

A Thessalonians

I. Introduction

- A. **2 Thessalonians 1:11-12** . . . 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, [12] 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.
- B. Today, my primary goal is to remind you that you need an intentional personal effort, challenging circumstances, and persistent prayer for help from God in order to become a person who is considered worthy of God's kingdom and who is counted worthy of your calling.
- C. Pray

II. The path to being counted worthy of our calling.

- A. This first chapter of **2 Thessalonians** presents three steps along the path to being considered worthy of the kingdom of God and being counted worthy of your calling. Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian believers in **vs 11-12** is the third of the three steps in this process of spiritual growth. We will begin by reviewing the first two steps and then reinforcing the importance of the third.
 - 1. The **first step** is found in **vs 3-4**, where Paul commends the believers for having greater faith, growing in their love for one another, and persevering in the face of persecution and affliction.
 - a. A paraphrase of these three qualities is as follows:
 - (1) **Greater Faith:** A growing and practical **trust** in God, His ways, His word, His provision, and His protection that is applied in your daily living.
 - (2) **Growth in Love:** A measurable growth in the understanding and practical application of **love**.
 - (3) **Perseverance:** Remaining godly in thought, attitude, word, and deed in spite of mistreatment, unjust suffering, cruel hostility, and being hated and persecuted without just cause.
 - b. Though God is our source of power and help for Christian growth, neither faith nor love grows spontaneously or solely by God's doing. Both must be intentionally, thoughtfully, and repeatedly nurtured by those in whom they reside.

- c. In a similar way, perseverance, that is, remaining godly when facing trials, mistreatment, cruelty, or injustice is never automatic. Nor are those who persevere free of the temptation to respond with distrust or disapproval of God, ungodly anger, or feeling like a victim.
- d. The reality is, we must be actively and purposefully involved in nurturing our faith and trust in God, our love for those around us, and our perseverance in godly living.
 - (1) To be actively involved requires wanting and choosing to be involved enough to make measurable and commendable progress. In other words, active involvement does not mean occasional or as time permits involvement, but rather intentional, planned, and persistent, daily involvement.
 - (2) Therefore, to be purposefully involved requires making a plan, protecting time to work your plan, seeking help, wisdom, and accountability from those who are more spiritually mature than you, and continuing to do this until you either die or are so perfected in the Christian life that you don't need to do this any more.
- e. God's word affirms this first step, that is, our intentional, planned, and persistent involvement in spiritual growth.
 - (1) **Romans 8:12-13**, "So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— [13] for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit **you are putting to death** the deeds of the body, you will live."
 - (2) **Philippians 2:12b-13**, "(*You*) **Work out your salvation** with fear and trembling; [13] (*Why you? Because*) it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."
 - (3) **Colossians 3:5, 12-13**, "Therefore (*you*) **put to death** the members of your earthly body: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. [12] And as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, (*you*) **put on** a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; [13] bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

- (4) **2 Timothy 2:22.**, “Now **flee from** youthful lusts and **pursue** righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”
- f. To summarize, the first step in the process of growing spiritually is the step of personal responsibility – doing what God’s word tells us to do in order to become mature Christians.
2. The **second step** along the path to being considered worthy of the kingdom of God and being counted worthy of our calling is found in **vs 5**. In this second step, God brings or allows trials, tribulation, sickness, suffering, and even persecution and affliction to come into our lives in order to mature and purify us. And though this step is hard and even painful at times, it’s outcome of spiritual growth and increasing Christian maturity is so valuable that it makes the cost worth it.
- a. In other words, God often uses difficult circumstances and difficult people to take us from the initial act of repentance and faith in Jesus into and through the process of sanctification so that we become worthy recipients of God’s gift of life – now and throughout eternity.
- b. But why does God uses difficult and even painful circumstances when He could miraculously and painlessly change us? I can think of several reasons, but for now I will give you two.
- (1) **First**, difficult circumstances challenge our faith and test the strength and maturity of our trust in God – thus revealing how much we’ve grown in trusting God and His ways. Difficult circumstances test the endurance of our commitment to live godly in spite of the cost or our failures along the way.
- (2) **Second**, difficult circumstances force us to choose God or self, God’s way or our own way, love or self-interest, living by the word of God or living by the wisdom of the world, seeking the pleasures and riches of God or seeking the pleasures and riches of the world, and choose to depend on God’s provision and protection or trust in worldly security.
- (a) This is important because every time we choose God and godly living we strengthen our trust in God, our submission to God, and our love for God – while killing off more of our old nature, further weakening the power of our fleshly desires, and making progress in breaking ungodly habits that have ruled us for so long.

- (b) But it doesn't end there. By repeatedly choosing God and godliness, we establish and nurture godly thinking, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors – resulting in becoming new creatures in Christ Jesus which makes it almost natural for us to think, speak, and act as godly Christians.
- c. The point here is that God uses difficult circumstances because they provide a testing, learning, and changing environment that exceeds all other such environments.
- d. But then, you already know this. You have heard God's truth found in **James 1:2-4** many times.
 - (1) However, James goes on to say in **vs 12**, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved (*counted worthy*), he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."
 - (2) Peter puts it this way in **1 Peter 1:6-7**, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, [7] so that the proof (*as a result of being tested*) of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation (*return*) of Jesus Christ."
- e. To summarize this second step, God brings or allows us to experience trials, tribulation, sickness, suffering, and even persecution in order to further mature and purify us so that we live lives worthy of His kingdom and our calling.
- 3. The **third step** along the path to being considered worthy of the kingdom of God and being counted worthy of our calling is found in **vs 11**. The focus of this step is purposeful prayer that seeks God's help, empowerment, wisdom, leading, and personal fellowship in order to become a Christian who lives a worthy life.

B. [11a] To this end also **we pray** for you **always**,

- 1. Though this verse is about Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian believers, I am going to apply it to us in two ways.
 - a. **First**, I going to use it to promote personal prayer on behalf your own spiritual growth in godliness and fellowship with God.
 - b. **Second**, I am going to use **vs 11** to encourage us to pray for each other's spiritual development and growth toward Christian maturity just as we pray for each other's physical health and

healing when one of us is sick, or just as we pray for God's comfort and strength when one of us is struggling or suffering from some loss.

2. Paul begins by saying that they (Paul, Sivanus, Timothy) **pray always** for the Thessalonians spiritual health and growth.
 - a. In other words, in relation to spiritual health and growth toward Christian maturity, they were relentless in prayer, and we should be too.
 - b. In my opinion, relentless praying for our spiritual health and development is essential for at least two reasons.
 - (1) **First**, praying relentlessly for the same thing until you get it – even if it takes a year or two – demonstrates that you are sincere and willing to persist until you obtain it.
 - (2) **Second**, growing in godliness in one area almost always requires making changes other areas – and this adds to the time it takes to change the one area you want God's help with.
 - c. Therefore, keep on praying – for yourself if it is personal growth you seek, or for others as you ask God to work in them. God may be at work in ways you cannot see because you are unaware of the number of changes required to make the one change you are praying about.

C. Paul's focus in the rest of **vs 11** is on praying for specific areas of spiritual growth.

1. The **first request** is about God growing us in godliness to the point of being counted worthy of our calling.
 - a. To be counted worthy of your calling is to be so changed that you live a life that is – in God's estimation – worthy of the price He paid to save you, sanctify you, and reconcile you to Himself.
 - b. This is like asking God to conform you to the likeness of Jesus Christ (**Romans 8:29**). Such a request takes in all our thoughts, words, and deeds. Therefore, this is not a one issue, quick answer, pain free, no cost request.
 - c. To make a request like this is to ask God to put you through an educational process that will challenge you, push you to what feels like your limits, require you to die to self and die to things you love and value – but shouldn't, test you, and require serious perseverance from you – which is especially challenging when you feel like you are making no progress at all.

- d. My goal in telling you this is not to discourage you, but to warn you in advance about what lies ahead in hopes this knowledge will motivate you to persevere to the end. And if you pray this for others, and you ought, then be available to encourage and support them as they are taken by God through this challenging process of change.
2. The **second request** asks God to empower and bring to completion every specific desire you have to be godly and every specific effort you make to do God's will – in relation to yourself, your home, your workplace, your community, and your church.
 - a. What desires for godliness do you have? Is there a sin that easily tempts you from which you want freedom? If so, what godly quality or way of thinking do you desire to replace it with?
 - b. Do you want to be free of ungodly fear, ungodly anger, ungodly attitudes, and ungodly speech?
 - c. Is it your desire to be free of encumbrances that get in the way of devoting time and energy to growing in godliness – such as pleasures or possessions or the need for power or the quest for riches or the longing to be seen as important?
 - d. Do you desire to know God's will – generally, and when possible, specifically? Do you want godly wisdom? Do you desire to love your spouse or your children as God loves you? Do you desire to serve others, to seek the good of those around you, to come to the aid of the needy and hurting, or to improve your efforts at evangelism?
 - e. And in whatever move toward godliness that you desire, do you also desire for God to walk hand-in-and with you through the process of change? Do you desire God to empower and bring to completion the process of change? Do you desire God to empower and fulfill your efforts at loving and serving those around you?
 - f. The reality is, what you persistently or relentlessly pray for reveals much about what you desire.
- D. [12] 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.
 1. Godly Christians bring glory to our Lord Jesus in two ways.
 - a. **First**, living a godly life makes the Lord Jesus look believable and therefore trustworthy to the unbelieving world.

- b. **Second**, living a godly life makes the sanctifying, mind transforming, and behavior changing work of our Lord Jesus look real, which makes His teachings look realistic.
 - c. In other words, the quality of our spirituality has a profound effect on how the world sees God and His son, Jesus Christ. This truth gives added meaning to **Romans 14:7-8**, “For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; [8] for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.”
- 2. As I stated at the beginning, “Though God is our source of power and help in times of trouble, neither faith nor love grows spontaneously or solely by God’s doing.” The human element is vital to spiritual growth and Christian maturity.
 - 3. However, in spite of the necessary human element, without God’s gracious empowerment, provision, promises, and help, there **cannot be** commendable, measurable, sincere, heart purifying, mind transforming, and life changing spiritual growth.
 - 4. Jesus clearly stated this in **John 15:5**, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for **apart from Me you can do nothing.**”

III. Conclusion

- A. Without question, you must be thoughtfully, intentionally, and persistently involved in your spiritual growth and development. To do otherwise is to languish in spiritual mediocrity.
- B. Without question, God will bring or allow challenges and tests to come into your life to further grow you up in faith, love, and overall Christian maturity.
- C. But most of all, you must have God’s involvement every day of the rest of your life, which is one vital reason to **pray always** for your growth in godliness.