

Lord Teach Us To Pray

"Praying for the Right Things"

Lesson 12

INTRODUCTION:

- I. When you pray, what do you typically pray for?
 - A. If we were to take a survey among Christians today, asking them what it is that they most often prayed for, we would discover that most prayers are often short-sighted, and selfish.
 1. We typically pray for health, happiness, and success.
 - a. We pray for personal comfort most often.
 - b. We pray for God to solve all the physical problems of life: such as praying for improved health or a place to live, a job, a car, a husband, a wife, children, a promotion, more money, and so on.
 2. While those things are certainly important, especially to those who praying for them at the time, those things are really low on the list of priorities in God's kingdom.
 3. **Matthew 6:25-33** – Jesus put it this way: *"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more*

than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

4. In other words, Jesus said we are not to be anxious about what we eat, drink, or wear especially when we know God supplies them all. Instead, we need to be concerned with seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness – we need to be concerned with advancing the kingdom of God.
- B. We live in a world that knows very little about what's truly valuable.

1. People all around us are pursuing things that have no lasting value.

BODY:

- I. The apostle Paul clearly knew what was important in the life of the Christian. In fact, His prayers are wonderful examples of how his concern for spiritual attributes took center state in his prayers on behalf of the saints.
 - A. One of his prayers in particular stands out for its simplicity and its depth.
 1. **2 Thessalonians 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. . .*
 - a. Paul often focused his prayers on the spiritual benefit that he desired to see in the life of every saint.
 - b. In this verse he had three wishes for the Thessalonians:
 - (1). **Worthiness:** . . .*that our God would count you worthy of this calling. . .*
 - (2). **Fulfillment:** . . .*and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness. . .*
 - (3). **Powerful Faith:** . . . *the work of faith with power. . .*

- II. Before we look at those three requests and their implications, we need to consider briefly the source of all spiritual blessing.
 - A. Paul knew that many of the things he desired MOST for saints would come only by prayer.
 - 1. He didn't rely on his own wisdom or spiritual strength; he turned to God.
 - 2. Paul was a faithful servant who always taught God's people the importance of obeying the Lord's commands.
 - 3. But that wasn't enough. Paul also knew that God desires to sanctify His people.
 - 4. Therefore Paul always prayed for those things he knew God wanted to accomplish in His people.
 - B. The apostle Paul knew that the MAIN way to ensure that the promises and purposes of God, the spiritual well-being of God's people, the spread of the Gospel, and the growth of the church would be accomplished was through persistent, fervent prayer.
 - 1. In all his prayers, Paul sought what was most important to GOD before anything else – and in so doing, he would glorify the God of heaven and his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Therefore, our prayers should also be seeking what is most important to God before anything else, and thereby we ALSO will

glorify God the Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in all we say and do.

- C. When you look at Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians, notice that it contains three vital spiritual issues that are critical for every believer: *"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. . ."* (**2 Thessalonians 1:11**)

1. **Worthiness** refers to spiritual character.
 - a. It should be our desire that the Lord would make us the kind of people we ought to be.
2. **Fulfillment** speaks of God bringing about in our lives every holy and godly desire.
3. And **faith with power** is necessary for our service to be truly effective.
4. When you pray for your loved ones, or for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, pray for THEIR worthiness, THEIR fulfillment, and for THEM to have a faith with power.
 - a. When those issues are the focus of our prayers, God will be honored.

- III. Let's take a closer look at what worthiness, fulfillment, and faith with power actually mean in the context of Paul's prayer.
- A. Paul's first request is that God, *"would count you worthy of this calling."*
- (2 Thessalonians 1:11)**
1. This is a request that pertains to our Christian character.
 - a. If we claim to belong to Christ, we need to live in a way that brings honor to Him.
 2. The phrase *"this calling"* is a New Testament concept that always refers to being called to Christ through the message of the gospel.
 - a. **2 Thessalonians 2:13-14** – The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians: *"But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."*
 - b. This is not a call to repent or believe, but rather a call through the gospel of Christ to completely submit ourselves in obedience to Christ.
 3. The apostle Paul used the concept of our being called to obedience in many of his epistles.

- a. **Romans 1:5-7** – In his opening comments to the saints at Rome, Paul wrote, *"Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*
- b. Later in this same letter, Paul explained the benefits of this call: *"Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." (Romans 8:30)*
- c. In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul mentions all the various reasons why those saints were called:
 - (1). **1 Corinthians 1:2** -- *"those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints"*
 - (2). **1 Corinthians 1:9** – *"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."*
 - (3). **1 Corinthians 7:15** – *"God has called us to peace."*
4. In his first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul talked about the importance of this calling: *"that you would walk worthy of God who*

calls you into His own kingdom and glory." (1 Thessalonians 2:12)

- a. Paul's point is clear. Believers have been called to salvation – called to wear the name of Christ and become identified as God's people.
 - b. Therefore, Paul prays for us to live our lives in such a way as to be deserving of wearing Christ's name.
5. But this raises a question. Since we are all sinners, and completely unworthy of the grace God extends to us through Jesus Christ, in what ways do we BECOME worthy – deserving – of wearing the name of Christ?
- a. **Worthiness in Position:**
 - (1). You and I certainly didn't earn our righteousness; neither did we earn our worthiness – it's ours through God's gift of grace gift. So in our POSITIONAL STANDING before God we've been made worthy.
 - (2). **Ephesians 2:4-10** – Paul speaks of our receiving this POSITIONAL WORTHINESS through God's gift of grace: *"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ*

(by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

(3). This is why Paul goes on to urge these same Ephesian believers; *"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. . ."* **(Ephesians 4:1)**

(4). These Ephesian saints had been made worthy in their standing before God (**Positional Worthiness**) by God's grace through their faithful and complete obedience, and now he urges them to continue to walk in a manner **WORTHY** of that calling. They've been **MADE WORTHY**, and now they need to **REMAIN WORTHY**.

b. **Worthiness through Suffering:**

- (1). **2 Thessalonians 1:3-6** – *We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, 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. . .*
- (2). The Scriptures tell us that God uses persecution and suffering to refine and purify us; and THROUGH this suffering we move closer toward spiritual maturity and worthiness.
- (3). This is why we need to greet persecutions and suffering as a benefit. *To the Roman saints, Paul wrote, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations,*

knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Romans 5:1-5)

- (4). James, the Lord's brother, also spoke of the benefits of trials: *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (James 1:2-4)*, and then adds, *"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." (James 1:12)*
- (5). We are made worthy (or "approved") to "receive the crown of life" because trials and temptations never weakened our deep and abiding love for Jesus Christ.
- (6). Now perhaps you can better understand why the apostles, who were beaten at the orders of the Sanhedrin for their faith in Christ, rejoiced because they

knew they had been "*counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.*" **(Acts 5:41)**

6. So, one of the first things for which every saint should pray is that we all be made more worthy of our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.
 - a. We need to pray that every saint lives their life in such a way as to, "*walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" **(Ephesians 4:1-4)**
 - b. Furthermore, we need to pray that every saint may be made worthy (or "*approved*") through their persecutions, trials and temptations, so that in the end they "*will receive the crown of life.*" **(James 1:12)**
- B. Paul's second request is for fulfillment – for God to, "*fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness.*" **(2 Thessalonians 1:11)**
 1. The Greek word translated "*fulfill*" (*pleroō*) means "to accomplish."
 - a. And so, when Paul petitions for God to "*fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness*" on our behalf, he is asking God to accomplish in our lives every pure, holy and good DESIRE that God defines as good.

2. The Psalms often reflect this desire.
 - a. David praised God for giving him "*his hearts desire*" for those things characterized as "*blessings of goodness.*" He said, "*The king shall have joy in Your strength, O LORD; and in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! You have given him his heart's desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips. For You meet him with the blessings of goodness...*"
(Psalm 21:1-3)
 - b. David also said, "*Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.*" **(Psalm 37:4)**
3. How is it that David could be so confident that God "*shall give you the desires of your heart?*" The answer is simply because the deepest desires of David's heart were in sync with the desires of God.
 - a. God will give us the desires of our heart when we delight ourselves in Him, and as long as the desires of our hearts are His desires.
4. I'm amazed when I hear believers question whether God really desires happiness for them. They have lived under a cloud for so long that they no longer experience any genuine happiness, nor do they believe God wishes for them to be happy.

- a. Nothing could be FURTHER from the truth. God desires for our joy to be FULL.
 - (1). **John 15:11** – Jesus told His disciples, "*These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*"
 - b. But, right before Jesus told His disciples it was His desire for their joy to be full, He told them there was only one way HOW that can be accomplished.
 - c. **John 15:9-10** – "*As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.*"
 - d. Our joy – the FULLNESS of joy – comes by abiding in the love of Christ, and the only way we can abide in the love of Christ is to keep His commandments.
5. And so, we need to pray for God to "fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness" toward every believer. **(2 Thessalonians 1:11)**
- a. We need to pray that every child of God will receive the desires of their heart that are in keeping with God's desires, and experience the real joy of being a Christian.

- b. And the only way they can experience that real joy is to abide in the love of Christ by faithfully keeping His commandments. That should be our prayer for every believer.

C. Paul's third request for the saints in Thessalonica is for God to also *"fulfill [or "accomplish"]. . . the work of faith with power."* (2

Thessalonians 1:11)

1. The saints in Thessalonica were already involved in the work of faith.
 - a. **1 Thessalonians 1:2-3** -- *"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ..."*
2. But now, Paul wants to see them enlarge their faith, so he prays for their faith to be more powerful.
 - a. This was also Paul's prayer for the Ephesians.
 - (1). **Ephesians 3:14-16** – *"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man..."*

3. But how does God accomplish the work of faith with power? Or, to put it another way, how does God give our faith strength and power?
 - a. The apostle Peter gives us the answer.
 - (1). **2 Peter 1:5-11** – *"... giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*
 - b. God strengthens our faith when we add to our faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.

- c. Peter tells us when our faith has been augmented with all these things, and when they are all in us and abound, we benefit in four ways:
- (1). We will be *"neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*
 - (2). We will *"make [our] call and election sure."*
 - (3). We will *"never stumble."*
 - (4). And *"an entrance will be supplied [us] abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*
4. And so, we need to pray that God will *"fulfill [or "accomplish"]*. . . *the work of faith with power"* in the life of every saint – that the faith of every saint will become more powerful.
5. And how can God make their faith more powerful? When they add to their faith virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.
6. And that should be our prayer for every believer – that their faith may grow by abounding in virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.

IV. And so, it was Paul's prayer that the Thessalonians receive worthiness, fulfillment, and a powerful faith. But why was this so important in Paul's mind, and why should we ALSO be praying for one another to receive worthiness, fulfillment, and faith with power?

A. The apostle states the reason in the verse 12 of 2nd Thessalonians 1. He says the reason is, *"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."* **(2 Thessalonians 1:12)**

1. The ultimate reason for EVERYTHING we do in our lives as Christians is so *"that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified."*
 - a. If that ISN'T our ultimate goal, then we're focusing too much on ourselves.
 - b. We need to pray for each other to be worthy of our calling because Christ's reputation is at stake.
 - c. You and I both know that one of the primary excuses people give for rejecting Christ is because of the hypocrisy they see in the lives of Christians they've met.
2. And so, Paul prays that we will be the opposite of hypocrites – that we will bring honor to the name of Christ and, through our Godly, Christ-centered lives, lead unbelievers to Christ.

- a. This is why Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* **(Matthew 5:16)**

CONCLUSION:

- I. If I could sum up everything we've said about prayer in this series, I believe it would be to say that everything for which we pray, and in every way we pray – *"whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."* **(1 Corinthians 10:31)**
 - A. Every prayer we pray, every request we make, every outpouring of our heart to God should be done to glorify God.
 - 1. When it is our desire to *"do all to the glory of God,"* we will never again need to worry about whether we're praying for the right things, in the right manner, and with the right attitude of heart.
 - a. You'll never worry again about praying for right things because the first question in your mind will be how can God be glorified by what I'm requesting.
 - b. You'll never again worry about praying in the right manner because you'll always be asking yourself how are my prayers bringing glory to God.

- c. And you'll never again worry about the attitude of your heart in prayer because your central goal – the ultimate purpose of your heart – will be to glorify God.
2. Listen one last time to Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians – and this will tell us the very things we should also be praying for.
 - a. **2 Thessalonians 1:11-12** – *"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, 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."*
3. Paul tells us there are three things for which we should ALL be praying:
 - a. We should all be praying for one another that we all be made more worthy of our calling as followers of Jesus Christ by living in such a way as to, *"walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*
(Ephesians 4:1-4) And that every saint may be made worthy (or *"approved"*) when they encounter persecutions,

trials and temptations, so that in the end they *"will receive the crown of life."* (**James 1:12**)

- b. We also need to be praying for one another that every child of God will receive the desires of their heart that are in keeping with God's desires, and experience the real joy of being a Christian – knowing that the only way they can experience that real joy is to abide in the love of Christ by faithfully keeping His commandments.
 - c. And finally, we need to be praying that the faith every believer may grow by abounding in virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness and brotherly kindness, so they will be neither barren nor unfruitful, so that they will make their call and election sure, so they will never stumble, and so they will gain an entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
4. Brethren, just imagine how MUCH we would grow closer to one another and to the Lord if we brought these petitions to the throne of God on behalf of every one of our brothers and sisters in Christ in this church.
 5. The power of Christ would simply be IMMEASURABLE! We would accomplish things that are BEYOND our imaginations.

6. This church simply could not be stopped in its effort to strengthen and edify the saints, and in winning souls to Christ.
 7. But most importantly, the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified!
- B. Can you honestly say you *"do all to the glory of God?"* Is *"the name of our Lord Jesus Christ... glorified in you, and you in Him?"*
1. You can answer "Yes," if you're faithfully serving the Lord to the best of your God-given ability.
 2. But if you've never been baptized into Christ – if you've always resisted surrendering your life to Christ – or if you're a child of God who has been living your life in a selfish, self-centered manner, and doing your will rather than the will of God, they you must answer "No."
 3. Why not begin this very moment glorifying the name of our Lord Jesus Christ by doing whatever you need to do to bring glory to God. Your soul depends on it.