

**November 19, 2023**

**2 Thessalonians 3:1-5**

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, <sup>2</sup> and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. <sup>3</sup> But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. <sup>4</sup> And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. <sup>5</sup> May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

Scriptures for further study:

John 15:5

Hebrews 4:16

Romans 7:7-25

Ephesians 6:10-20

“The word translated as “speed ahead” means to ‘run so as to win a race’ and speaks of Paul’s desire for the gospel to spread and conquer unbelief.”

- Richard Phillips

G.K. Beale’s translation of verses 2-3:

“Pray that we would be delivered from out of place and evil men, because not all in the church have faith, just as is true in your situation. But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and protect you from the evil one, who inspires the evil man in your midst.”



### Strength

### 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

**BIG IDEA:** Because of God's faithfulness and because of our utter dependence on Him, then we are to confidently and frequently pray to God for His mission, our battle, and His strength.

### OUTLINE

1. Gospel Mission (3:1)
2. Gospel Battle (3:2-4)
3. Gospel Strength (3: 3,5)

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“God has decreed not only the final salvation of people but also the means for them to reach that goal.”

- G.K. Beale

“God’s faithfulness does not relieve us from needing to persevere in prayer. Instead, confidence in God will keep us praying until God has sped forth the gospel and overcome spiritual opposition.”

- Richard Phillips

Paul’s fundamental concern is the advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To that end, he has worked, prayed, and asked for prayer that the word of the Lord would speed ahead and be honored and that he and his companions would be delivered from wicked and evil men (vv. 1–2). Paul’s prayer for deliverance is not motivated by concern about his health or security but by his desire to advance the gospel. Knowing that his calling will lead to confrontation with those in Thessalonica or elsewhere who do not love Christ, Paul nevertheless boldly proclaims the truths and responsibilities of the gospel. He reminds his readers (and us) that the Lord is faithful and will establish and guard his people against the evil one (v. 3). Established on these glorious gospel truths of God’s faithfulness, Paul communicates his confidence that the Thessalonians and all true believers will do the things that Jesus Christ and his apostles command (v. 4).

- ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible

***Praise to Jesus.*** Praise the Lord for His faithfulness and His strength that He provides to us through God the Holy Spirit. Praise Him that the spreading of the gospel is not up to our power, but His power.

***Repentance through Jesus.*** Repent for the times when you have not asked for prayer and when you sought to fight your spiritual battles on your own effort. Ask God to change your hearts to be completely dependent on Him.

***Consecration for Jesus.*** Take time to pray for the gospel to be spread in your family, our community, and to the ends of the earth. Ask God to reveal His beauty to you for the purpose of reorienting every aspect of our lives around Him. Pray that God will reveal a part of your life that is not directed to bring Him glory.

## DISCIPLESHIP DURING THE WEEK

These “Sermon discussion questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. Pastor Ken mentioned that our prayers show our faith. Why is this the case? How often do you ask for someone to pray for you? Why do you ask or not ask for prayer?
2. In verse 1 Paul asks for the Thessalonians to “pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you.” What does this request show about Paul’s belief in God? What do our prayer requests reveal about our belief in God? Think about your sphere of influence. Who might need your prayers to come to a saving faith in Jesus?
3. What is the battle that is mentioned in verses 2-3? What weapons has God given us to fight this battle?
4. What does it mean that “the Lord is faithful?” How does God’s faithfulness affect our prayer lives and our lives in general?
5. How does the directing of our hearts to the “love of God” and “the steadfastness of Christ” help us in our faith journey? Which of these is most meaningful to you at this stage of life?

## FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. How would you describe prayer to a friend at school or in your neighborhood? *(You may have to give them some ideas and ask them questions to get them to think about prayer. Put simply prayer is our communication with God. The Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 98 states, "Prayer is offering our desires to God in the name of Christ for things that agree with his will, confessing our sins, and thankfully recognizing his mercies.")*
2. When was the last time you asked for someone to pray for you? What did you ask them to pray for you?
3. What did Paul ask the Thessalonians to pray for him and his ministry in verse 1? What does this prayer reveal about Paul's view of God? *(Paul asked for prayer "that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored." The "word of the Lord" is the gospel. This prayer request shows that Paul believed that the Lord is the One who enables the gospel to be spread and is the One who saves people.)*
4. What does it mean that "the Lord is faithful?" (This means that God can be trusted. It means that God will always do what He promises to us and for us. He never breaks His promises to us.)
5. How does Paul's warning about the opposition that we will face as Christians comfort us? What does it mean in verse 5 that we would ask that "the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ?" *(It is helpful to know that we will face opposition in our Christian lives so that we are not surprised and discouraged. Paul wants our hearts focused on God's love so that we can keep going forward in our faith and not think that opposition means that God doesn't love us. As for Christ's steadfastness, you may have to define that for your children. Other translations use "perseverance" or "patience" or "endurance" or "the strength to go on.")*

Scriptures for further study:  
Ephesians 6:10-20

1 Timothy 6:12

## FOR STUDENTS

1. How much do you pray for the leaders of your church? How could you pray for them—and your church in general—along the lines of Paul’s prayer requests in verses 1-2?
2. What difference do you think it would make to your life to acknowledge the work of the evil one more? Why is that important?
3. Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray for the gospel to be spread, who are/can you be praying for to receive the good news of the Gospel?
4. Why do you think Paul saw prayer as an integral component to people hearing the gospel?
5. Who is one person you can share the gospel with this week?
6. Paul says, “he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.” How does knowing that the Lord rules over Satan give you peace? How does it help you fight against the temptation of sin?
7. What has been a difficult Christian discipline to maintain during this season of life?
8. What are some practical steps you can take in this season of life to be faithful to the commands of the Lord?
9. How can you practically seek to grow through discipleship and community in the next week?
10. Paul requests for our hearts to be directed toward “the steadfastness of Christ”, how does Christ as the model of obedience inform your understanding of perseverance?

## FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. Paul asks for prayer that the gospel message might spread rapidly (literally “run”), and be honored; in other words, that the gospel message would move swiftly and powerfully. We know from history that this prayer was indeed answered, as Christianity grew exponentially (40% growth per decade) for the first several centuries! We also know that the Christian faith spread mainly through Christians faithfully sharing the gospel in their social networks (work, family, etc.). They did not keep it to themselves!

**Challenge:** What are your own current social networks? Who do you know in your various spheres of influence? Would you now faithfully spread the message to these people?

2. This passage centers on the theme of prayer. When we pray we are recognizing our constant dependence on the Lord for all things. According to this passage, we should pray the following:

- a. Pray that the message of salvation would spread rapidly and that you yourself would be faithful in participating in its spread.
- b. Pray for God’s protection from the evil one (v.3), and God’s deliverance from wicked and evil people (v.2) who will undoubtedly oppose you and the spread of the gospel. Trust that what God has established, He will also guard continually. He’s got you!
- c. Pray with confidence that the good spiritual work that God has begun in you He will continue and bring to completion. (See Philippians 1:6)
- d. Pray for perseverance. With Christ as our strength (and also inspiration—see v.5), pray that we would be men and women who are growing in his love, unswerved from our purpose, and loyal to Christ in faith and piety.

# A Sustaining Gratitude: The Abundant Growth of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica



*Sunflowers, Vincent Van Gogh, 1888*

**About 2 Thessalonians:** Paul writes to express his GRATITUDE for the church's continued growth in faith and love. At the same time, he encourages them to stand firm amidst persecution, seeks to correct a false teaching concerning the return of Christ, and addresses an idleness problem.

Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to commend them for their continued spiritual growth while encouraging them to progress. He deals with misinformation about the 2nd Coming and an emerging problem of idleness. The letter's focus is eschatology, or the theology of end times. While this is a prevalent theme in 1 Thessalonians, instead of continuing a discussion about what will happen to the dead, the Thessalonians were confused and disturbed by false teaching that said Jesus had already returned invisibly and the church missed it. Paul provides much-needed clarity about when Jesus will return.

**About the artist and painting:** In 1888, the Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh moved to southern France with a dream. He wanted to establish an art community where painters could live, work, and inspire one another. One of his mentors, a man he deeply respected, Paul Gauguin, agreed to come and live in this community. As a symbol of his thankfulness and happiness, Van Gogh painted a series of sunflower paintings and hung them in his room. The sunflower meant to reflect his surprising joy towards achieving a dream.

The apostle Paul was probably not an artist but he did produce a letter expressing his surprising joy, his thankfulness, and happiness. This letter was his "sunflower" to the church Thessalonica. It's Paul's verbal painting of Gospel Gratitude. What are things you are most grateful for in your life? Has the Gospel taken root in your heart? If so, what fruits of gratitude are being produced and overflowing in your life as a result of Jesus?

In his opening words from Paul to the Thessalonians, he writes:

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. The same faith, hope, and love that made a difference in the lives of believers then can make a difference in your life now. "I'm excited for what God has in store for us First Presbyterian Church, as the Spirit washes us in these words of Gospel gratitude. May Christ be our hope for the world to come, our faith for today, and our love for a lifetime."

Pastor Bill Pardue