# A Pastor’s Desire for God’s People

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

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*Strong & Ready! (Books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians)*

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**livinghopechurch.net**

**Introduction**: Open your Bible to 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “A Pastor’s Desire for God’s People.”

**Run!**

Among all the strange dreams that visit us at night, one of the most frustrating—which happens to me quite frequently—is the dream of trying to run and discovering that it’s impossible to do so. My legs feel like lead: they become hopelessly heavy, and I can hardly move them. The attempt to run becomes agonizing. Imagine the sense of freedom and release if, suddenly, the dream were to change and you could run freely and without any problem!

Having told the Thessalonians what he is praying for in relation to them, Paul asks them to pray for him. What he asks, translated literally, is that the word of the Lord will ‘run and be glorified’, as was the case among them.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Paul is a pastor to the Thessalonians. He’s their first pastor. He was only with them three weeks or so (Acts 16-17), but his heart was connected to theirs. He wanted to shepherd them well.

Being a pastor is the highest calling for a godly man, not only in privilege, but also in obligation. Therefore, anyone who preaches and teaches the Word of God and offers himself as a spiritual shepherd for God’s flock must meet the highest of divinely established standards.

It is the church’s duty to measure and hold their pastors to those high standards, which Scripture so clearly and precisely defines.

* In a command that applies to all shepherds, Jesus told Peter, “Feed My sheep” (John 21:17).
* In the early days of the church, the Twelve resolved, “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).
* Paul, pointing to his own example, exhorted the Ephesian elders concerning the serious and comprehensive responsibilities they had as shepherds of God’s church: “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:27–28).
* Remember Paul had instructed them how a healthy church has a healthy relationship between the leaders and the rest of the Body. **1 Thess. 5:12-13**, “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, **13**and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.” Sincere love connects us all to Christ and to one another.

**Noble Character Requirements for Shepherds**

Both Paul and Peter set forth God’s high and holy requirements for shepherding His flock (1 Tim. 3:1–7; 4:6–11; 2 Tim. 3:16–4:5; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Peter 5:1–4; cf. Heb. 13:7, 17).[[2]](#footnote-2) Most of these requirements outline how a shepherd should have good character.

But Paul joins with his dear “forever family” at Thessalonica and asks them for four vital connections for them to expand God’s kingdom:

1. Prayer
2. Trust
3. Obedience
4. Growth

St. Paul asks for four requests.

**2 Thessalonians 3:1-5**, “Finally, brothers, **pray** for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, **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.”

1. That God’s People **Pray** (2 Thess. 3:1-2)**.**

**2 Thessalonians 3:1-2**, “Finally, brothers, **pray** for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, **2**and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.”

**Without Prayer, we are Powerless**

Prayer is necessary because God has to be in this or all is in vain.

**Psalm 127:1**, “Unless the Lord builds the house,
    those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
    the watchman stays awake in vain.”

1. **THE PROMISE OF PRAYER**

How important regular prayer times and public prayer meetings are!

**Martin Luther** said, “To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”

Paul said much the same: "Pray without ceasing!"

Nancy Leigh DeMoss in her book "A Place of Quiet Rest" gives 13 reasons against a life a prayerlessness.

I am convinced that prayerlessness:

1. Is a sin against God (1 Sam. 12:23).
2. Is direct disobedience to the command of Christ (“watch and pray,” Mt. 26:41).
3. Is direct disobedience to the Word of God (“pray without ceasing,” 1 Thes. 5:17).
4. Makes me vulnerable to temptation (“watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation,” Mt. 26:41).
5. Expresses independence – no need for God.
6. Gives place to the Enemy and makes me vulnerable to his schemes (Eph. 6:10-20; Dan. 10).
7. Results in powerlessness.
8. Limits (and defines) my relationship with God.
9. Hinders me from knowing His will, His priorities, His direction.
10. Forces me to operate in the realm of the natural (what I can do) verses the supernatural (what He can do).
11. Leaves me weak, harried, and hassled.
12. Is rooted in pride, self-sufficiency, laziness, and lack of discipline.
13. Reveals a lack of real burden and compassion for others.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Matthew 7:7-8**, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **8**For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”

**John 16:23–24**, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.**24**Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”

1. **PRAY FOR GOD’S POWER (GOD’S WORD TO RUN)!**

**2 Thessalonians 3:1**, “Finally, brothers, **pray** for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you...”

**We can’t make people receive the Word.** Paul was Christ’s servant fulfilling his calling, but he was still only a man saved by grace and therefore unable to achieve anything for God without the aid of the Holy Spirit. He made this plain to the Corinthians when he wrote to them, ‘God has chosen the foolish things … the weak things … the base things of the world and the things which are despised’ (1 Cor. 1:27–28). Paul requested much prayer that God’s anointing would rest upon him.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Examples**. In his epistles, he asked for particular and pointed intercession from the saints.

* In Ephesians, he requested prayer that he would be enabled to ‘open [his] mouth boldly’, using the right words when timely opportunities were given to preach the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6:19).
* In Colossians, Paul appealed for ‘open doors’ in order to teach the gospel wisely. Col. 4:2–4, “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.”
* In this letter to the Thessalonians, he hopes that ‘the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified’ (3:1), that is, that the gospel will be spread rapidly in Europe through his ministry.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Calvin says, ‘Paul was asking that his preaching might have in it power and effectiveness to renew men in the image of God.’[[6]](#footnote-6)

1. **PRAY FOR GOD’S DISCERNMENT**

Not only this, but he was also asking that he would be ‘delivered from unreasonable and wicked men’ (v. 2).

**2 Thessalonians 3:2**, “pray for us…and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.”

He was referring to those people or groups who hinder the gospel, whether they are inside or outside the churches (Matt. 13:25; 2 Tim. 4:14). He defined these spoilers as ‘unreasonable and wicked’ and lacking in true faith: ‘for not all have faith’ (v. 2*b*).

We are reminded here that faith is a gift of God and is not found in everyone; as someone once said, ‘**Not all who profess faith possess real faith**.’[[7]](#footnote-7)

***Transition***: **Pray**! This is what your pastors and elders are always asking you to do. Pray! But here’s a second thing we always ask you. **Trust God**!

1. That God’s People **Trust** God(2 Thess. 3:3)**.**
2. **TRUST THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL.**

**2 Thessalonians 3:3**, “But the Lord is **faithful**. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.”

When he wrote this letter, Paul was in Corinth, so he could not ensure firsthand how strong the Thessalonians’ trust in God through all their trials and persecutions would remain. But no matter what difficulties faced them, Paul knew **the Lord** would be **faithful** to accomplish His purposes for them.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**1 Thess 5:23-24**, “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. **24He who calls you is faithful**; he will surely do it.”

Phil 1:6, “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.”

1. **TRUST THAT GOD WILL STRENGTHEN YOU.**

**2 Thessalonians 3:3**, “But the Lord is faithful. He will **establish you** and guard you against the evil one.”

**Prayer is a Means of God’s Grace**

Paul was without equal as a gifted and effective minister of God. His natural abilities were immense—he had the best rabbinical education; he was a brilliant, logical, and persuasive thinker and communicator; and he was spiritually perceptive and possessed much experience in missions and church planting. But none of those qualities stood alone as the source of his effectiveness. Paul testified to the Colossians, “I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me” (Col. 1:29).[[9]](#footnote-9)

Paul’s secret is not his own power. He placed no confidence in the flesh.

We can all say with Paul in **1 Cor 15:10** (KJV), “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: **yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me**.”

As I said on Sunday, we do our best. It’s weak. It’s pitiful. But it is faithful. “The righteous falls seven times and rises again” (**Pro 24:16**). We give all that we are, but in the end it is so little.

**Philippians 2:12b-13** says it well: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

But I want you to know, little is much when God is in it! There’s an old Gospel song which goes:

*Little is much when God is in it!*

*Labor not for wealth or fame;*

*There’s a crown, and you can win it,*

*If you go in Jesus’ name.[[10]](#footnote-10)*

God has given us so much! We sometimes don’t know what to do with it all. We don’t always do the right thing with the Gospel. But we do something with it.

1. **TRUST THAT GOD WILL PROTECT YOU.**

**2 Thessalonians 3:3**, “But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and **guard you against the evil one**.”

**Applications**

1. Expect Satanic Attack
2. Resist the devil and he will flee from you (Eph 4)
3. We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against demonic powers (Eph 6:12ff).
4. God can and will deliver – “he will flee from you”! It’s a promise!
5. The fight comes primarily through prayer
6. That God’s People **Obey** God(2 Thess. 3:4)**.**

**2 Thessalonians 3:4**, “And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that **you are doing** and will do the things that we command.”

1. **THEY WERE ALREADY LIVING OBEDIENTLY.**

The third pastoral desire Paul had for the Thessalonians was that they continue their pattern of obedience to God…based on what they were already **doing**.

**1 Thess. 1:3**, “Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**1 Thess. 1:6–8**, “And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, **7**so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. **8**For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.”

Paul had **confidence in the Lord** that they would **continue to do what** he taught them. As their pastor, he had spent much time explaining the Word of God, and in so doing he had the authority to **command** that they obey it (cf. 1 Tim. 4:11).

1. **WE ARE CALLED TO PERSEVERE.**

**2 Thessalonians 3:4**, “And we have confidence in the Lord about **you, that you are doing** and **will do the things that we command**.”

This is pattern of obedience is a mark of true conversion.

* **1 John 3:2-6**, “Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. **3**And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. **4**Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. **5**You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. **6**No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.”

Scripture is replete with such commands for obedience. In fact, David described the entirety of God’s Word as a command:

* “The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:8).
* In the Great Commission, Jesus defined as commands the many things He taught, and He expected believers to obey them: “Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matt. 28:20).

Even the gospel contains the twofold command to repent and believe (Mark 1:15; cf. 6:12; Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 26:20). Thus it is the duty of all believers, as it was for the church at Thessalonica, to obediently follow the divine commands (Scripture) their pastor gives them—whether he is present or absent (cf. 2 Cor. 10:1, 11; 13:2, 10; Phil. 2:12).[[11]](#footnote-11)

1. That God’s People **Grow** Spiritually(2 Thess. 3:5)**.**

**2 Thessalonians 3:5**, “May **the Lord direct your hearts** to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.”

1. **GROW IN THE LOVE OF GOD**

**Direct,** “make straight,” is the same word (*kateuthunō*) used in 1 Thessalonians 3:11 to indicate the removing of all obstacles and hindrances as someone opened a pathway or road. Paul did not want their spiritual progress to come to a halt, but rather that **the Lord** would clear the way so their **hearts** or inner persons would move **into the love of God.**[[12]](#footnote-12)

1. **GROW IN THE STEADFASTNESS OF GOD**

Second, the apostle desired that God would **direct** the Thessalonians’ **hearts** to grow stronger in **the steadfastness of Christ.** That phrase also contains a certain degree of ambiguity in meaning. Paul could have referred either to Christ’s **steadfastness** (*hupomonē,* also rendered “patience,” as in “patient enduring”) with believers, or believers’ patience in His strength, through their endurance. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to increasingly understand how patient Christ was with their sins, problems, and struggles and to understand better His own endurance in trials (cf. Matt. 4:1–11; 26:59–68; Luke 22:39–53; John 18:33–38; 19:1–11), so that they would have greater spiritual endurance (cf. Heb. 2:17–18; 4:15–16). He desired that they learn from their Savior’s example and move forward in love and patience under persecution (cf. Matt. 5:10–12; Rom. 12:12; Gal. 6:9; Eph. 6:18; Col. 1:23; 2 Tim. 3:12; Heb. 3:6, 14; 6:10–11, 19; 12:2–3; 1 Peter 4:13).[[13]](#footnote-13)

**Conclusion**

Shepherds are imperfect people. The only truly Good Shepherd is found in Psalm 23.

Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
**2**    He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
**3**    He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
    for his name's sake.

**4**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
    I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
    your rod and your staff,
    they comfort me.

**5**You prepare a table before me
    in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
    my cup overflows.
**6**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
    all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
    forever.”

1. Wright, T. (2004). *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (pp. 152–153). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (pp. 291–292). Chicago: Moody Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Nancy Leigh DeMoss. *A Place of Quiet Rest*, Moody, 2000, p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. McNaughton, I. (2008). *Opening up 2 Thessalonians* (p. 62). Leominster: Day One Publications. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. McNaughton, ibid, 62-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Calvin, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. McNaughton, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (p. 296). Chicago: Moody Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. MacArthur, ibid, 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Little Is Much When God Is in It*, by Kittie L. Suffield, 1924. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. MacArthur, 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., 298. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)