

Superheroes and Ticket Stubs: Praying for Others

1 Thessalonians 1

Sunday, May 3, 2020

Paul's letters are something I've never really been into. Yes, I've learned incredible and life changing things there. Yes, Paul's writings build and encourage my faith. But they are not a place I go to for Bible reading fun.

This has changed significantly since life in isolation. There is a new relevance here for these letters. Paul was writing to a scattered church in his letters. And here we are: a scattered church! Paul's letters feel like field guides to follow Jesus through uncharted waters.

We're going to look to his field guide in 1 Thessalonians to see how we ought to pray in these times.

Paul prays about the Thessalonians, ***"We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers."*** Paul is grateful for these people specifically. He's not grateful for them generically. He has very specific reasons to be thankful for them.

These Thessalonians are amazing people. Here are the ways that Paul is able to genuinely pray for them:

- ***Your work produced by faith.*** They believe in Jesus, and they work hard in service to him. Their belief results in action – action that changes both church and community.
- ***Your labour prompted by love.*** They serve well, not out of a sense of duty. Not out of a sense of, "I suppose I will if I have to." They serve out of love for Jesus and love for others.
- ***Your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*** They endure. They keep moving forward one difficult step at a time. As Bruce is prone to say, they "plod on!" They understand the promises of Jesus. They live in the power of his resurrection. They advance.
- ***You welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.*** The message they received was not, "Jesus makes life great". The message they got was, "If you follow Jesus you will suffer". And they followed anyway! Would this be true for us? Would this be true for me?

The people of the Thessalonian Church sound downright heroic! They sound like super heroes! They sound almost too good to be true. They endure in hard times! They rise above difficulty. They are confronted with evil, yet they press on! Of course Paul is going to be thankful for people like that! Who wouldn't be?

Then we think about the Christians we know. We think about the people that normally sit near us in a church service. We don't see them as heroic. We all have met Christians that do dumb things, say dumb things and are less than heroic in their faith. Of course Paul is thankful for the Thessalonian Christians! What do we have to be thankful about when it comes to the Christians in our lives?

A common problem that we have when reading the New Testament is that we over value the contributions of the early church and under value the contributions of the believers in our lives. We idealize the early church. We discount the Christians around us.

Some of the praise that Paul gives the Thessalonians is certainly earned. But some of this praise is JUST BECAUSE Paul is an advocate for these believers. “The church in Thessalonica is very young, perhaps not more than a few months old” (NT Wright, 89, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians*). They are willing to sacrifice life and freedom for Jesus. But they are also incredibly green.

The attitude Paul had toward the Thessalonian church is an attitude we can adopt toward others. Paul is an advocate for the Thessalonians to other people. Paul is an advocate in prayer to God. We can be advocates for other believers in much the same way. The Canadian rock band Sloan sings, “Ooooh, the good in everyone. You see the good in everyone.” Well we can pray, “Ooooh, the good in everyone, we thank God for the good in everyone.” And we can pray it very specifically. Paul’s praise and prayer for the Thessalonians was very specific – they endure, they are faithful, they work hard in service to Jesus. But it is also prayed as an advocate.

We can pray very specifically for the people around us. We can thank God for the Christians around us with very specific reasons for our thankfulness. See what is good in the lives of other Christians and thank God for those things.

Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians is also an act of remembering. ***We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*** Paul remembers.

Prayer can be an act of remembering. God asks this of Israel over and over and over again: “Remember!” When Jesus asks his disciples, and us, to continue to take the Lord’s supper together, he says, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

Remembering is powerful. Remembering brings us joy in dark times. Remembering reminds of the times where God has been faithful. Remembering takes the good things of the past and brings them firmly into our present.

Remembering is a joyful reality for me right now. I have several albums of ticket stubs from concerts and sporting events I have attended. I can’t go to any of these events now. I may not be able to go for a long time! But I can thrive off of the memory of concerts and games I have attended. Remembering helps me be grateful for these previous experiences. Through remembering I still enjoy those previous experiences today.

If remembering events I’ve attended brings me joy, how much more joy comes to mind with the memory of Christians who have walked with me in serving Jesus?

When we experience lean days and months and years, it is so valuable to remember previous times of God’s faithfulness. This is also important in our memory of others. Are you having a rough go with

other believers? REMEMBER the good experiences with them. REMEMBER that God is with them as well.

I suppose it's a valid prayer to ask God, "Please be with so-and-so and help them to stop being an idiot." At least it's honest? But it is certainly not the prayer of Paul.

We pray for others, thanking God for the very specific ways that we see God at work in their lives. We pray truly seeing the good in the people we are praying for. As we pray for people in this way, we begin to see truly amazing things in their lives rising to the surface.

We pray for others, remembering them and the work of a faithful Saviour in their lives. Christ is faithful. We see God's faithfulness in the things we have experienced with other people. We see the faithfulness of God as they share their lives with us.

May our prayers for one another be this:

We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)