

Sermon Outline

“By His Power”

Desperate, Part 8 – 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 – Joshua Harris – Dec. 5, 2010

Introduction

1. Prayer is the overflow of a heart desperate for God. When we earnestly seek God, we pray. When we're abiding in Christ, we're praying. Desperate people know that time, money and talent are not enough. Because we desperately need God and the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray.
2. *“If you are not praying, then you are quietly confident that time, money, and talent are all you need in life. You'll always be a little too tired, a little too busy. But if, like Jesus, you realize you can't do life on your own, then no matter how busy, no matter how tired you are, you will find the time to pray.”*

Time in prayer makes you even more dependent on God because you don't have as much time to get things done. Every minute spent in prayer is one less minute where you can be doing something 'productive.' So the act of praying means that you have to rely more on God.”

—Paul Miller

Basis of Paul's Prayer: We Pray According to the Grace of God (v. 11)

1. Grace is defined as: being given what you don't deserve and haven't earned. Wayne Grudem defines grace as *“God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.”*
 - a. The good news of the gospel is that God *“does not deal with us according to our sins”* (Ps. 103:10-12), but instead he transfers our guilt to Jesus and Jesus' righteousness to us (see 2 Cor. 5:21). We deserve death and hell, but instead God forgives our guilt, declares us righteous, and makes us his sons and daughters.
 - b. Ephesians 2:8-9 states that we are not saved by our performance, works or goodness. Salvation is a free gift. It is by grace and is received by those who believe in Jesus who obeyed for us, died for us, and rose again for us.
2. So when Paul says, *“we pray for you ... according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ”* he is saying that the only reason we can pray and ask God to do good to us is because God doesn't relate to us on the basis of our goodness, but on the basis of his grace through his Son—on the basis of his love, his acceptance, his commitment to bless and help, his total forgiveness, and his fatherly concern for us.
3. But we don't always pray for ourselves or others based on grace.

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- a. Sometimes we pray according to our own spiritual track record. When we do, our prayer life is a roller coaster. Sometimes we pray with self confidence because we've performed well, served well and sacrificed well. But the next day we sin and can't bring ourselves to pray because we feel unworthy.
- b. Sometimes we pray for others if we feel they are deserving. So we pray for the nice, beautiful, holy people, but we find it hard to pray for sinners and enemies. If we wait to pray for people who deserve God to work for them, we will pray very little.

Petitions: We Pray to God to Fulfill Our Requests by His Power (vv. 11-12)

1. Request 1: *"our God...may make you worthy of his calling...by his power"*. When Paul prays that God would make these Christians worthy of their calling, he is NOT saying that they need to make themselves worthy so that God will love and accept them. Because of the gospel of grace they are already loved and accepted in Jesus. Instead he prays that God, by his power, would make the quality of their life—their words and their choices and their behavior—match up to and be worthy of the amazing grace God has shown them.
 - a. Paul knows that grace doesn't leave us wallowing in sin and selfishness. God is committed to transforming his unworthy children. So Paul (in effect) prays, "make your totally loved children look like and act like you. Make them worthy of the calling they've already received."
 - b. Grace doesn't leave us prisoners on the treadmill of performance. But neither does it leave us prisoners of our old sinful habits. So as believers, when we see an area of weakness in our lives, we can pray with confidence for the power and grace to repent and to obey so that this particular part of our lives matches our status and calling.
2. Request 2: *"our God...may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power"*. This prayer is acknowledging that even our best intentions and our best works will only be fulfilled and will only accomplish something by the power of God.
 - a. When it comes to Christian growth, many of us think that being able to name our sin, diagnose it, and describe what we should do equals change. But it doesn't! Wanting to change and knowing that you ought to change is not the same as changing. We need the power of God to change!
 - b. Proud people think their resolve to do good is enough. Humble and desperate people cry out to God to fulfill, by his power, their best intentions and resolutions. Even in moments when we step out in faith, obey God, and do the right thing, we still need to rely on God to fulfill his purpose (see Psalm 127:1).
 - c. Desperate people don't trust in their efforts or their techniques or their labor or the latest book; they ask God to establish and build and watch over every good work.

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Ultimate Goal: We Pray Everything So that Jesus Is Glorified." (v. 12)

1. Verse 12 shows us what the ultimate purpose or aim of our prayers should be: *"SO THAT the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him."* For Jesus to be glorified in us means that he is seen as glorious, strong, faithful and worthy. That is what happens when we rely on him, call on him, and wait for him. When we are humble and acknowledge our weakness in prayer, he displays his glory in jars of clay.
2. Also, it says in verse 12 that not only will Jesus be glorified in us, but we will be glorified in him. On the final day, we will see Jesus face-to-face and his transforming work in us will be complete. We will see him, we will be like him, and we will share in his glory.

Fellowship Starters

1. Josh quoted Paul Miller who wrote, *"If you are not praying, then you are quietly confident that time, money, and talent are all you need in life ... But if ... you realize you can't do life on your own ... you will find the time to pray."* How would you evaluate your prayer life?
2. What does Paul mean when he prays *"according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Thess. 1:12b)? How could Paul's example inform and shape your prayers?
3. One of Paul's requests was for transformed character. Do you regularly pray for God's power to change yours or another's heart? What particular area of sin or weakness can you commit to bring to the Lord in prayer?
4. Another of Paul's requests was for God's help in good works. What good work(s) have you done primarily through your own efforts? How can you begin to rely on God's power through prayer for your good work(s)?
5. What is the typical goal of your prayers—self-interest or God's glory? How can your prayers begin to be informed and offered *"so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified"* (2 Thess. 1:12a)?