

Love Abounding 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

What happens when you pray? Wouldn't it be great if someone could just come alongside of you and point the way?

What if someone could give you a "textbook case – a guide to follow? If they would write down what they prayed and wait for some time to pass. Then, what if they would write down how the prayer was answered and how they gave thanks?

Paul wrote two letters to the church at Thessalonica that are recorded in Scripture. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul recorded his prayers for the fledgling congregation. Some time passed. We don't know exactly how long. But we do know that Paul expressed his profound thanks to God for the way his prayers were answered. And this gives us hope: hope for our families, hope for our children, and hope for our friends. In this New Year of 2018, prayer is the golden key to a hopeful future.

Begin with the End in Mind

Picture what it would be like at the end of this year if you could sincerely say the words of verses 3-4:

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet [fitting, or appropriate], because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity [love] of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; ⁴So 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:"

Paul thanked God for those believers at Thessalonica because

- Their faith was growing – exceedingly
- Their love for each other was overflowing – abundantly
- They were models of faithful perseverance in all their persecutions and trials

How had these believers stayed strong in the midst of their tribulations?

The Prayers of Paul

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3: "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; ³Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; ⁴Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."

In the "1,2,3" of 1 Thessalonians 1:2,3, Paul prayed continually for the Thessalonians

- Working by faith
- Labor of love
- Patient (persevering) hope

He prayed for them that, in the sight of God, these things would be true. Paul's courage to pray for them sprang out of his certainty that, as the elect of God, they had truly trusted Christ.

Paul prayed, and sent his first letter. Time passed. He received a good report about their faithfulness, even under terrible persecution. Now consider his thanksgiving in 2 Thessalonians – as a direct answer to his prayer, recorded in 1 Thessalonians:

“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet [fitting, or appropriate], because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity [love] of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; ⁴ 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:”

Paul gave thanks because his request before the throne of grace had been granted! The Thessalonians faith had grown exceedingly, their love to each other overflowed. They had become models of gracious faith.

Now before we go on to the next verses in 1 Thessalonians, consider what this means in 2018.

- ❖ You and I should first of all pray for ourselves: that our faith would grow – exceedingly, that our love toward each other would overflow – abundantly, that we would be models – becoming what we want others to be for the Lord.
- ❖ What needs do you see in your fellow members here at Calvary? Picture yourself at Christmas time next year, looking back on 2018. Wouldn't it be exciting to look at your prayer journal to see that the Lord has done at Calvary in Findlay exactly what He had done in Thessalonica?
- ❖ Our children: how would you like to see your children grow in the Lord in this new year?
- ❖ A number of young people in our circles are considering marriage. Think of prayer this way: it's the gift that keeps on giving. Consider how Paul prayed in 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13:

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13: “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all *men*, even as we *do* toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.”

- He prayed that the Lord would cause them to increase in love and abound in love
 - Toward one another
 - Toward all men

This kind of love was being modeled by the Apostle Paul. How could he show them love when he was hundreds of miles away? He could pray! And he did.

- The goal of this prayer is that the Lord would establish their hearts in holiness – in preparation for the Lord's return.

The Nature of Abounding Love

Jesus gave His disciples careful instruction about the nature of abounding love. He described it in terms of “greater than” and “less than” so that we would make no mistake:

Matthew 10:37-39: ³⁷ He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And he that taketh not his cross,

and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. ³⁹ He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

The love that Christ requires is greater than the love that you have for your own child! In fact, it was greater than the love for one's own life! Clearly, this is not "natural" love, it is supernatural. How could anyone, anywhere ever love like this? When Paul prayed for the Thessalonian believers, this was the way that they loved others – overflowing in an abundant manner.

Think of the models we have for such love. The Father loved us so much that He was willing to give us His Son (Romans 8:31-35)! Who could separate us from such love? And we have a most significant human illustration of this love as well: Abraham and his son, Isaac.

In your Bible reading this year, when you get to Genesis 22, consider this story carefully. In Genesis 22:1-2, God commanded Abraham to put his "only son, Isaac" to death – and burn his body as an offering to God! At that moment, Abraham had a choice to make:

- ✚ Would he place Isaac as a higher priority – loving him more than loving God?
- ✚ Would Abraham place himself as a higher priority – loving his own desires more than God?
- ✚ Would Abraham honor God and teach Isaac that they must obey God and trust His will?

These are the same objects of love that Jesus brought out in Matthew 10: one's child and oneself. Should we change our views of God in order to show our "love" to our children when they pull away from God? When I disagree with the precepts of God's Word, should I honor myself more than obeying God?

But how could Abraham have made such a choice – a fatal choice for his only son, Isaac? Hebrews 11:17-19 explains Abraham's thinking:

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, ¹⁸ Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: ¹⁹ Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

Though he would offer Isaac as a burnt offering to God, Abraham believed that God would resurrect his son! This is how Abraham loved God supremely – trusting in the power of God to resurrect. This is the abounding nature of Gospel love. The Father gave His only Son to die as the Sacrifice for our sins – this is supernatural love. He raised His Son from the dead to show us resurrection power. This is why we can exercise supernatural love – greater than our love for ourselves or our love for our children.

Applications

How can we apply what we learned about Paul's prayers for the Thessalonian church?

A Journal of Prayer and Praise: When you look at what Paul wrote in his first letter, and what he gave thanks for in his second letter, you see a helpful pattern. Paul did not pray in mindless generalities. He prayed for specific characteristics, and he remembered what he prayed for.

Why not make this the year that you become "businesslike" in this matter of prayer? Get a notebook, and make a prayer journal recording your specific requests. Think about the way that George Muller

approached prayer. Muller's journal was divided into two columns: on the left was the specific prayer request with the date and on the right was a column for answers. In so doing, Muller maintained a careful way to glorify God for specific answers to prayer. But how did Muller persevere in prayer?

R. A. Torrey wrote, "When it was laid upon George Mueller's heart to pray for anything, he would search the Scriptures to find if there was some promise that covered the case. Sometimes he would search the scriptures for days before he presented his petition to God. And then when he found the promise, with his open Bible before him, and his finger upon that promise, he would plead that promise, and so he received what he asked. He always prayed with an open Bible before him."ⁱ

So there we have it – wonderful guides who give us the means to pray in 2018. Paul prayed for the Thessalonians to abound in love. Jesus Christ explained this love and empowered it by His finished work on the cross. Men like George Muller have shown us the way. Let us pray!

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ⁱ R. A. Torrey on George Müller, *The Power of Prayer*, 1924. P. 81
http://prayerfoundation.org/prayer_tips_george_mueller.htm