpless. We cannot find ourselves; much less, God. But grace found us.

“AMAZING GRACE” SHALL ALWAYS BE MY SONG OF PRAISE
FOR IT WAS GRACE THAT BOUGHT MY LIBERTY
I DO NOT KNOW JUST WHY HE CAME TO LOVE ME SO

HE LOOKED BEYOND MY FAULTS AND SAW MY NEEDS

I SHALL FOREVER LIFT MY EYES TO CALVARY
TO VIEW THE CROSS WHERE JESUS DIED FOR ME
HOW WONDERFUL THE GRACE THAT CAUGHT MY FALLING SOUL
HE LOOKED BEYOND MY FAULTS AND SAW MY NEEDS