

I believe that every single follower of Christ... somewhere within their heart... wants to be an instrument of God's power. ... This is the premise that I operate from... as we open our passage for today. ... Even if you don't feel like it at this very moment... buried somewhere in your subconscious... is the longing to be a man or woman of fervent and effective prayer. ... I believe... because our passage today will speak to this... that every follower of Jesus Christ... wants to have a significant role... in what God is doing around them. You want to be God's instrument in accomplishing things that are significant.

Now having acknowledge this belief... about such a desire in all of us... I would like to present to you some excerpts... of what John Piper has written about the passage of Scripture we are about to study. ... The reason why I quote him so extensively here... is that I believe his words will encourage and motivate us... to draw as much as we possibly can from today's verses in 2 Thessalonians... chapter 3... so that we will have many worthwhile accomplishments. ... So listen now... to these words of pastor, author, and conference speaker, John Piper...

This text gives tremendous significance to prayer in God's victorious purposes. We could state the doctrine like this: Through prayer the word of the Lord overcomes obstacles and reaches a glorious victory.

The word of the Lord is pictured as an athlete running in a race to attain the prize of glory. An athlete is glorified when he wins and is recognized and acclaimed as superior to all the others in the race. So the word of the Lord is running in the world. It will one day win the race of words—the race of philosophies and theories and worldviews. It will be recognized and acclaimed as superior to all other words and philosophies—IF we pray! [Paul writes in our passage] "*Pray* for us that the word of the Lord may speed on in triumph."

Now just think of it. Almighty God has spoken. If he is God, it is sure that his word will accomplish all his purposes. God's truth must win the race of words, but the text says, "Pray that the word will be victorious!" I take this to mean that God will indeed cause his word to be glorified, but he does not intend to win the victory without prayer. Or to put it in the most amazing way, he does not intend to win without giving you a part in the victory.

This is simply amazing. God's whole purpose of creation and redemption hangs on the success of his word... If his word fails, if there are insurmountable obstacles, then the new heaven and new earth abort.

Therefore, since God does not intend to win the race of words without the prayers of his people, the very purpose of God in creation and redemption hangs on your prayers

If you're hungry for significance—for ultimate, eternal significance, not a little nationwide 50-year significance—then devote yourself to prayer for the word of God to run and be glorified, because through prayer the word of the Lord will be victorious and you with it.

We count people great in proportion to whether they have produced anything great, so some people long to write a great novel, and some long to build a business that will rival IBM or Mobil Oil, and some long to be the coach of a Super Bowl champion team, and some dream of commanding a brilliant battalion in victory, and some dream of discovering a new form of energy.

In about two seconds, all of them and all of us are going to gather before the judgment seat of God. James says that your life here is like a mist that appears for a little while and then is gone. Earthly life is like the breaths you saw in the air as you walked in this morning—about two seconds. So the only greatness worth pursuing is greatness that is going to last in the age to come. Nobody gets excited about two seconds of greatness. Would there be any takers if God offered to let you feel the greatness of being chief executive officer of IBM for two seconds in exchange for your life?

So we are all there before the judgment seat of all. The novel is gone, IBM is gone, the Super Bowl is gone, the battalion is gone, and the

new form of energy is a first grade science project in heaven. But off to the side of this group of erstwhile greats is John Doe Christian who, in his life, had spent 30 minutes a day on his knees praying that the word of the Lord would run and be glorified.

For those of us who long for eternal significance and hunger after true greatness, 2 Thessalonians 3:1 is a very exciting text. God has appointed prayer as the means by which we have a role in his saving purposes, which is greater than any greatness the earth has to offer.

Brothers and sisters, this is a high calling. Believe it or not, this is the kind of greatness and the kind of significance you are longing for—to be an instrument in the hands of God to cause the word of the Lord to speed on in triumph!

## **2 Thessalonians 3:1-5**

Every ministry needs much prayer. The minister cannot carry the load alone but needs the help of others to hold him up in prayer.

I know that this happens to be the Sunday before Christmas... and perhaps many of you came to church today... thinking that this would be a Christmas message. ... That will come. Come back on Christmas eve. ... I just could not pass on this opportunity... in light of where we are as a church right now... to wait another week... before preaching this passage. ... Last week we recognized God's calling on Brandon Smith to be our new youth pastor. He is planning to come in 2 weeks. We need to start praying DILIGENTLY right now for him and his ministry.

I am asking God to speak through His word to our hearts this morning... and to raise up many dedicated prayer warriors... who will commit themselves to begin... today... praying for Brandon every single day. You

might be one of those that God is calling. (More on that later.) Right now... let's return to our passage and allow God to speak to our hearts.

## **2 Thessalonians 3:1**

He needed the presence and power of the Lord as much as anyone. The former president of Dallas Seminary, John Walvoord has written:

*"Paul, too, was having his difficulties. The task committed to Paul was a very lonely one: to go from place to place, frequently coming into a strange city where not one person would welcome him. He was not entertained in the best hotel, nor was there any honorarium for him in recognition of his services. He had to find his own way, arrange for his public meetings, and somehow try to bear a testimony for Christ. Apart from fellowship with the Lord, it was a very difficult and solitary task and one in which there were many discouragements" (The Thessalonian Epistles, p.146).*

The Apostle Paul realized that ultimately... any ministry advance through enemy territory... would only come from the hand of Almighty God... using His Word.

Too much Christian work these days is accomplished by human plans and promotion... and not by the Word of God. ... When Brandon comes... we simply cannot trust our programs... exciting activities... whether or not the right kids come to youth group. ... Our trust... and therefore our praying... is that the Word of God spreads quickly among the youth... and takes hold.

The universe was created... and is sustained... by the Word of God (Heb. 11:3). ... Surely His Word can accomplish His work among the youth of La Pine. ... So the proclamation of the Word... one on one... and to groups of kids... must be the chief aim... and never imbalanced or altogether replaced by the entertainment. Dr. Donald Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury, has said of Christian pastors: "It is their task to feed the sheep—not to entertain the goats."

God's Word will accomplish God's work. Once a way has been found to feed the sheep... they will flock together in love... reproduce... and follow their shepherd. ... It is when the sheep are hungry... that they start biting each other... becoming sick... and wandering away.

Pray for Brandon... that the Word of God will speed ahead and be honored through him. The situation is just like Paul's. There was the need for the Word to have *free course... unhindered... and to be glorified*. The Word of God is often hindered... hampered... and stymied. ... Too often... it has no power or influence among people. Why? Because of...

- opposition
- daydreaming
- unprepared hearts
- unprepared
- sleepy eyed listeners
- proclaimers of the Word

The list could go on and on... but the great need of the hour is for the Word of God to have free course and be glorified

To “Speed along”... or as others translations put it... to have "Free course"... means to run. It is a picture of an Olympian athlete running in a race... the picture of the Word of God spreading all over because it is...

- focused
- unflinching
- active
- vigorous
- strong
- powerful
- urgent

If the Word of God had free course, it would be glorified; that is, souls would be saved and lives changed. ... This is exactly what had happened to the Thessalonian believers. The Word of God had *freely run* among the Thessalonians; therefore, many had been converted to the Lord.

The second request... was for Paul and his fellow missionaries... to be delivered from enemies of the gospel. ... As they moved about from city to city... opponents of Christianity tried to frustrate their efforts. ... Ray Stedman used to say: “Wherever Paul went... there was either a riot... or a revival...”

The enemies of the gospel were irrational... and destructive of the spiritual welfare of others. Paul refers to them in verse 2 as... **wicked** (atopōn, “perverse”)... and **evil** (ponērōn, “actively harmful”).

As the gospel message advances... it always faces severe opposition. The spiritual battle rages intensely for people's souls... and Satan does not easily let go of his own. ... Thus... the apostles needed prayer. ... If Paul asked for it... how much more should we be praying for our new youth pastor... as he seeks to share the gospel message...? We all know that he is certain to encounter perverse... and actively harmful opponents to his ministry. Just like Paul's enemies... he will face those who do not believe in the gospel message... and will actively work against it.

## **2 Thessalonians 3:2**

The world is full of unreasonable and wicked persons... persons who want to live like they want... without any interference from God. ... They deny and ignore God — deny and ignore the evidence within the world... and within their hearts... and thoughts... that God exists... and that His love and judgments are real. ...Therefore... they oppose anything that reminds them of eternity... and of a coming day of judgment. ... They want nothing to do with a message... that puts restrictions upon their behavior... especially a message that demands so much love — a love that demands that we give all we are... and to consider others as more important than ourselves.

Your pastors... and anyone of us... who proclaims the Gospel message... needs to be delivered from such unreasonable and wicked persons. ... When people lack reason and morality... goodness and honesty... conscience and decency... they are dangerous. ... They can hinder both the messenger and the message of the gospel. ... Therefore... I am

asking... that as Brandon comes... you will start now... to pray that God would deliver him from unreasonable and wicked persons.

Now when Paul writes, "For not all have faith," that is really "the faith." ... All men do not have the faith. ... The **Faith**... is used here in the sense of salvation.

That is why we must faithfully proclaim the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing... and hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). If you want men to have faith... you must proclaim the Word of God.

In the middle of Paul's prayer... he includes a parenthesis of praising Christ for His faithfulness. Christ is faithful to establish believers... and to give safety to believers.

### **2 Thessalonians 3:3**

There are two things we should take from this verse. **#1)** Whatever success we are about to see happening around here in youth ministry... it will be... because the Lord is faithful. ... As confident we are in Brandon's abilities and experience... the basis of our confidence is the Lord's faithfulness. ... **#2)** God will strengthen and guard the youth ministry against all evil... in the final analysis... even though there will be times when evil seems to be the conqueror.

I invite you to begin praying with me now... that as Brandon steps onto the Lord's battlefield... under His command... with Christ's authority... that he will always know that through God's Word... he will win. When the battle rages heaviest... he is going to need this certainty.

## 2 Thessalonians 3:4

You and I know a lot of teens... who instead of submitting to the proclamation of God's Word... they rebel. ... But if we commit ourselves to pray... we can be every bit as confident... as Paul was for the Thessalonians.

## 2 Thessalonians 3:5

Many things bid for the affection of our hearts... and more often than NOT... they are ungodly affections. They are affections that distract and compete with our love for Christ.

But notice that it is the Lord... Who directs the believer's heart into the love of God. ... We are not left to our own devices... to whip ourselves into having a proper love for God. The word "direct" (kateuthunai) means to make straight or to be straight.... It means to remove obstacles out of the way or to open up. ... The Lord Jesus Christ takes the genuine believer and opens up his heart. ... He straightens... directs... and focuses the believer's heart upon the love of God. ... The result is that the believer learns to love God more and more. ... His attention and focus becomes more and more set upon God's love. ... Therefore, when trials... trouble... temptation... and evil... attack the believer... he is able to stand in the love of God and overcome the attack.

It is also the Lord Who must direct hearts to the steadfastness of Christ. This means... the same endurance of Christ. ... Neither love or a patient kind of enduring is natural... for any of us. It isn't something we can whip out from within. So Paul prays that the Lord would direct your hearts into

these unnatural... but godly qualities. It is what I have been praying this week for you. I am praying that God will direct your heart to a love that answers His call... and the endurance of Christ... as you answer His call to for eternal significance and true greatness.

For those of us who long for eternal significance and hunger after true greatness... 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 is a very exciting text. ... God has appointed **prayer** as the means by which we have a role... in His saving purposes... which is greater than any greatness the earth has to offer.

God will be duly glorified when the word of the Lord runs... and is glorified through prayer. ... This is a high calling. ... Believe it or not... this is the kind of greatness... and the kind of significance... each of us has been longing for... it is to be an instrument in the hands of God... to cause the word of the Lord to speed on in triumph!

We stand just one week... after initiating a new era of ministry in our church. We simply MUST launch it the way we should. The ministry of the Word will run and be glorified at Living Water... to the degree that we remain faithful to God's word... and to the degree that we pray for its victory. ... Everything of eternal significance happens by the Word and prayer.

So... let me hold out a challenge to you. ... Would you be willing to join me in resolving to pray this prayer every day throughout Brandon's first year? "Lord, cause your word to run and be glorified in the youth ministries of our church." Perhaps God would have you continue long after the first year... but right now... I am just asking you to commit one year... to praying for

God to cause His Word to run... and be glorified... and to deliver Brandon from wicked and evil distractors...

Please pray that the word of God will win converts to Christ in our midst. Pray that the word of God will conquer sinful habits in many young lives. Pray that the word of God will rise up and send out from among the youth of this church future pastors... teachers of the Word... and missionaries...

I am asking whether you will make the promise. God helping me, I will pray each day for a year... "Lord, cause Your Word to run... and be glorified in the youth ministry of our church."

Do you remember the movie, "Castaway"... where Tom Hanks played the part of a FedEx executive whose plane crashes and leaves him stranded on an uninhabited island...? (I think this is my wife's favorite movie.) Perhaps you were watching Superbowl XXXVII... when FedEx ran a commercial that spoofed the movie *Castaway*. The Superbowl commercial featured a man looking like the bedraggled Hanks in the movie. He goes up to the door of a suburban home to finally deliver the unopened package he had kept all those years in exile.

When the lady comes to the door, he explains that he survived five years on a deserted island, and during that whole time he kept this package in order to deliver it to her. She gives a simple, "Thank you."

But he is curious about what is in the package that he has been protecting for years. He says, "If I may ask, what was in that package after all?"

She opens it and shows him the contents, saying, "Oh, nothing really. Just a satellite telephone, a global positioning device, a fishing rod, a water purifier, and some seeds."

I remember laughing so hard at that commercial... "*If he had only known what resources he had available to him... for all those years...*" ... But it is really no laughing matter that so many believers DO know what resources are available to us... but they will not open the package.

Will you commit yourself... starting today... to use this incredible resource that God has given us...? I am convinced that God is asking us to join Him in a remarkable work that He is about to do in our midst.