

How to Pray When Trouble Comes

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4, 11-12

In the recent message¹ from Revelation 13, we learned the importance of the words, **“Here is the patience and faith of the saints”** (Revelation 13:10). In this dramatic passage in the Book of the Revelation, we learn what will happen when Satan unleashes his full wrath upon this world. Believers will be the special target of his fury during this coming Great Tribulation. But for those of us who will be delivered from the Great Tribulation, is this a concern today?

Sometimes, those of us who believe that the Lord will deliver His bride, the Church, from the Great Tribulation are criticized. We are told that we are weakening believers by giving them false hope. This criticism comes from those who believe that the believers of this Church Age will go through the Great Tribulation. Their argument is that we are setting believers up for a huge disappointment and defeat. But our answer to this criticism comes through properly preaching texts such as 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, **“... we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure”** (2 Thessalonians 1:4). Nowhere does the Scripture teach that believers will be taken up in the Rapture while they lounge in leisure waiting for the Lord’s return. On the contrary, passages such as 2 Thessalonians 1:4 present a very different story. As the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: all those who will live in a godly manner shall suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). So what is the main point of this message? Believers in every age must face persecutions and tribulations with patience and faith. How can we help each other to do this? We can help by knowing how to pray in a God-honoring manner..

Praying for believers in times of trouble

Paul’s stirring prayers in 2 Thessalonians 1 surround the persecutions and sufferings of the saints. Verses 4 and 5 describe their persecutions, tribulations and sufferings. Verses 6-7 frame these troubles with the God-given answer, **““And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord...”** (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 describes the eternal fire of God’s judgment. You can almost smell the acrid smoke in these verses – like a horrific forest fire. Those who do not obey the Gospel will face the eternal flames of God’s wrath. True Christians try to rescue those who are on the edge of the flames of eternity – snatching them from the fire (Jude 23).

Do you understand that the Gospel is to be obeyed? This is not a “take it or leave it” issue. Your eternal destiny is at stake. Christ was tortured and put to death for your wickedness. He rose again from the dead to demonstrate that the Father had honored His sacrifice. He ascended to Heaven to show us that He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). And God promised to save – to deliver – all who will obey His Gospel by placing faith in Him. He will give them eternal life.

But those who refuse to obey the Gospel reject the Savior and trouble the saints. Those who hate the Savior hate His saints; they try to fight the fire with their fury. This is why words for trouble and suffering occur repeatedly in verses 4-7.

In this message, we want to study how to pray for each other in these times of trouble. In 2 Thessalonians 1, we learn how to thank the Lord and enable our fellow believers with God-honoring prayer.

A. Honoring God with our Thanks

“We are bound [we ought] to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet [appropriate], because that your faith grows exceedingly, and the charity [love] of every one of you all toward each other abounds; so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:” (2 Thessalonians 1:3-4)

Sometimes it seems that particular churches are particular targets of Satan’s rage. When Paul and John wrote to the church at Ephesus, they did not mention trouble or persecution. This is not to say that there was no trouble. But the apostolic letters to some churches repeatedly mention the severe testing they were enduring. In verses 3-4, Paul expressed his gratitude to God for the Thessalonians’ growing faith and their abounding love. Like a bubbling fountain, their faith and love overflowed and this caused rejoicing in their sister churches. Specifically, Paul thanked God for their steadfast patience and enduring faith in the Lord. How should we pray when trouble comes? We ought to thank God for the unfaltering perseverance and persistent trust demonstrated by others.

You have probably wondered about this. You may have watched a believer go through the ravages of a horrible cancer, and marveled at their inner strength. Or you have known Christians who have been cheated or mistreated, and yet they continued to serve Christ. Some have faced untimely death with determination. For others it was the loss of wealth or relationships, and they demonstrated patience and faith. What is the right response when you see these things? Thank God! During the upcoming Thanksgiving season, we now realize that we have much to be thankful for. We live among saints who steadily endure troubles of all kinds. Thank God for them. Here is a great way to pray when trouble comes! Thank God for your fellow believers’ as you watch their faith increase and their love overflow.

Persecution in England in the 1600’s

One person, whose name you know well, heard three or four poor women talking about the new birth one day in Bedford, England. He was a young man at the time, and God’s Spirit had been convicting him with the question, *“Will you leave your sins and go to Heaven, or have your sins and go to Hell?”* During the English Civil Wars, he saw a friend die in battle and this caused him to consider the question of the new birth even more seriously. After he became a believer, he read constantly. He took courage from watching the believers in his Baptist church go through persecution. And when he answered the call to preach God’s Word, the troubles came to him.

The government in England charged him with holding church services without a license; he was put into prison (the first time) for 12 years, beginning in January 1661. During this time, he had to support his wife and 4 small children by making shoe laces in his prison cell. You may have heard of a book that this man wrote while he was imprisoned; it is entitled *Grace Abounding* (which is his spiritual autobiography). But without doubt, you have heard of John Bunyan’s second book *Pilgrim’s Progress*. If you are a believer who has read *Pilgrim’s Progress*, you have thanked God for its remarkable, Scriptural teaching. But now that you know the rest of the story, thank God for Bunyan’s patience and faith in

persecution and tribulation. We ought to give glory to God for the way Bunyan and his fellow believers faced their troubles. And thank God for the way He continues to enable believers to stand firm in our own day.

Now we understand from verses 3 and 4 that we ought to thank God for the patience and faith of those who have faced trials and persecution. They have blazed a trail for us. If they could face persecution and tribulation, so can we, by God's grace. But the apostles' prayer in verses 11-12 shows us even more about how to pray when trouble comes.

B. Honoring God with Enabling Prayer

"Wherefore [or for this purpose] also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *his* goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you [by you], and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

In verses 11-12, Paul designed his prayer to assist and enable the believers' perseverance. Here are specific ways we could pray for each other when trouble comes:

1. That God would count you worthy of His calling (by the way you go through suffering)

Verse 5 puts it this way: that you may be counted (or considered) worthy of the kingdom of God for which you suffer. The point here is that God's grace would enable believers in their times of testing. God's grace makes you worthy of God's kingdom. Believers are to walk worthy of their calling (Ephesians 4:1) and they do so by being vibrant members of a local church (Ephesians 4:11-16). They are built through the ministry of their church and they walk worthy by building up others in their congregation.

In Philippians 2, when Paul told the congregation at Philippi to "work out your [plural] own salvation with fear and trembling," he was telling them all to act like the Christians that they were. How could they do so? Paul's answer was, "For it is God who works in you [plural] both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). In short, your church needs you and you need your church to walk worthy of the Lord – especially in times of trouble.

2. That the Lord would fulfill every God-honoring desire to do good

The potential of this prayer is almost limitless! Note that, in some translations, the word "his" is supplied in italics. This is because the translators are trying to make a choice about what this phrase means. Does it mean that God would fulfill His desire for you? Paul knew that the Lord was already doing that. But consider the other possibility: Paul was praying that God would fulfill every God-honoring desire of these troubled believers. It is likely that Paul was thinking of the expressions in Psalm 20, verses 4 and 5. There the psalmist prayed that God would grant the heart's desire of the believer and fulfill all their prayerful petitions and plans. What a wonderful way to pray for your fellow believers: that the Lord would bring every one of their God-honoring desires to fulfillment! This would be astounding. But remember Paul's doxology in Ephesians 3:20-21, **"Now unto Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, unto Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."** Could our Lord fulfill every one of our God-honoring desires? Yes. If so, how would God do so? Paul's answer was, **"Wherefore we pray always for you..."** Does something whisper in your heart, "What if..." and you fill in the blank?

3. That every work of faith would be enabled with power

Here we will feel like Peter taking the first step onto the waves of the Sea of Galilee. How should we pray when stormy trouble comes? We should pray as Paul did: that every work of faith would be enabled with God's power. Fictional novels about orphans, such as Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, are based on the harsh realities of Victorian England. But the truth is that one man – whose prayers the Lord answered – helped to turn the tide of these harsh realities. His name was George Mueller, and his prayer journals record fifty thousand (50,000) answers to prayer; many of those prayers were answered the same day he prayed them! Estimates are that the Lord passed more than a half billion (in today's dollars) through Mueller's hands. About him, we could say, every work of faith was enabled with God's power. I ask again: Is there something that stirs in your heart with the words, "What if...?" What if you and I would step out on faith to accomplish something for the Lord, knowing that God would enable every work of faith with power?

4. In order that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in [by] you and you in Him

Paul's real purpose was to magnify the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is honored when we work together in unity. The Lord is exalted when we maintain purity in our hearts, minds, and bodies. Jesus is praised when we are generous. When Paul wrote, "**and you in Him**" he referred to their ultimate glorification (see Romans 8:17-18, 30). But passages such as 2 Corinthians 3:18 help us to connect our eternal destiny with what happens daily; we grow "from glory to glory." Our inward man is renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). This is not about the glory of man, which is like the fading flower called "the morning glory." That flower looks great in the morning, but starts to fade in the afternoon and is gone by the evening. This is about the everlasting glory of God. This is how we pray in troubled times.

5. That all of this would be accomplished by God's grace working in you

Paul's prayer included the energizing power of God's grace. Think of this enabling grace as "Godly Responses Activated by Christ's Enablement." He appealed that God's grace would not have been bestowed upon them in vain.ⁱⁱ The flesh (man's carnal way of doing things) will accomplish nothing (John 6:63). But by God's undeserved kindness working in us, we can accomplish great things for God. This is a wonderful way to pray for others, especially in troubled times.

Our brothers and sisters in China have demonstrated patience and faith in their troubles brought on by government persecution. And when I have talked to them, they told me about their unusual prayer request. They have prayed that we, as Western believers, would go through some persecution and trouble. Why would they do this? They know that testing taught them how to be like the Lord. They know that by patience and faith they have endured their trials and persecutions. And they are praying that we would do the same.



Pastor Gordon Dickson, Calvary Baptist Church, Findlay, Ohio
<https://www.cbcfindlay.org/how-to-pray-when-trouble-comes/>

ⁱ Who Can Go to War against the Beast? Accessed at <https://www.cbcfindlay.org/who-can-go-to-war-against-the-beast/>
ⁱⁱ See, "Grace Not in Vain" accessed at <https://www.cbcfindlay.org/grace-not-in-vain/>