

“Praying the Gospel” – 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

In Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, right toward the end, he wanted to share his plans for ministry, and he wrote:

But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. (1 Corinthians 16:8-9)

That turn of phrase has always fascinated me. It’s one of those good news/bad news statements. First the good news; a door for ministry was opened – Paul could see an opportunity to bring more people to Christ and to teach them the way of the Lord. But there was also bad news in that there were many who opposed Paul’s ministry.

That’s just the way it is. Satan and his minions will do anything they can to hinder the spread of the gospel. His tactics are many and varied. Sometimes, he will use direct opposition. Perhaps a secular ruler will prohibit Christians from sharing their faith. In fact, over the past 2,000 years, many have lost their possessions, their livelihood, their freedom and even their lives because they refused to deny their Savior.

But often, the opposition is subtler. Maybe a false teacher will twist the word of God ever so slightly, and people will be deceived. The enemy might sow seeds of division within a church body, causing conflicts that torpedo Christ’s purpose for the church. Maybe the seduction of wealth, or creature comforts serve to choke out the truth of the Gospel. Sometimes folks are just too comfortable to perceive their desperate need for Jesus. Whenever and wherever you have an opportunity to share the gospel of Christ, there will also be adversaries.

It is especially true for those who are called to preach the word. Pastors are especially vulnerable. Pastors can get discouraged. Pastors can get burned out. Pastors can doubt the sufficiency of their own gifts, wonder about their calling, think “who is sufficient for these things?” And yes, pastors often succumb to temptation. We’re just people, after all, and the devil has painted a big old target on our chests.

Now, I count myself incredibly blessed and privileged to be your pastor. It will be eight wonderful years this summer. What an adventure it has been! If Kris and I have blessed this church and this community even one tenth as much as we have been blessed, our ministry will be counted a success. But I want you to know that I need your prayers. Every pastor needs your prayers.

I don’t want it to sound like I’m whining, but being a pastor carries a great responsibility. Almost every day, I feel the weight of that responsibility because I am called to rightly divide the very word of God, the word of truth and convey it to you accurately. James writes:

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. (James 3:1)

It is a formidable duty and I have to take it very seriously. I must be held to an incredibly high standard. If I fall short, I must be disqualified. You know, that was Paul’s great fear. Even Paul was shaken by the responsibility. That’s why he wrote:

I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:27)

Even the great Apostle Paul! Those who are called to preach God’s word need your prayers.

And so, we open this third chapter of second Thessalonians.

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2)

Paul was not shy about asking for prayer, not only for himself, but those who were partners in his ministry. “Pray for us”, he says. Ministry is never a solo effort. At least it shouldn’t be.

I know there are those who really enjoy being the “sage on the stage.” Some pastors want to call attention to themselves. I know there are pastors who are dictatorial in their leadership style. They want to call every shot, micromanaging everyone. They want to control everything. They become despots who crave their own glory, but that really isn’t Jesus’ design for His Church.

Paul had many partners in ministry. Think of Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, Priscilla and Aquilla. Think of Timothy, Titus, Luke, and even John Mark. There are dozens of individuals gifted and called by God that helped spread the Gospel throughout the Mediterranean Basin and I’m sure there are hundreds more that are not recorded in scripture.

The same is true here at Canyon Community Church. This church certainly isn’t all about me. There’s Scott and Eleanor and Paul and Tanner, Mark and Cindy, Judy, Barb White, Lois Gillham, Molly Ban. Joe and Linda Rogers, Jim and Jody Lester, Jim Sutherland. I could go on and on and on. You are all critically important to the ministry of this church. This ministry is about ...

... the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:16)

Pray for us! Pray for the ministry of Canyon Community Church. Pray that, in everything we do, that *the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified*. You see, it’s not about making a name for ourselves. It is about glorifying Jesus Christ.

This world needs to know about the good news.

"... broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. (Matthew 7:13)

People are perishing all around us. Our community is stuffed to the gills with people who have no hope, people who are running hell-bent to eternal destruction.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)

This Bible delivers the amazing truth that despite our sinful, depraved state, God still loves us.

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

And yes,

... the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

People need to hear the word of Jesus Christ. So, pray that *the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified*. Pray the Gospel! Because God moves by means of the prayers of His saints. It's not that He needs us, but He wants us to participate. I can't say I fully understand, but prayer is effective. And exhibit A is the church in Thessalonica.

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified ... just as it is with you, (2 Thessalonians 3:1)

We also need to pray for protection.

and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. (2 Thessalonians 3:2)

I already mentioned this. Whenever there is ministry opportunity, there will also be adversaries. Way too often, those adversaries Actually come from within the church.

Charles Spurgeon is widely considered the greatest preacher of the 19th Century. He is called the prince of preachers. But toward the end of his life, he was essentially kicked out of the Baptist Convention. It grieved him greatly, and I think it contributed to his death when he was only 57 years old. He stood for the truth of the Bible, and it cost him dearly.

Or consider Jonathan Edwards, who was one of the principle preachers of America's First Great Awakening. He was a brilliant, gifted man, completely dedicated to the gospel of Jesus Christ. At the very height of his preaching ministry, he was voted out of his church. Jonathan Edwards was fired!

Even within our Village Missions family, we have had pastors and their families treated horribly by some of the people they dedicated their lives to serve. There are many adversaries. Please, pray for pastors. Pray for our Village Missionaries of the week. (It's why Tanner gives his Village Missions report every Sunday.) Please pray that they would be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men who have no faith.

But here is some good news: You can pray with confidence because, although human beings are often faithless, God is always faithful. Look at verses 3 and 4

But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. (2 Thessalonians 3:3-4)

Yes, there are many adversaries, but they are fighting a losing battle. Jesus already won and if we trust Him, He's going to both establish us, and guard us. And if you pray "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one," He will answer that prayer.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

Does God want to deliver you from Satan? Oh yes! If you belong to Him, He surely will.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. (John 10:27-29)

There's a promise you can cling to!

You can have absolute confidence in the Lord. I have confidence in the Lord. I don't have a whole lot of confidence in myself. In fact, pretty much every Sunday morning, I have a crisis of self-confidence. This week, it actually started on Saturday. It terrifies me to think that I am called to deliver the truth of God's word. It terrifies me that I will be held accountable for what I teach you.

But then I remember First Thessalonians 5:24:

He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:24)

Oh, I cling to that promise! It is the only way I have the courage to stand before you today.

God calls us to salvation. God the Holy Spirit quickens us to spiritual life, otherwise, we wouldn't even see the Kingdom of God. God then gives us the gift of faith. (Ephesians 2:9) We can be confident of this very thing:

... that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; (Philippians 1:6)

Yet at the same time, there is something we must do; we need to believe. We do have a responsibility; we need to strive for obedience. But we must not do so in our own strength, because we would fail. We need to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, trusting that it is God who works in us to both will and do for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Soli Deo Gloria! (To God alone be the glory!)

So, Paul asks the Thessalonians for prayer. He wants them to pray that the Gospel will advance and he wants them to pray for his protection. Then he expresses his confidence in the Lord to protect and sanctify those who make up the Thessalonian Church. Finally, in verse 5, he prays for the Thessalonian church.

Yes, Paul practiced what he preached. He asked for prayer, then he prayed. He understood that nothing would happen outside the power of Almighty God.

Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 3:5)

There are two petitions here. First, he asks that the love of God become the motivating force in their lives. As Christians, it needs to be the motivating force in our lives. This is *agape* love. This is the love God has for us. When we begin to comprehend the height, breadth, and depth of this amazing love, it should transform us.

We love Him because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

In fact, we can only love Him when we realize that He first loved us. Paul is praying that we would begin to comprehend this love. We're not going to fully comprehend it; the human mind is simply not capable, but we can appreciate it. We can be thankful for it. We can praise God for it.

And it must motivate us to obedience. We won't be perfect. But it will break our hearts when we have let our Jesus down. We will repent and seek His forgiveness and He will cleanse us. He promised!

The second petition is that we would be transformed into the patience of Christ. That's an interesting phrase. The word our New King James translates as patience could be translated "endurance", or "perseverance". It essentially means to remain steadfastness, no matter what the cost. Paul wants us to persevere even in the face of serious

persecution. We can't do it on our own. But remember, God is faithful. God is powerful. God is able to keep us, no matter what.

As with everything else in the Christian faith, you can't do it on your own. But you're not on your own; you have the Spirit of Christ. So, yield to the Spirit. Place your trust completely in Jesus.

And keep praying the Gospel.