

## Chapter 3 - Worthy Petitions

*“And in view of this, we always pray for you that our God will consider you worthy of His calling, and will, by His power, fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified by you, and you by Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* (2 Thessalonians 1:11–12, HCSB)

### Summary of Paul's Framework:

1. Gratefulness for the most important things - for signs of God's grace at work in believers, their growth in faith and love.
2. An eternal perspective, keeping in mind the future that God has promised for those in Christ.

Based on this framework, what kinds of things should we be praying for?

### The Content of Paul's Prayer

1. Paul prays that God might count these Christians worthy of their calling. (v11)

#### What is God's calling?

- In some New Testament writers, God's calling is his invitation. For example, Matthew's parable of the wedding banquet (Matt. 22:1-14).
- With Paul, God's calling is always effective - those who are called are truly saved. For example, Romans 8:29-30: *“For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers. And those He predestined, He also called; and those He called, He also justified; and those He justified, He also glorified.”* (Romans 8:29–30, HCSB)

#### So is he praying that God would make them worthy to be saved?

- No, they've already been called, and he's asking God that they might live up to that calling. We are saved by his grace - justified, filled with the Spirit, inheriting eternal life - all freely, and all undeserved. None of us was worthy of it, but Paul wants us to become so. He wants us to live up to how we have been counted in Christ.
- This theme is reiterated throughout Paul's letters - be what you are! You are a child of God, now it is time to begin growing up into that. We are to become increasingly holy, self-denying, loving, full of integrity, steeped in the knowledge of God and his Word, delighted to know and obey our heavenly Father.
- Is this the type of prayer you pray for your family? For your church? For your children?
- Carson writes: "Many of us have had the experience of asking a parent, "How are

your children doing?" only to get an answer like this: "Oh, Johnny's doing very well now. His career as a research physicist has really taken off. He is the youngest person in his company to have been appointed to the board. And Evelyn is doing very well, too. She's into computer programming and is already the head of her section." "And how are they doing spiritually?" A long pause. "I'm afraid their not really walking with the Lord at the moment. But we're hoping they'll come back some day."

- **From eternity's perspective, what should be the primary thing we pray for those close to us?**

2. Paul prays that God by his power might bring to fruition each Christian's good, faith-prompted purposes. (v11)

- In other places, such as Phillipians 2:12-13, Paul says it is God at work in us leading us to work towards his good purpose. **What's different about what he says here in verse 11?**
- Here it is God empowering us in our faith-prompted, good purposes. The presupposition here is that the believer has been so fundamentally transformed through Christ and the gospel that they have developed a new set of goals and purposes that are prompted and shaped by faith and goodness.
- **What might that look like? What good, faith-prompted purposes have you been developing?**
- Paul's expectation is that we will develop such purposes, but he then prays that God himself will take these purposes and work them out to bring them to fruition.
- After all, this is the only way that we can accomplish these purposes -
  - *"Unless the Lord builds a house, its builders labor over it in vain; unless the Lord watches over a city, the watchman stays alert in vain."* (Psalm 127:1, HCSB)

### The Goal of Paul's Prayer

So in verse 11 we saw the two petitions which Paul asks of God, and now we see his goals behind these two petitions:

1. Paul seeks the glorification of the Lord Jesus. (v12)
  - The desires he has expressed - that Christians would be counted worthy of their calling, and that their good purposes would come to fruition - these are not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is the glorification of the Lord Jesus.
  - It's a corruption of the gift of salvation we enjoy when we seek to win glory for ourselves instead of for Christ. Everything we do should have the ultimate purpose

of seeking the praise and glory of the Lord Jesus. Nothing surprising here.

2. Paul seeks the glorification of believers. (v12)

- This is more surprising. **How does this square with the previous assertion that the the glorification of Jesus is supreme?**
- The glorification spoken of here is not a detraction from the glory of Christ, it is a reflection of it and a participation in it. As we grow in our walk with Christ, ultimately to perfection at the resurrection, we are becoming increasingly more like him. In doing so, we are bringing him glory because he is the one bringing this about in us.
- This is Paul's future looking focus appearing again - he prays with the end goal in mind. He prays in the hope of the glorification of the resurrection, but even now he prays that we would be transformed into the likeness of Christ, from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18)
- **As a side note, can it be said that God shares his glory with us?** See also Romans 8:16-17; John 17:22

### The Ground for Paul's Prayer

**How does Paul avoid his prayer becoming simply an encouragement for them to just "try harder?"**

Finally, in verse 12 Paul makes clear that the ground of his petition is in the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, this is not simply an encouragement to try harder, though it is that. It's a recognition that even as we try harder, it is the grace of God working in us.

- Carson writes: "We become fruitful by grace; we persevere by grace; we mature by grace; by grace we grow to love one another the more, and by grace we cherish holiness and a deepening knowledge of God. Therefore Paul reminds his readers at the end of his Prayer that everything he has asked for is available only on the basis of grace. The Savior himself cannot be glorified in our lives, now can we be finally glorified, apart from the grace that he provides.
- This prayer reflects a wholistic view that takes in all of the Christian experience past, present, and future. Paul sees the grace of the past, our present direction, and our future vindication and formulates his prayers in light of that.

### "Chapter 4 - Praying for Others

The next chapter is focused on people - the church, for better or worse, is made up of people. Sinful, imperfect people. Our efforts in Church and ministry should be to serve other people.

Obviously, this does not take away from our obligation to love God with our whole heart, and make service to him our principle focus. However, it does warn us that there is no such thing as intimacy and fellowship of God, if we neglect and lack love for the people of God (see for example, 1 John 4:19-21).

In this vein, we should always be asking ourselves what's best for the people of God. We should also be asking in terms of what Jesus thinks is best for them, which may not necessarily be what they think is best. **So what does all this have to do with prayer?**

When we examine Paul's prayers, one of the noticeable things is the large proportion of space devoted to praying for other people. Carson writes: "If we follow Paul's example, then, we will never overlook the monumental importance of prayer for others. Prayer will never descend to the level where it is nothing more than a retreat house in which we find strength for ourselves... Prayer may embrace all of these elements, and more; but if we learn to pray with Paul, we will learn to pray for others."

Two corollaries of this:

1. We must always submit to God's definition of what is best.
  - As discussed, the prayers of scripture should guide our priorities to know how we should pray for others.
2. Praying for others demand that we examine our own hearts.
  - How can we prayer for others if we nurse resentment or bitterness for them?
  - **How can nurtured sin our lives affect our praying?**
  - Also, unconfessed sin and unforgiveness can hinder our communication with God. (For example, Isaiah 59:1-2)
  - Malachi gives us a list of sins that can cut us off from effective praying:
    - Half-hearted religion that offers God second best (Mal. 1:6-14)
    - Meaningless tears of repentance while adultery and divorce abound (2:13-16)
    - Absence of fear of God, leading to oppression (Mal. 3:5)
  - But in our case, it is often sheer bitterness and unforgiveness that hinders us.

It's vital that we examine our own hearts and bring that before God in repentance first.

**A challenge for the next week is to take this list of Paul's prayers and read through them slowly on your own, meditating on his requests and allowing them to influence your own prayers.**

## **Paul's Prayers in the New Testament**

### **Romans 1:8–10**

*8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you 10 always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.*

### **Romans 10:1**

*Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.*

### **Romans 12:12**

*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*

### **Romans 15:5–6**

*5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, 6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

### **Romans 15:13**

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

### **Romans 15:30–33**

*30 I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. 33 May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

### **1 Corinthians 1:4–9**

*4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— 6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

### **1 Corinthians 16:23**

*The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.*

### **2 Corinthians 1:3–7**

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. 6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. 7 Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.*

### **2 Corinthians 2:14–16**

*14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. 15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, 16 to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?*

### **2 Corinthians 9:12–15**

*12 For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 13 By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, 14 while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. 15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*

### **2 Corinthians 12:7–9**

*7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

### **2 Corinthians 13:7–9**

*7 But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. 8 For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. 9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for.*

### **Galatians 6:18**

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.*

### **Ephesians 1:3–23**

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ*

*with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. 15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

### **Ephesians 3:14–21**

*14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

### **Ephesians 6:19–20**

*19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

**Philippians 1:3–6**

*3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

**Philippians 1:9–11**

*9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

**Philippians 4:6–7**

*6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

**Philippians 4:23**

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*

**Colossians 1:3–14**

*3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. 9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. 11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

**Colossians 4:2–4**

*2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— 4 that I may make it clear, which is*



*how I ought to speak.*

### **1 Thessalonians 1:2–3**

*2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

### **1 Thessalonians 2:13–16**

*13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. 14 For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, 15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind 16 by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!*

### **1 Thessalonians 3:9–13**

*9 For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, 10 as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? 11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, 12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*

### **1 Thessalonians 5:23–24**

*23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*

### **1 Thessalonians 5:28**

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

### **2 Thessalonians 1:3–12**

*3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. 4 Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. 5 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— 6 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in*

*flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. 11 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, 12 so 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.*

## **2 Thessalonians 2:16–17**

*16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.*

## **2 Thessalonians 3:2–5**

*2 and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. 5 May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.*

## **2 Thessalonians 3:16**

*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.*

## **1 Timothy 1:12**

*I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service,*

## **1 Timothy 2:1–4**

*1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

## **2 Timothy 1:3–7**

*3 I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. 4 As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. 5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. 6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the*

*laying on of my hands, 7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*

**2 Timothy 1:16–18**

*16 May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, 17 but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me— 18 may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.*

**2 Timothy 4:22**

*The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.*

**Philemon 4–7**

*4 I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, 5 because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, 6 and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. 7 For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.*

**Philemon 25**

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*