

SESSION 12

# fellow-believer support

## SCRIPTURE FOCUS

2 Thess. 3:1–5

## BUILDUP THEME



UPLIFT OTHERS

God wants us to pray for effectiveness, express His faithfulness, and expect spiritual fruitfulness.

## MEASURABLE RESPONSE

Students will use Paul's prayer for ministry as a model for their own prayer.

## MEMORY VERSE

"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you" (2 Thess. 3:1).

## Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Have you ever experienced extra strength or comfort from the Lord and later learned that others were praying for you during that time? Or has someone ever told you that they felt your prayers for them during difficult circumstances? Such experiences underscore the power of prayer.
- ☐ Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1–5. Paul consistently prayed for fellow believers and requested prayer for his missionary team. From his model prayer, we can learn that God expects us to pray for effectiveness, express our trust in His faithfulness, and expect spiritual fruitfulness.
- ☐ Read John 17:9–26. Notice that Jesus prayed for His followers as well as for all future believers. He, too, focused on spiritual needs, including joy, unity, and protection from temptation. When your students seem discouraged in their faith, remind them that Jesus prayed for them.
- ☐ Your students might tend to focus their prayers on other people's financial or physical needs. Use this session to help them take their prayers deeper by praying for people's spiritual needs. Help them see that a person with physical and financial needs also has spiritual needs. Guide them in their efforts to pray for other believers, reminding them that prayer is powerful.

## Session Summary

Paul's prayer request shows the importance of praying about serving God. He requested prayer that the gospel would get across to unbelievers and would go out without hindrance. He expressed his trust that God would be faithful to ground believers in the faith and guard them from Satan's attacks. Paul also trusted that God would guide the Thessalonians to continue obeying His Word. Paul prayed God would direct the believers to abide in His love and to look to Christ for patient endurance in their trials. Paul's confidence that God works through believers' prayers should encourage us in our own prayers.

# Session Starters

## Option 1—Communication Advancements

### Gather

- Examples of outdated communication devices.

### Steps

1. If you have examples of outdated communication devices, show those to your class. Give them an opportunity to share their experiences in using similar devices.

2. Discuss advances in communication.

**ASK:** How have technological advances changed communication over your lifetime?

**ASK:** How have those changes impacted your life?

**ASK:** What advancements, if any, have been made in our ability to communicate to God?

3. Transition to the Bible study.

Paul had to use a letter to ask the Thessalonians to pray for his team. Some of us have probably never written a letter. We have much more efficient ways to communicate today. But prayer hasn't changed. We all still have access to God. He is available anytime. And He can even read our thoughts. This session will encourage us to take time to pray and to ask others to pray for us. It is an essential part of spiritual fruitfulness.

## Option 2—Meaningless Sayings

### Steps

1. Talk about saying things we don't mean.

**ASK:** What are some examples of things people say but don't mean? (Q1) *We should grab coffee! Let me know if I can help. Glad to see you. Have a nice day.*

**ASK:** Have you ever told someone you would pray for them but didn't really mean it? (Q2)

**ASK:** Have you ever mouthed the words of a prayer that you didn't really mean? (Q3)

2. Transition to the Bible study.

Paul never talked about prayer in a meaningless way. When he asked for prayer, he meant it. And when he said he would pray for

others, he did. He understood prayer is vital for spiritual growth and fruitfulness. This session helps us understand that too.

## Bible Study

Chapter 3 begins the last major section of 2 Thessalonians. When Paul began verse 1 with “finally,” he indicated a move to a different topic. He had been discussing future events, but he moved on to present issues. The first issue he discussed was prayer.

### I. Ask God for Effectiveness (2 Thess. 3:1–2)

#### A. To get the message across (3:1)

Paul requested prayer for his mission team, something he did often (2 Cor. 1:11; Eph. 6:18, 19, 1 Thess. 5:25).

**READ:** 2 Thessalonians 3:1.

The verb tense that Paul used when he asked the believers to pray for him indicated that he wanted them to pray for him on a regular basis. Paul knew that he would need prayer for as long as he lived. He would never reach a point in his life when he would be exempt from prayer.

In requesting prayer, Paul didn’t assume his team’s success in Thessalonica would guarantee their success during the remainder of their second missionary journey. Instead of making assumptions, Paul requested prayer that the gospel would continue to spread freely. The verb Paul used means to “run.” The picture is of a swift runner in a race without any hindrances. Believers should consistently pray that the gospel would spread quickly and effectively. Paul wanted the message to get across to more and more people so they might be saved and become witnesses themselves.

**ASK:** God obviously wants the gospel to spread. So why does He want us to pray that He would make that happen? (Q4) *Because God has chosen to work in response to prayer. Furthermore, our prayer keeps us dependent on God and answered prayers give us reasons to thank and praise God.*

Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray that the gospel would be glorified and honored. As people were saved, Paul wanted them to become walking advertisements of the benefits of knowing God. Paul wanted their salvations to be genuine and followed by spiritual growth. Not everyone who claimed to know God helped the gospel’s reputation. Most of the Thessalonians, to Paul’s delight, had become positive examples of the benefits of putting one’s faith in Christ (1 Thess. 1:6–8). Paul wanted that to continue in other cities along his journey, so he asked the Thessalonians to pray about it.

**ASK:** What characterizes the life of a believer who brings honor to the gospel? (Q5) *The person shows the love of God, has peace in times of trouble, and has a hopeful outlook on life.*

**ASK:** If you shared the gospel with your neighbors or coworkers, would they be surprised? Does your life bring glory and honor to the gospel message? (Q6)

Our common mission as believers is to take the message of salvation to the world. Consistent prayer will enable us to work together toward this goal.

## **B. To get the message out (3:2)**

**READ:** 2 Thessalonians 3:2.

Not everyone likes to hear the gospel. That was especially true for first-century Jews who saw Christianity as a threat to undermine their monopoly on the worship of the one true God. They opposed Paul and put up “roadblocks” to hinder him from spreading the gospel. Paul asked for deliverance from such unbelieving, evil men.

We should not forget that Satan is going to spiritually and physically attack God’s servants who are doing a great work for the Lord. In fact, the more a believer gets involved in God’s work, the more Satan will bring opposition into his or her life. Overcoming that opposition is possible, but only through prayer. So, when missionaries share their struggles and trials, those who support them should rally behind them in prayer. “Prayer support” for missionaries and for all believers is not just a good idea; it is absolutely necessary. The enemy is committed to defeating God’s servants. Prayer will keep Satan from winning.

While we enjoy relative freedom to worship God and spread the gospel, that isn’t the case for believers in countries closed to Christianity. Muslims control most of those closed countries. Christians in those countries, like Paul’s team in the first century, face life-threatening opposition to the spread of the gospel.

**ASK:** What could we ask God to do for believers in countries closed to Christianity? (Q7) *For God to deliver the believers from persecution and incarceration; for God to give the believers courage to remain faithful, strength to endure hardships and suffering, and peace and joy as they live for Christ.*

Most of the obstacles we face in getting the gospel out are in our own minds. God can help us overcome our internal obstacles of fear, uncertainty, and even apathy.

## **II. Express Trust in God’s Faithfulness (2 Thess. 3:3, 4)**

### **A. To ground believers (3:3)**

**READ:** 2 Thessalonians 3:3.

Paul turned to the needs of his readers, beginning with a declaration of God's faithfulness to work in the Thessalonians' lives. In his first letter Paul wrote that God would be faithful to sanctify and preserve the Thessalonians until Christ returns (1 Thess. 5:23, 24). Faithfulness is one of God's defining characteristics. He will always keep His promises and will always act according to His attributes, including His holiness.

Paul counted on God to be faithful to the Thessalonians in three ways. First, God would be faithful to establish them in their faith. The word establish means to be fixed and grounded. The Thessalonians needed to understand God's truth and base their lives on it. The truth would keep them from being shaken and disturbed by false doctrines concerning the Day of the Lord (2 Thess. 2:1, 2). Paul's letters went a long way toward grounding the Thessalonians in the truth. Of course, the Thessalonians had to read and study them for them to be effective. God is faithful to ground believers as they submit to learning and following solid Biblical teaching.

**ASK:** What ministries in our church could God use to ground us in our faith? (Q8)

**ASK:** What might you do on your own to become better grounded? (Q9)

**B. To guard believers (3:3)**

The Thessalonians were under attack from Satan through persecution by evil men and through false teachings. But God would be faithful to guard them from being overcome by evil. Satan would not win.

The word "guard" (keep) was often used for a soldier's protection against an enemy's violent attack. Satan wants to destroy believers and render them useless. He does that by getting them discouraged and feeling defeated and hopeless against sin. He wants believers to give up the battle. But as we put our faith in God to help us live obedient to Him, we will be shielded from Satan's destructive darts (Eph. 6:16). Paul's assurance reminds us of Jesus' prayer for believers.

**READ:** John 17:14, 15, 20. **ASK:** How should knowing Jesus prayed for us affect our faith? (Q10) *It should give us courage and confidence; it should motivate us to pray for fellow believers.*

Jesus taught that our prayer, both for ourselves and for other believers, is a major defense against Satan's attacks. When we pray for strength and protection, God is faithful to answer our request.

**C. To grow believers (3:4)**

**READ:** 2 Thessalonians 3:4.

Paul's team had confidence in God concerning the Thessalonians' faith. Paul trusted they would continue to do the things his team had commanded them. God, of course, inspired the missionaries' commands. Paul always made clear that what he taught came from God and not from his own mind. The word "command" Paul used in verse 4 refers to a military order that a superior officer passes on to those under his direction. God was the source of the commands Paul passed along. Paul had ultimate confidence in his Superior Officer.

Paul had already encouraged the Thessalonians to hold on to traditions (doctrines) he had taught them (2 Thess. 2:15). And in his first letter, he referred to instructions given through "the Lord Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:2).

Notice that Paul's confidence was in the Lord, not in the Thessalonians themselves. It is by God's power that believers continue to follow Biblical truths and grow in the Lord. Paul knew that God would be faithful to keep the Thessalonians growing.

### **III. Expect to See Spiritual Fruitfulness (2 Thess. 3:5)**

#### **A. God's love for others (3:5)**

Paul often assured the recipients of his letters that he was praying for them and expressed his prayers in his writing.

**READ:** 2 Thessalonians 3:5. **ASK:** Why it is important to let others know you are praying for them? (Q11) *Believers often receive extra encouragement when they can depend on the prayers of others.*

Because of God's work on behalf of the Thessalonians, Paul expected to see spiritual fruit in their lives, including God's love coming from their hearts. God's love had made possible the Thessalonians' salvation and acceptance of the gospel. Paul wanted them to continue to experience that love as they endured persecution. Their hardships might make them question God's love, so Paul prayed their hearts would be drawn closer to God in their trials rather than drawn further away. The word "direct" means to "clear the way." As believers depend more on God, His love strengthens them and enables them to continue loving others as well.

**ASK:** How can hardships draw us closer to God? (Q12) *As we experience trials, we realize that God is the only stability we have; we have no other choice but to keep trusting in Him. When we draw near to God, He will draw near to us (James 4:8), making us more aware of His presence.*

**ASK:** When have you drawn closer to God during a difficult time? (Q13)

#### **B. Christ's patience in trouble (3:5)**

Paul also prayed the believers' hearts would be directed toward Christ's patient endurance. Christ provides a perfect example of patience.

**READ:** Philippians 2:6–8.

God the Son took on flesh and became the perfect example of patient suffering. He willingly obeyed the Father even when it meant death on the cross. As the Thessalonians experienced persecution, they needed to remember what Jesus had endured for them to make their salvation possible.

When we experience trials, we must remember Jesus' experience. If He endured such suffering, why should we, as His followers, expect to escape suffering?

We need to look to Christ not only as our example of patience but also as our source of patience (2 Thess. 3:5). Through His Spirit, Christ gives believers the patience they need to live for Him faithfully.

**ASK:** While we should pray for believers' physical needs, what is Paul's focus 2 Thessalonians 3:1–5? (Q14) *Spiritual needs, including love, patience, deliverance from evil, spiritual strength, faithfulness.*

Paul's continued prayers for believers underscores our need to pray for each other. God guards us, and His Spirit enables us to continue firmly in our faith. But God doesn't expect us to be "lone wolf" Christians. He has created us to support each other and to gain spiritual strength from the prayers of other believers.

Either through death or at the return of Christ, believers will be delivered from the trials of this world. Until then, He gives us the power to live for Him, but we should also commit to support each other through prayer as we navigate the Christian life together.

## Session Application

### Steps

1. Discuss praying for other people.

When we're sharing prayer requests, physical needs, such as safety or health, easily come to mind. But we should not forget to share our spiritual needs with each other as well.

**ASK:** What are some examples of spiritual needs? (Q15)  
*Strength to overcome temptation, comfort in a time of sorrow, patience for completing a task, courage to share the gospel.*

**ASK:** Do you find it more difficult to share prayer requests focused on spiritual needs rather than physical needs? Why or why not? (Q16)

**ASK:** How can we focus our prayers on believers' spiritual

needs? (Q17) *Ask people how we can pray for them; ask them what their specific needs are.*

When we know of a physical need, we should consider how it might lead to a spiritual need. For example, if we pray for physical healing of a cancer patient, we can also pray that person will depend on God's grace and know joy during his or her season of uncertainty.

2. Challenge your students to commit to pray regularly for the spiritual needs of believers. Give them an opportunity to do so as you close this session.