

Pray it Again, Saul

The Recorded Prayers of the Apostle Paul

Text

Second Thessalonians 1:11-12

Introduction

Studying prayer is dicey because you don't want to formalize it. But since Jesus was willing to give His followers brief instruction on prayer, it's OK as long as we are careful.

We are taking a look at the prayers that the apostle Paul prayed that are recorded in the New Testament.

There are different lists; it can be hard to determine what is a prayer and what isn't, since Paul wrote in an attitude of prayer.

But even if we miss some, the ones we will study will be rich.

We're taking them in chronological order, starting with what scholars believe were Paul's first letters - to Thessalonica.

Paul's prayer in Second Thessalonians 1:11-12 is in a context of comforting the Thessalonians in their afflictions - specifically, persecution.

Leading up to the prayer, we read,

2Th 1:5 which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;

2Th 1:6 since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you,
2Th 1:7 and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,
2Th 1:8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2Th 1:9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,
2Th 1:10 when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

"You suffer," "you who are troubled." The Thessalonians were enduring persecution.

Paul lifted their gaze beyond their trouble and past the Great Tribulation. The glorified church is going to be returning with Jesus at the end of the Great Tribulation. When He does, judgment is coming upon its persecutors.

We're not to glory in that vengeance. We must hold in mind, always, that God is not willing any should perish, but that all would be saved.

Knowing the future puts the present into perspective. I suffer now, but one day all my suffering will be over.

The wicked prosper now, but unless they receive the forgiveness of their sins, they will be judged accordingly.

I need - we need - strength to endure the present afflictions; and that is what Paul prayed for.

2Th 1:11 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,
2Th 1:12 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.

Earlier Paul said he thanked God for them. He said he boasted about them to others. On top of that, he prayed for them.

We should be thankful for... boastful about... and prayerful towards... the believers we know. It's an amazing miracle that someone is born-again of the Holy Spirit. It is cause to rejoice, and to go on rejoicing by practicing those three attitudes.

I was raised to put a high value on customer service. One thing that used to mean is that you don't criticize, to customers, your company or its employees. You keep those things internal.

Today everyone seems to quickly disrespect their fellow workers; or their company.

Are there problems in churches? Yup - *because you and I attend!* I want, however, to be thankful, boastful, and prayerful towards other believers, covering all their faults with grace.

Nonbelievers should not get the impression that the churches are in competition.

(I'm not talking about cults, or so-called churches whose doctrine is not biblical; I'm talking about churches who honor the Lord and His Word, though there may be differences between us).

Paul prayed, first, that "our God would count [them] worthy of this calling." No one is "worthy" of salvation. It is a free gift of grace, not by works. God only justifies sinners.

He is describing them *after* they got saved - not before. He's therefore talking about how we walk with Jesus from the Cross until His coming for us.

Although the emphasis is on God, and what He has promised to do, we will want to walk in a way that is worthy of such a miraculous calling.

Not deserving; we never walk in a way that makes us deserve anything. But in light of our calling to salvation, and ultimate glorification, we want to walk worthy.

To that end Paul prayed to, "fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness." A better translation is that God would "fulfill our every desire for goodness."

In the Christian film, *God's Not Dead*, two of the main characters had a dialog they'd use. One would say, "God is good," and the answer was, "All the time." Then one would say, "And all the time," to be answered, "God is good."

That is part of what Paul was getting at - that God is always good. Remember, he was saying it in a context of suffering, when it's hard to see the goodness of God. But He can show us His goodness; and He does.

The other part of this is that I would desire to do good, and depend upon God to empower my desires.

Depending upon God isn't easy:

- Sometimes I have a desire that seems good, but it's not from God and that means I won't enjoy His empowering if I pursue it. I'll be in my own strength, and I will end up burnt-out and frustrated.
- Other times the desire IS from God, but I hesitate, not believing by faith that God will empower me to perform it.

Paul prayed "God... would fulfill... the work of faith with power." The "work of faith" is a description of what our lives ought to be after we are saved. We ought to produce works that are characteristic of faith in Jesus.

We can only do so through God's "power." Having begun in the Spirit, we ought to continue in the Spirit - depending upon the Lord to empower us in all our endeavors.

2Th 1:12 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.

Since we are saved, it ought to be natural for us to want to see Jesus "glorified" through our lives.

Specifically, that His "name" be glorified. His "name" encompasses His character and His nature.

Too bad it got overused, but the WWJD campaign has its place in our thinking.

In my words, and in my walk: Am I bringing glory to the Name of Jesus? A sincere asking of that question will give me answers to many of life's unanswered questions.

For example we are always asking, "Can a Christian (you fill in the blank)?"

Those gray-area questions can often be answered by asking of the activity, "How does it glorify Jesus?"

It doesn't mean I can't have liberty in some questionable activity, but like Paul said of himself elsewhere, maybe I should have my liberty to myself, and not flaunt it in the world, where it might bring reproach upon Jesus, and stumble His followers.

How in the world can "you" be glorified "in Him?" You will be when, at the end, Jesus presents you spotless, blameless, and perfect before our Father in Heaven.

"Grace" is the context in which all this occurs. Not one of us, not ever, merits or deserves anything from God; but He graciously supplies everything we need for life and for godliness.

"According to the grace" of Jesus and of the Father, I am saved... I am being sanctified... And I will be glorified.

A final observation: Paul did not pray for their persecution to end. Maybe he did elsewhere; but it isn't recorded here. He prayed for something higher; something better.

Aim higher; want what is best.