WE CONSTANTLY PRAY FOR YOU

2 Thessalonians 1:1–12

Key Verse: 1:11

“With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.”

Are you healthy? As we live our lives, sometimes we can seem to be doing fine, but all the while we have some kind of illness we’re not even aware of. It’s true both physically and spiritually. What does it mean to live as a spiritually healthy Christian? And how is that even possible? As we think about Paul’s opening greetings to the Thessalonians, we can get a clearer picture of what being spiritually healthy means. We especially want to learn from Apostle Paul how to pray for one another. May God open our hearts and speak to us personally through his words today.

In verses 1 and 2 Paul opens the letter with his customary greeting. As in 1 Thessalonians, he says this letter is from all three apostles, Paul, Silas and Timothy; he calls them “the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”; and he blesses them with grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read verse 3. He begins, “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so…” When we pray for people, the first principle is to find things to be thankful for. It’s a thankfulness for people, but really it’s a thankfulness to God for what he’s doing in and through others.

Why was Paul thankful for them? He says, “…because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing.” Paul must have heard from Timothy after he visited them, and he probably also heard from others who had been among them. They were new believers, but they were growing in exemplary ways. It was so beautiful. How could they be growing like this? It was because God himself was working powerfully in their hearts. But their cooperation also played a part. It’s so easy to get sidetracked and distracted by trivial things. But these believers focused on exercising their faith and on learning how to love one another. Growing in faith and love is always key to being spiritually healthy. Also, to be growing in these ways, these people couldn’t be spiritually complacent—they had to *want* to grow.

Read verse 4. In Greek it literally says “we ourselves.” It implies that even Paul, Silas and Timothy were inspired by and had something to learn from these new believers. They “boasted” because they wanted all the churches to learn from the Thessalonians’ perseverance and faith. These people were going through all kinds of persecutions and trials, but they had faith that perseveres. In fact, the persecutions were partly the reason they were growing so much. In life, when we’re always avoiding sufferings, we can’t grow. But as we take sufferings with faith, we grow deeper in our relationship with Jesus.

Read verse 5. “All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right” refers to several things. God chose to work in these people to help them grow in faith and in love. God chose to help them persevere. God even chose to bless them to suffer persecution. These are all God’s “judgment,” or his sovereign choice. Sometimes we think suffering is a sign of God’s punishment. But in this case, suffering is a sign of God’s blessing. God considered these people worthy to suffer for his kingdom. The Bible doesn’t say exactly what kind of suffering they were going through. But as new believers, they must have been treated like outcasts for their faith. They were not welcomed; they were shamed. But it wasn’t meaningless suffering; Paul says here it was “suffering for the kingdom of God.” And his point is, God doesn’t allow just anyone to suffer for his kingdom, but only those he considers “worthy.” This tells us how we should view suffering for our faith. We shouldn’t try to create such suffering, but when it happens, we should consider it a sign of God’s favor, and, the greatest blessing (cf. Ac5:41).

Read verses 6,7a. It’s a core Bible teaching that God is just. God’s justice is a sure thing. It may not happen during our lives, but it will certainly happen one day when Jesus comes again. Those who trouble God’s suffering people will be paid back with trouble. And those who experience unjust trouble will find God’s relief and comfort. Why does Paul emphasize this? It’s to encourage our faith. When we experience the unjust suffering of persecution, instead of getting angry or lashing out, we should be conscious of God and his just judgment (1Pe2:19). Even though we don’t see God’s justice yet and we’re still suffering, we should commit ourselves to our faithful Creator and continue to do good (1Pe4:19).

When will we see God’s justice? Read verses 7b,8. This describes what will happen when Jesus comes again. He will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. It’s not a fantasy; it will be a reality. So many people have ignored Jesus, mocking the Christian faith. They think they can sin and hurt others and get away with it. But when Jesus comes, he will bring God’s justice on earth. It will begin with those who rejected the gospel message.

It says he will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. When we hear the gospel, we have to make a choice, either to repent and believe it, or refuse to repent and reject it. This is what it means to “disobey” it. When we choose to obey the gospel, we really come to know God personally. But when we choose to disobey it, we remain in ignorance of who God is. As we continue to live among God’s suffering people, we continue to obey his gospel practically. But if we turn away, it’s another form of disobedience. For those who disobey the gospel, we’re warned of terrible consequences.

What are they? Read verse 9. The words “everlasting destruction” refer to eternal torment in hell, “where the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mk9:48; cf. Isa66:24). It’s a most sobering thought. But the worst part of the punishment described here is to be shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might (9b). It means to never be able to have access to God again. On the other hand, the best part of the kingdom of God is that God himself will dwell among his people in eternal glory.

Read verse 10. When Jesus comes again, he will be glorified in his holy people. He will be revealed in the people who received his gospel. His glory will be revealed in us. His saving grace and his power to change people will be clearly seen and through us. And we’ll get to share in his glory. For now, God’s people are not glorified. But when Jesus comes again, he’ll be fully glorified in us. What a great hope! It also says he’ll be marveled at among all those who have believed. Anyone who believes the gospel will be included. And the focus won’t be on us but on Jesus. We’ll get to admire and honor him forever.

Read verse 11. What is important here is the opening phrase, “With this in mind…” Paul prays for the Thessalonians with the ultimate reality, the glorious second coming of Jesus in mind. He prays for them to live in such a way as to be ready for it. Sometimes we pray fervently for others, but often we don’t. We might pray if we know about a problem or challenge someone is having. But what inspires constant prayer is the awareness of the second coming of Jesus. We should be praying for people with his coming in mind.

We also can learn from Paul’s prayer topics. First, he prays that God may make them worthy of his calling. In verse 5 he already said he believed they will be counted worthy of God’s kingdom. But here he prays that God will make them worthy of his calling. What does it mean? Essentially it means to live according to God’s will for us. God calls us to live as his kingdom people. It means to grow in the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ in our daily lives, in his humility, in his love, in his obedience to God’s will, in his faith in God. It means to allow the Holy Spirit to rule us, instead of our sinful nature, and to allow Him to sanctify us.

We can see what it means to be worthy of this calling in Paul’s second prayer topic. He prays that God, by his power, “may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.” Basically, a life worthy of God’s calling is a life full of good deeds. Often we may have the desire to do good but not actually carry it out. We all need God’s power to help us. So, what are these good deeds? Paul gives us the impression here that there are so many kinds. So he says “every desire” and “every deed.” A worthy life is a life full of all kinds of good deeds. It starts with sharing what we have with others, especially with the needy and the hurting (Heb13:16; Mt25:37–40). It also includes how we treat those who act like our enemies—feeding them, giving them something to drink, praying for them. And it’s important to note that we do these good deeds not for people to see, but only for God to see. We can do all kinds of good deeds like these only as God’s power enables us. Good deeds don’t earn us God’s favor, but they make us ready for Jesus’ coming.

The point here is not only that we do such good deeds, but also that we pray for others to do them. So often we don’t pray like this. It’s good to have all kinds of prayer topics for people. But healthy prayer is to pray for people, by God’s power, to be doing all kinds of good deeds for the glory of God, so that they may be ready for Jesus when he comes again.

Read verse 12. Why should we pray for people like this? It’s so that the name of Jesus may be glorified in them, and they in him. This is the ultimate purpose of praying for others. And we learn here that when our lives are full of good deeds done for Jesus’ sake, God’s grace is revealed.

Read verse 11 again. May God help us grow as spiritually healthy Christians, whose faith and love are growing and increasing, who live lives worthy of his calling, lives full of good deeds done for Jesus’ sake. May God inspire us to pray like Apostle Paul for others with Jesus’ glorious second coming in mind.