

Paul's Prayer Report
2 Thessalonians 1:11-12
Part One

Let us read **2 Thessalonians 1:11-12**. **"To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power; (12) in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."** This is not an actual prayer but Paul's prayer report to the Thessalonians. And in this report we get insight into how Paul prayed. He prayed for the right stuff in **V. 11**, **"we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power."** He prayed for the right reason **V. 12**, **"in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."**

Many Christians spend the vast bulk of their prayer time consumed with themselves or their family members. They pray for their health, their happiness, and their success. They pray for solutions to life's various problems, they pray about their home, their wife, their job, and about their finances. Certainly it would not be wrong to pray for these things, but what becomes apparent as we look at Paul's prayer report is the fact that these things would be far down on Paul's prayer list.

These earthly concerns would also be far down on Jesus' prayer list as well. In **Matthew 6:31-33** Jesus said, **"Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?'" (32) For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. (33) But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you."** We need to choose our priorities carefully. We must not allow ourselves to become earthbound, obsessed with things that are passing away.

There is a short story written by Anton Chekhov entitled *"The Bet."* The plot involves a wager between educated men. It was a bet over the most appropriate punishment for a capital crime. A wealthy banker believed that solitary confinement would be more appropriate because the pain inflicted over time would be greater than if the prisoner was simply executed. A young lawyer of 25 disagreed saying, "To live under any conditions is better than not to live at all." Angered, the banker impulsively responded with a bet of 2,000,000 rubles. He bet the younger man he could not live five years in solitary confinement. The young lawyer shot back to the banker impetuously that he would not only stay the five years in solitary confinement but he would stay fifteen years for the 2,000,000 rubles. The arrangements were made the young man moved into a separate building on the grounds of the banker's large estate. He was allowed no visitors and no newspapers. He could write letters but he could receive none. There were guards watching to make sure that he did not violate the agreement. But they were placed in such a way that he could not see them.

He received his food in silence through a small opening through which he could not see. Everything else he wanted, books, foods, etc. were provided through written request. Anton Chekhov develops the story based on the things the lawyer asks for through the years and the occasional glances of those who guarded him while he slept.

During the first year the piano could be heard at almost any hour. He asked for many books, mostly novels and light reading. The next year the music ceased and the work of various classical authors were requested. In the sixth year he began to study languages. He soon wrote that he had mastered many different languages. After the tenth year of his confinement the prisoner would sit motionless at his table day after day reading the New Testament. And after a year of completely saturating himself in the New Testament he began to study theology.

The second half of the story focuses on the day before the noon deadline when the lawyer would win the bet. The banker is now at the end of his career. His risky speculations had gradually undermined his business. The once confident millionaire was now a second rate banker and to pay the wager to the lawyer would destroy him. Angry at his foolishness and jealous of the soon to be wealthy lawyer who was just turning 40, the old banker determined to kill the lawyer and frame the guard with his murder. Slipping into the men's room, he found him asleep at the table. Before he could kill him he noticed a letter that the lawyer had written to him.

“Tomorrow at noon I will be free but before leaving this room I find it necessary to say a few words to you. With a Clear conscience and before God who sees me I declare to you that I despise freedom, and life, and health and all that your books declare to be the joys of this world. I know that I am wiser than you all. I despise all your books. I despise all earth blessings and wisdom. All is worthless and false, hollow and deceiving like the mirage. You may be proud wise and beautiful, but death will wipe you away from the face of the earth as it does the mice which live beneath your floor. And your heirs, your history will burn with the destruction of the earth. You have gone mad and are not following the right path. You take falsehood for truth and deformity for beauty. And to prove to you how I despise all that you value I renounce the 2,000,000 rubles upon which I looked at one time as the opening of paradise for me which I now scorn. And to deprive myself of the right to receive the 2,000,000 I will leave my prison 5 hours before the appointed time and by so doing break the terms of our contract.” And then he signed his name.

The banker read the lines bent down and kissed the sleeping man and with tears in his eyes left the house. Chekhov writes that never was there a time in his life that he despised himself more than he did at that moment. His tears kept him awake the rest of the night and at 7:00 in the morning he was informed by the watchman that they had seen a man crawl through a window and disappear.

The world and the things of this world offer nothing. The only thing that really matters is summed up at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes. It is to fear the Lord and keep his commandments. We must not focus on building our kingdom, but rather building His.

Hopefully we will not have to go through the hardship of the young lawyer or the grief of the banker to learn this. Hopefully we can learn from the life of Paul.

PAUL'S RESOURCE

God's purposes are not advanced in our strength. This is why those who are truly active in the building of His kingdom rather than theirs will be involved in prayer. We see in Paul's life. Why was he so effective in impacting so many people for Christ? Why was he so effective in advancing the kingdom? Why was he so effective in accomplishing God's purposes? Because he was a praying man.

Paul's resource for accomplishing truly important things was prayer. Let us look at **VV. 11-12** once again, **"To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power; (12) In order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."** Paul understood that those things which will not perish in time but have eternal benefit are the result of God working and working through prayer.

Certainly through our effort and hard work we might be able to hold a family together. We might be able to establish ourselves in a career and be looked upon by the community as someone of influence and power. But the best of what life has to offer, such as being counted worthy of our calling, fulfilling every desire for goodness and living spiritually powerful lives that count for eternity, can only be achieved through prayer.

Yes, in our strength we can build edifices that can exist in time but apart from His strength we will not be able to build edifices that will endure into and throughout eternity. Isn't this what Jesus meant in **John 15** when He told His disciples **"without me you can do nothing?"** Certainly you can build a house, or repair a car or make a living, but you cannot make your life count in terms of eternal things unless you turn to the Lord in prayer.

Prayer is powerful. Do you believe this? Certainly Paul believed this. He knew he could not, in his strength, bring about the things he mentions in **V. 11.**

Are you excited about the power of prayer? Have you seen it at work in your life, in your family, in this church, in the world? The secret of an effective prayer life is praying according to the will of God. What does **1 John 5:14** say? **"And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."** We need to understand that God has a plan for us, our families, this church, and this world. His plan is not going to be thwarted.

Job 42:2 records for us this wonderful lesson that Job learned during his painful ordeal, **"I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted."**

Proverbs 16:33 - "The lot is cast into the lap, but every decision is from the Lord."

Isaiah 46:8-11 - “Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors (9) Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, (10) declaring the end from the beginning. And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’”

Picture God’s purposed plan as a mighty rushing river. It is going to the sea and nothing is going to stop it. Now I want you to picture throwing yourself into the river and swimming upstream. That is what some people are experiencing in respect to their prayer lives. They are wearing themselves out and getting nowhere. If you want to go somewhere, turn and swim downstream. Pray in accordance to the will of God and see how far your prayers will take you.

Someone might say, “Well if God’s will is going to be accomplished anyway why pray? Why throw yourself figuratively into a river that is destined to arrive at the sea any way.” Because somehow in God’s eternal, purposed, sovereign plan He has intertwined prayer. The prayers of the saints are as much a part of God’s plan as the sovereignly purposed results.

Certainly Samuel believed this. In **1 Samuel 12** the people had sinned by asking for a king. And they were afraid that they might be put to death by the Lord. In **V. 19** they said to Samuel, **“Pray for your servants to the Lord your God your God, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil by asking for ourselves a king.”** The people thought they were going to die. What about Samuel? What did he think? He did not at all believe that they were going to die. He did not see this to be God’s design for their lives. In **V. 22** it says, **“For the Lord will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the Lord has been pleased to make you a people for Himself.”** Therefore what is Samuel going to do? Is he going to say, “Oh well, since I know this is God’s will I don’t need to pray?” This is not anywhere near the attitude of Samuel. What does he say? **V. 23** says, **“Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way.”** Samuel is going to pray because he does not see it as optional. It must be done.

Certainly Jesus also believed this. Consider Jesus in **Luke 22**. In this passage Jesus says to Peter, **“Simon, Simon behold Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat.”** And what we need to understand was that permission was granted. Satan was freed to go after Peter and ravage him. But when this permission was granted did Jesus not know what was going to happen? Of course he knew what was going to happen. But he demonstrated for us the integral part that prayer plays in God’s sovereign plans. Listen to the rest of what Jesus said to Peter, **“Simon, Simon behold Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”** Jesus saw His prayer as a part of God’s sovereign plan and necessary just as Samuel’s saw his prayer as a part of God’s sovereign plan and necessary.

Certainly Paul also believed this. He is praying the very things that he believes God desires for the Thessalonians. If we choose not to pray for the things that God has purposed to do we have relegated ourselves to the bench. I don’t want to be on the bench. I want to be a player. Our team

is going to win. The church will prevail and ultimately be delivered without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. But are you going to play a significant part in that victory or not? I don't know what your answer might be, but I know what Paul's answer was. He wanted to be a very active participant in the outworking of God's sovereign plan and that meant that he needed to commit himself to praying according to the will of God. If we want to be an active participant in the outworking of God's sovereign plan, then we need to commit ourselves to praying according to the will of God.

CONCLUSION

Are you struggling in your prayer life? Do you wonder if it makes a difference? Perhaps you have lost sight of the primary focus of prayer. The primary focus of prayer needs to be on the Lord's will being done rather than our own.

Do we recognize that the Lord in this present age is working out His purposes? Do we understand that these purposes are being carried forward through the conduit of prayer? If we do then let us throw ourselves into the work of praying according to His will and stand back in awe as we see His plan unfold.

Should we feel guilty for praying for earthly concerns such as health, career, family relationships, or success? Of course not! But realize that He will not answer prayers that do not fit His sovereign purposes. Should we feel guilty for enjoying the things this world has to offer? Of course not. He has given us everything freely to enjoy. But we must be careful not to allow earthly concerns to dominate spiritual issues and eternal matters.

Dr. Jowett says, "Worldliness is a spirit, a temperament, an attitude of soul. It is life without high sailings, life devoid of lofty ideals. It is a gaze horizontal, not vertical. Its motto is "forward," not "upward." May the Lord protect from this spirit and attitude. Therefore let us lift our prayers up to God praying like this, 'Our father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come they will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'" And as we do this I believe that will see the power of prayer unleashed advancing His purposes in and through us.