

“Lord Teach Us To Pray”

A Study in the Exposition of the Prayers of Paul: 2 Thessalonians 1¹ Two Week Study Guide

Week One

Scripture

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Introduction

Paul is praying for the Thessalonian church as a corporate unit, and while this will always be different when addressing a large group (usually more sweeping or general) - he is still not praying for "quality and preference of life" matters, but matters of great weightiness and eternal consequence. Now, praying for such things are not always inherently wrong, but they must always be regarded as secondary to the more qualitative elements of prayer/petition. Further, they should be evaluated in regard to one's motivation as one is not simply entreating a close friend, family member, counselor, confidant, colleague, or even pastor in prayer, but our Heavenly Father – the Lord of glory. When so entreating the Lord the disposition, quality, tone, and content should be different.

Now, as I have stated, prayers of lesser weight are not always inherently wrong (though if they constitute one's steady diet in prayer we certainly need to mature and progress in this area). However, what I would regard as not a proper way to pray would be to make the discipline one of arbitrary matters such as asking someone a preference of color or style for clothing or a vehicle or a house... not necessarily matters of prayer. Such topics and like matters are sufficient for common conversation, but they and matters of a like qualitative nature frequently flood the many prayers. They are fine for common conversation, counsel, and inquiry, but prayer is no such common act. One need not confuse the high privilege of *direct access to God* with *casual access to God* – it would be absolutely unimaginable to presume we could just entreat God directly on our own. We must always have before us that access to the Father comes through the Son and that his access has only been afforded to us by his completed work as our great High Priest.

So, should we even be praying for personal success at work, children doing well in their studies, to have good fortune and health or other elements of life? The question comes down to what end are such matters being petitioned? If the matters petitioned for or their resulting desired ends are the root and reason for the petition then they are selfish, short-sighted, and deficient as elements of prayer. However, if with pure hearts they are being petitioned in view of kingdom purposes and the glory of God then they are fitting elements of healthy prayer. Add to this another matter, "life decisions." If petition is just to make the right choice - to what end are you framing the "right" in the choice - is it the clear purposes of God and the pursuit of wisdom to exalt Christ or just a formula to assuage your mind or

¹ Prepared by David Crowe for Pray's Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School
ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

conscience that you are trying to make good choices. Even reconciliation of relationships can be short-prayed... if the goal is just to make things more pleasant in the engagement of life with others - we pray for reconciliation because this honors God and it presses us to deal with our sins/offenses against others and/or to genuinely forgive as we have been forgiven in Christ.

With this in view, how do we pray? We pray with humbled and pure hearts that are truth saturated and seeking to glorify God in the elements of our petition in ways that are plainly revealed in the Scriptures and when the Scriptures do not plainly speak to a matter, then we seek wisdom to marry the request to what is plain in the Scriptures. Praying well recognizes it is God to whom we are petitioning and his glory that we are seeking.

Praying well takes intentional and disciplined work – first there is the work of laboring in the Scriptures, and then there is the work of applying what they have instructed us to do. To this end we will first examine 2 Thessalonians 1 over the next two weeks with a view of learning to pray better as instructed by the Scriptures through the immediate modeling of the Apostle Paul. The majority of the chapter consists of opening greetings and then provides the foundational information off of which Paul will draw from to inform the how and what of his prayers for the Thessalonians. As with the whole of this study I will be using D.A. Carson’s book, *A Call To Spiritual Reformation*, as the central catalyst of the material in the Study Guides – Carson’s wonderful material being synthesized, supplemented, and pressed into personal application through my own work and contribution for our local church body.

It is my own prayer that the Lord would be pleased to mature us into a more robust people of prayer – always rooted in the Scriptures and with a view to his glory.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

Paul’s articulation of his prayer for the Thessalonian believers begins in 2 Thessalonians 1:11 with, “To this end...”², “And in this regard...”³, “With this in mind...”⁴ or clearly with a view to what he has just taken the time to unpack in the preceding verses. The theology that opened the book informed the content of his prayers as it must inform our own prayers too.

Thankfulness for Signs of Grace⁵

When establishing the contextual framework for his prayers for the Thessalonians, Paul begins by giving thanks to God for them. However, Paul’s thanksgiving is not just a casual gratitude, but a precise thanks to God for his work in their hearts and lives.

Building off what we established in the introduction of this Study Guide regarding the need for elements of greater weightiness of truth in one’s prayers, Carson speaks to the *heart* behind a petition, particularly in thanksgiving.

² The ESV and NASB translation of the beginning of 2 Thessalonians 1:11

³ The NET Bible translation of the beginning of 2 Thessalonians 1:11

⁴ The NIV translation of the beginning of 2 Thessalonians 1:11

⁵ *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Praying with Paul*; D.A. Carson; Baker Academic, 2014; (Hereafter: Carson), Pg.22

“...by and large, our thanksgiving seems to be tied rather tightly to our material well-being and comfort. The unvarnished truth is that what we most frequently give thanks for betrays what we most highly value. If a large percentage of our thanksgiving is for material prosperity, it is because we value material prosperity proportionately.”⁶

We frequently make this assessment when we examine the use of our money or our time, but further examination is due when we consider the content of our thanksgiving to God too. Perhaps more than the stewardship of resources, the examination of our prayers and thanksgiving serve as a measure of our soul’s priorities. It out of the heart that the mouth speaks⁷ and there is not a more intimate or consequential conversation one has, but that which he has with God.

Personal Response:

Remember the aim of this entire study is to teach, strengthen, and help you pray. Do not give attention to the elements of this study guide and then not act on them in the discipline of prayer. Pray.

What is the nature of your expressions of thanksgiving to God in prayer? Are they biblically sound, and how would you evaluate them now in view of what you have read?

How will you either remedy the deficiencies that you have identified or continue to mature in the areas of strength when it comes to a biblically sound thanksgiving prayer to God?

These questions are framed with the presumption that you are praying with a degree of consistency and in so doing are giving thanks to God. If you could not evaluate your pattern of thanksgiving to God because of a lack of consistent prayer and thanksgiving in prayer, then in a spirit of repentance resolve to press on in obedience as thanksgiving to God is one of the most natural responses one has to an awareness of God’s good works.

Thankfulness for Signs of Grace: An Element of Knowing and Loving One Another

Carson provides three areas in which Paul expressed thankfulness to God for signs of grace in the Thessalonians’ lives: 1) That their faith was growing, 2) That their love was increasing, and 3) That they were persevering under trial.⁸ However, what must be understood before one can express a like thankfulness to God for others is that the implicit understanding is that one can only give thanks in this manner for those whom they genuinely know and love. Quality thanksgiving is birthed from genuine one-anothering. The act of such prayer is birthed from love of others and the fuel by which it is fed is the intentional loving overlap and integration of lives. We can certainly express thanksgiving to

⁶ Carson, Pg.23

⁷ “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Luke 6:45

⁸ Carson, Pgs.23-25

God for others that we only know on a less personal level, but for those within the local church body and with whom our lives should be knit together with, there is a greater privilege in giving a more complete and robust thanksgiving to God for their growing faith, increased love, and perseverance.

Thankfulness for Signs of Grace:

“Paul gives thanks that his readers’ faith is growing.”⁹

Paul has known the Thessalonians and here expresses thanks to God for their maturing faith – not simply their conversion, but their growing in grace and truth.¹⁰

Thankfulness for Signs of Grace:

“Paul gives thanks that their love is increasing.”¹¹

Carson draws out that what was being communicated here in regard to the Thessalonians growing love was a growing love for one another within the body of Christ. A faithful manifestation of Jesus’ statement to the disciples in John 13.¹²

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

Continuing to speak to the unique love that bonds the family of faith as manifest in local assemblies of believers, Carson states the following:

“Ideally the church is different. It is made up of people who are as varied as can be: rich and poor, learned and unlearned, practical and impractical, sophisticated and unsophisticated, aristocratic and plebian, disciplined and flighty, intense and carefree, extrovert and introvert – and everything in between. The *only* thing that holds such people together is their shared allegiance to Jesus Christ, their devotion to him, stemming from indescribable love for them.”¹³

Therefore, we must be careful that we do not shop around for a church that matches our preferred “life and cultural elements,” but one that is submitted to the Scriptures and that seeks to walk in joyful obedience while longing for the Lord’s return. Further, when we are in such a body we need to be careful to love the whole of the body and not only the persons/elements to our particular liking and preference. A wonderful way to love such an eclectic and diverse body is to build into it in such a way that you know how to really pray for its members – all of them.

Thankfulness for Signs of Grace:

“Paul gives thanks that they are persevering under trial.”¹⁴

Paul is providing public recognition of the Thessalonians endurance amidst struggle – not to promote either himself or them personally, but to celebrate God’s good work in their lives.¹⁵

Now, one who is a student of the Scriptures and familiar with the Thessalonians’ context knows that they suffered and struggled, but wonderfully persevered and were pressed to do

⁹ Carson, Pg.23

¹⁰ Carson, Pg.23

¹¹ Carson, Pg.23

¹² Carson, Pg.24

¹³ Carson, Pg.24

¹⁴ Carson, Pg.25

¹⁵ Carson, Pg.25

so with a view toward Christ's glorious return. However, not all are called upon to suffer in a like manner, but all will be tested by various trials and all will be called upon to endure a variety of struggles with this antagonistic and fallen world and its pervasive elements that saturate our lives. So, to varying degrees there will always be both trials and the opportunity to glorify God by faithful perseverance amidst such trials.

One additional element that needs to be addressed here is that just as the Thessalonians were exhorted to find consolation in our blessed/eschatological hope, so we too should frame our thinking and hope. However, it is a disingenuous application of future hope when it is simply framed with a distaste for the present and not primarily driven with a longing for that which is promised. Certainly a frustration with present struggles prods us with a longing for home, but we need to be careful that our longing is not really just a discontent with present circumstances and detached from expectant hope. Let your insatiable longing for King Jesus' return be what makes this present life unsatisfying, and not the other way around.

Personal Response:

Remember the aim of this entire study is to teach, strengthen, and help you pray. Do not give attention to the elements of this study guide and then not act on them in the discipline of prayer. Pray.

Are you prioritizing your life in such a manner that you can genuinely give thanks to God for his intimate and continued work in the lives of those within the local church body? If you are, how might you continue to foster such a context within the culture of the church body? If you are not, then what commitments can you make to not just overlap in the business of mutual activities with others, but in the sweetness of fellowship and loving service with others within the body?

In what context do you or could you examine the maturing faith of others – not just giving a courteous affirmation that someone is likely growing, but tangibly observing their progress so as to give thanks to God?

How are you involved in the life of the body in such a way (formal and informal structured elements of body life) so that you are genuinely loving elements of the whole body (those more and not at all like you in age, practice, preference, culture, profession, etc.)? If needed what might you do to strengthen this element of membership?

The unique reality to struggle is that you can be in one of two positions, sometimes both – you can be the one struggling/persevering, the one giving thanks for another’s persevering, or possibly both persevering yourself and rejoicing with others doing the same. Are you giving thanks for others who are persevering amidst struggles and walking with them as they endure such trials? Or if you are the one struggling, is your disposition amidst struggle one that others can give thanks for too? Also, are you loving others enough that they know when you are enduring testing or are you secluding such matters?

Confidence in the Prospect of Vindication

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.” John 15:18-21

Carson provides two areas in which Paul expressed confidence that God would vindicate the Thessalonians’ trials/suffering: 1) Believers will be vindicated by our just and holy God, and 2) Unbelievers will endure retribution by our just and holy God.¹⁶

From their earliest of days the Thessalonian believers knew of the antagonistic hatred of this world toward Christ and those whom he has drawn to himself. However, the Lord is faithful to his beloved and will provide them both the means to persevere and will ultimately deal justly with those who persist in their rebellious and antagonistic actions toward Christ and his Church.

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

Confidence in the Prospect of Vindication: **“For believers, there will be vindication.”¹⁷**

It is not improper to long for the day in which the Lord Jesus, who has overcome the world, assumes his indisputable place as its glorious king and rights that which has for so long persisted in wrong. It is not that he will then assume full Lordship, it is and has been his already, but it is that day in which he will definitively stamp out its opposition in every form and hold those in rebellion to a full account. Further, it is so very important to root one’s heart in such glorious truths when one prays.

It is so peculiar that the contemporary American Evangelical will so eagerly distribute and receive “save the date” reminders for momentous occasions, that they will go to special events marking the soon arrival of a precious new child, or even just eagerly scour the internet for peeks of previews for movies coming out several weeks or months away... but there is so very little longing anticipation of our Lord’s return. Have we forgotten that

¹⁶ Carson, Pgs.27,29

¹⁷ Carson, Pg.27

Communion serves not only as a memorial reminder of Jesus ushering in the New Covenant through the breaking of his body and the shedding of his blood, but that it is to be kept... until he returns. It is a reminder that directs our attention forward.¹⁸ Our teaching and preaching must speak much of Jesus' return, our mutual encouragement toward one another must speak much of Jesus' return, and our prayers most certainly should speak much of Jesus' return.

Remember, the Thessalonian church did not have an extremely long period of time that they were afforded Paul's personal discipleship presence. But among the most robust elements of discipleship that Paul provided them was some of the clearest New Testament treatments of Jesus' return – for Paul and the Thessalonians it was not a “one day doctrine” something they will sort out later, it was their blessed hope and it shined clearly in their prayers.

“We are losing our anticipation of the Lord's return, the anticipation that Paul shows is basic to his thought. Even though we do not disavow central truths, for many of us their power has been eviscerated. The prospect of the Lord's return in glory, the anticipation of the wrap-up of the universe as we know it, the confidence that there will be a final and irrevocable division between the just and the unjust – these have become merely credal points for us, instead of ultimate realities that even now are life-transforming.”¹⁹

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”
Revelation 22:20

Confidence in the Prospect of Vindication:
“For [unbelievers], there will be retribution.”²⁰

This section might appear offensive to some, but it must be understood that to fail to properly recognize the doctrine of the retribution of the unjust/the unbelieving is to insult the holiness of God. To disregard this doctrine is to exercise a deficient view of God and one's prayers are equally deficient when we fail to affirm these truths.

“In fact, the Christian gospel is solidly based on some elementary notions of retribution. Where evil occurs, it must be paid back, or God himself is affronted. If God forever overlooks evil, ostensibly on the ground that he is loving and forbearing, is he not also betraying the fact that he is pathetically unconcerned about injustice?”²¹

“The truth is that every Christian who has thought long and hard about the cross begins to understand that God is not merely a stern dispenser of justice, nor merely a lover who lavishly forgives, but the Sovereign who is simultaneously perfect in holiness and perfect in love. His holiness demands retribution; his love sends his own Son to absorb that retribution on behalf of others.”²²

Personal Response:

Remember the aim of this entire study is to teach, strengthen, and help you pray. Do not give attention to the elements of this study guide and then not act of them in the discipline of prayer. Pray.

¹⁸ “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

1 Corinthians 11:26

¹⁹ Carson, Pg.27

²⁰ Carson, Pg.29

²¹ Carson, Pg.30

²² Carson, Pg.30

For what is your heart longing? Do you properly long for and anticipate the day of Jesus coming for his Church, for the establishment of his Millennial Kingdom, and for the ushering in of the Eternal State? Have you so rooted your soul and mind in eschatological hope in such a way that it comes through mightily in your prayer life? Is this important, why or why not?

For those who have rooted their soul and mind in eschatological hope in such a way that it seasons your thoughts and prayers, will you commit to continue to sharpen this focus? For those who have not so rooted their soul and mind in eschatological hope, would you seek to secure a proper understanding of what the early church would have regarded as a basic and foundational hope? How will you intentionally mature in this area?

Week Two

Scripture

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Introduction

In 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10 Paul established a robust foundation and context for his direct addressment of his prayers for the Thessalonians as expressed in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12. It is fully expected that the wonderful truths of 1:3-10 inform one's understanding of this short, but truth dense treatment of prayer. With this in view we give our attention to the final two verses of the chapter and examine how they might inform our lives of prayer.

In this week's study I will first provide a concise examination of the elements of the verses proper and then return to the pattern provided to us by Carson as well as our opportunities for personal responses.

2 Thessalonians 1:11

To this end

Paul is directing our attention back to the preceding content - establishing the context and disposition of mind in which he was praying for the Thessalonians.

we always pray for you,

Paul and others maintain a consistent exercise of conduct in praying for the Thessalonians - it is not rote repetition, but a sharp and consistent focus; a demonstration of love for the body and the members thereof.

that our God may make you worthy of his calling

Paul expresses one of the key elements that he is praying for the Thessalonians - a beloved church that he knew well - he prayed that God would make them worthy of his effectual/salvific calling of them. He desired that their hearts, lives, and walks in life would reflect their recognized status as children of God - living up to their positional reality.

and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,

Paul expresses a second key element that he is praying for the Thessalonians, that God would fulfill or complete or see through to completion two primary matters: 1) Every desired purpose... for good (that which is in alignment with the articulated desires of God as revealed in the Scriptures). 2) Every work... of faith by his power (actions or conduct that are governed by a proper trust in God and his purposes).

Additional Note:

The prayer is operating off the understanding that they are purposing their lives and conduct for good (things pleasing to God) and that they are conducting themselves in acts of faith (belief rightly tethered to Scripture, not a wishing well faith). So, this is communicating one of two things (perhaps both) that they are already so conducting themselves in these ways (purposing or resolving to do good and act in faith), and/or Paul is *teaching* them to so live even by how he is praying for them.

2 Thessalonians 1:12

so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you,

Paul has prayed for their aforementioned "success" to the end that Jesus would be glorified - made magnificently much of in them. This is the culminating goal of the child of God - to bring glory to the Lord as this was the reason that we were created and in God's kindness, born again. Therefore, if this is what we are striving for in life then how can it not but consume our prayers?

and you in him,

Paul has already articulated a view of the Lord's glorious return and here he is drawing out another element of our blessed hope.... one that the Apostle John reiterates in 1 John 3:2 "...we know that when [Jesus] appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." The transformational grace of God in which the beloved of God will finally be brought into a completed likeness with the Savior - no longer struggling with sin or even in the process of being conformed to the Savior, but finally conformed to his likeness and fit for eternal glory in his presence. Paul is praying with an eternal perspective and with a view to the believer's great and expectant hope.

according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul affirms that all the petitions, affirmations, and expectations that he prays for the Thessalonians, as well as the confidence of their being heard and fulfilled are wholly rooted in the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. He does not make a mystical incantation, he does not entreat some unknown deity, nor does he authoritatively direct the hand of God - he submits in confident humility that the Lord is pleased to conduct himself in accordance to his revealed character, will, and purposes as provided for us in his Scriptures.

Paul's Petitions:

"Paul prays that God might count these Christians worthy of their calling."²³

Carson begins this section by drawing out an important element of properly interpreting the text, namely to submit any/all conclusions regarding words and their usages in a given text to the larger context of the text. This is immediately applicable with Paul's use of "calling" in 1:11.

"In Paul's writings, however, the call or calling of God is always effective: those who are called by God are truly saved."²⁴

So, given the context of how the author, the Apostle Paul, consistently uses this word, "calling" it is first assumed that he is using it in a like manner here unless it can plainly be demonstrated otherwise. However, no such alternative reading would fit the immediate context and is not merited. Therefore, Paul is plainly communicating that he is praying that the Thessalonians would be worthy of God's effectual salvific call on them, worthy of God's magnificent gift of salvation.

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:1-3

"Certainly none of us was worthy when we received [salvation]. Now, however, Paul wants us to become what we were not, and he prays to that end."

Again, God's effectual salvific call on the beloved was not one of a like nature to a man called to one of the two offices of the church (Pastor and Deacon) where there are clear qualifications and expectations to be met. Rather, this is wholly an act of God and is effectively an imposed position that must subsequently be lived up to in conduct that is becoming of the position provided by God. The Apostle Peter articulates this in 1 Peter 1:14-16, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

Note that Paul is not petitioning for their welfare, success among various endeavors, or other like matters. *He is praying that Christ be formed in them.* Therefore, if hardships will produce this in them then he would (as should you) pray for persevering grace and not necessarily deliverance. Whatever the circumstances or means Paul is establishing here and pressing us to pray with a proper understanding of prayer and its intended aim for others, God is not a genie in a bottle or your buddy that you express personal aspirations to – he is the Lord of glory and his desire/will for you is plain: his glory in your good, rising you up to what he has called you to be in Christ.

"God has graciously called us; now we must live up to that calling. That cannot mean less than that we should become increasingly holy, self-denying, loving, full of integrity, steeped in the knowledge of God and his Word, delighted to trust and obey our heavenly Father."²⁵

Further, while the believer is called upon to do the work of sanctification (conforming to the image of the Savior) it is also plain that just as salvation was wholly of God, so is the ability

²³ Carson, Pg.34

²⁴ Carson, Pg.34

²⁵ Carson, Pg.36

to see the work through to completion. Therefore, one must consistently make it a preeminent priority to entrust and petition for oneself and others to see this work fulfilled in the life of the believer.

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12-13

Paul’s Petitions:

“Paul prays that God by his power might bring to fruition each Christian’s good, faith-prompted purposes.”²⁶

Paul is operating off of the presumption that the Spirit of God has so worked in the hearts and minds of his people that they have effectively repurposed their lives. Whereas time, creativity, energy, and desire might have naturally been directed toward a life of recreation, comfort, and power – the renewed mind is enraptured with seeing Christ magnified through the varied nuances of one’s life and influence. To that end Paul is praying that they would find success through the Lord’s enablement and help.²⁷

The church must also remember than in having wonderful and zealous ambitions for magnifying Christ through its varied opportunities and influence, that the time to labor for such matters in prayer is before, during, and after. To only pray for “supernatural approval” before, occasional and “casual help” during, and then genuinely laboring afterwards in the form of bemoaning a lack of clear “success” is not proper. Having renewed minds, hearts, and ambitions labor in God honoring prayer that genuinely recognizes and pursues God’s help from the inception of the work to its fruitful completion.

Carson directs even the most well focused churches toward applying wisdom in consistently evaluating their breadth of activities and programs – what may have begun well intended might have drifted from the strength of its core and what may have previously been effective might have become less so with cultural and personnel changes.

“That means we need to go over our own agendas and priorities, and those of the people and leaders in our churches and missions, and ask again and again, ‘What are our goals, our purposes? What is our mission, our direction? What should we be attempting, for Christ’s sake?’ And as we find answers to such questions, we must intercede with God that he, by his great power, might bring these good purposes, these faith-prompted acts, to bountiful fruitfulness.”²⁸

Personal Response:

Remember the aim of this entire study is to teach, strengthen, and help you pray. Do not give attention to the elements of this study guide and then not act on them in the discipline of prayer. Pray.

Have you intentionally set out to walk in a manner worthy of God’s effectual calling on your life? How has this or should this impact your life of prayer both for yourself and others?

²⁶ Carson, Pg.37
²⁷ Carson, Pgs.37-38
²⁸ Carson, Pg.38

Evaluating the emphasis of your time, creativity, energy, and desire would you confirm that they have been repurposed by the Spirit of God or do they look effectively the same as the respectable and polite unregenerate man or woman?

Is the culture and language of the local church one of a people who plainly have repurposed lives by the Spirit of God? Do you pray for their success accordingly? If they do not so plainly appear as an intentionally repurposed people, how do you pray for that deficiency and what will you do about it?

Have you prayerfully evaluated the areas of your present service and what those presently look like and what they should look like in the future? Would you commit to discussing your conclusions with the proper ministry team leader and/or the Elders so that the church can continue to be sharp in its effectiveness?

The Goal of Paul's Prayers:
"Paul seeks the glorification of the Lord Jesus."²⁹

While all the prior elements of life and service that have been presently addressed are highly commendable and worthy of pursuit, they must all be submitted to the chief goal: the glorification of the Lord Jesus.³⁰ If all one's works find the greatest of successes, even under the guise of pursuing God's glory, if they fail to genuinely achieve God's glory then they are all for naught. They are wood, hay, and stubble to be consumed... they are garbage to be swiftly discarded.

"For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire." 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

"Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:13-14

²⁹ Carson, Pg.39

³⁰ Carson, Pg.39

To this end we must also guard our hearts from ourselves; glory should be sought, but it is God's glory and the danger is that we are all too susceptible to developing an appetite for it ourselves.

“Our pilgrimage as Christians need not be very far advanced before we ruefully recognize that even our best service, motivated by the highest zeal, is regularly laced with large doses of vulgar self-interest. We learn that these sins, too, we must confess and seek to overcome. Paul recognizes the problem, and articulates the proper goal in his prayer: ‘We pray this,’ he writes, not that you may be thought remarkable Christians, or so that you may gain a reputation for perseverance and spirituality and power throughout the Roman Empire, but ‘so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you.’”³¹

This is a temptation and problem that has only been further exasperated by the prevalence of the internet and its ability to thrust someone into the spotlight of “Christian fame” with terrifying speed. We all, I hope, bemoan the rise of “Christian celebrityism”, but we all are to differing degrees susceptible to it on various levels (usually it is only opportunity and exposure that tempers this temptation), so we must all be careful to evaluate our own souls and insulate them in humble prayer to be kept... and we must love others enough to so petition for them too.

The Goal of Paul's Prayers:
“Paul seeks the glorification of believers.”³²

This might sound a bit strange, even jarring, in view of what we just took the time to unpack. How does one make it their chief goal to glorify Christ and then immediately speak to the glorification of believers? It is a wholly consistent and rightly timed subject as the glorification of believers is a primary means of them glorifying Christ as their glory is a conforming one to his own. Therefore it is not only an acceptable element of the Christian life, but an expected one as the process of sanctification is one of growing in Christ-likeness from one degree of glory to another.

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18

Carson wisely points out that this pursuit of present glory in the life of believers presses us toward a view of the final glory that will be ours in Christ. “Thus the final transformation, as wonderful as it is, is prefaced by a whole series of transformations, as we become increasingly conformed to the likeness of Christ, in anticipation of the climactic glorification at the end.”³³

Carson continues unpacking this wonderful truth and further articulates just how it is that Jesus is ultimately glorified in the believer's final glorification too. “On the last day, Jesus Christ will be glorified in us on account of what we have become by his grace, and we will be glorified in him on account of what he has done for us.”³⁴

³¹ Carson, Pgs.39-40

³² Carson, Pg.40

³³ Carson, Pg.40

³⁴ Carson, Pg.41

Personal Response:

Remember the aim of this entire study is to teach, strengthen, and help you pray. Do not give attention to the elements of this study guide and then not act on them in the discipline of prayer. Pray.

Is the glory of God your chief aim – how does this impact not only your thinking and conduct, but also your prayers?

Do you recognize your own appetite toward self-glory? How do you or should you be praying to address this all too common threat/temptation in your life and in the life of others?

When you pray for your pastors and others in public ministry positions do you plead that the Lord would keep them from this world that is seeking to make a celebrity out of everyone? Why is this important and what do these prayers need to look like?

How does the Christian's glory glorify Christ, and with this in view how should we pray for one another?

How does a view of future glory in Christ shape your prayers?

The Ground for Paul's Prayer³⁵

Paul concludes his focus on prayer for the Thessalonians with a direct reference that such things are petitioned with the confidence of being heard and answered, not on his own special merit or the merit of the Thessalonians, but wholly on account of the grace of God. This was not a formulaic way to conclude a treatment on prayer, but a proper capping of how we petition God, "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."³⁶

Carson reminds us here that while the aforementioned elements of prayer are rooted in Scriptural truths and principles, that they are still wholly reliant on the grace of God to see them through to completion. "...that he asks God to perform these things shows that he is deeply aware that God's grace must be at work if these petitions are to be answered at all."³⁷

Personal Response:

Remember the aim of this entire study is to teach, strengthen, and help you pray. Do not give attention to the elements of this study guide and then not act on them in the discipline of prayer. Pray.

How does the grace of God inform and impact your prayers?

In view of the elements that you have studied over these two weeks, how will you seek, by God's grace, to be more diligent, robust, and faithful in prayer?

Finally, remember there is not a great rush to achieve a prescribed check list, slow meditative prayer is sweeter than mission accomplished prayer. Grace to your growth in prayer!

³⁵ Carson, Pg.41

³⁶ 2 Thessalonians 2:12

³⁷ Carson, Pg.42