

1 Thessalonians 1 (2) – I Thank God for You

In our message today, we are going to focus on both our prayer life as a church, and your prayer life as an individual. Of course, when I mention prayer, some people might immediately feel a dread about it, like I am going to ask you to pray more, or pray longer, or feeling like you're going to be guilting into having one more thing to do. But today, I won't be laying a new burden on you. Rather, I will be bestowing a blessing on you.

You will like this. And this blessing to you can become a blessing from you. You can receive this, and then also spread this out. This is no limited resource, zero-sum game. Instead, this is a blessing that comes from you to others, and from others to you. And this has unlimited potential. If we would take advantage of this opportunity, it would make a great difference in our lives as a church, and in our families, and with our loved ones, and with ourselves. Today, you can start to change the world around you. And this is all possible, and only truly possible, if we start with God. As we go through this message today, I pray you will clearly see this.

So, at the start of this message, I want to ask you a few questions. And at the end of this message, we will come back to these questions. And there is no need to feel guilty about this. Instead, get excited that this is an opportunity to grow, in a way that you will enjoy, and a way that makes others happy.

So, here are the questions. When is the last time you told someone that you were thankful for them? And when is the last time you told someone *why* you were thankful for them? And when is the last time you thanked God for them in prayer? And when is the last time that we, as a church, thanked God for a particular ministry or mission or missionary?

And now, to the text...*We* – When Paul prayed as an individual, he says so. For example, in Romans 1:8, Paul says – *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.* And when Paul prayed with someone else, he indicated that. For example, in Colossians

1:1-3, which says – *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.* So, this “we” in 1 Thessalonians 1:2 is saying that Paul, Silas, and Timothy had been praying together for the Thessalonians.

Surely, they were praying individually for the Thessalonian church as well. But this “we” is not to be overlooked. Corporate prayer in church, prayer meetings, believers praying individually but also together for others on a prayer list, groups of people praying for missionaries, and praying about other godly endeavors, families praying together for family members, loved ones praying together for loved ones, etc., this is an important part of our prayer life as individual believers, and as a church.

You can be a “mighty prayer warrior” in your “prayer closet.” And that is good, of course. But if you never pray, at the same time, in the same location, praying together for the same needs, you are missing something. And you are withholding something from others. People need more than your prayers. People need prayers made together. You need to pray together with other believers. About the same things. And at the same time. Romans 15:6 says *that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* And that would include your prayers. And that would include the prayers of others, including believers who are still children, and everyone else. And if you can’t be with other people, and if you aren’t able to leave your house, use your phone, use your computer, use whatever means you can find, to find a way to pray, together.

We give thanks to God always for all of you – Salvation is something that God initiates, and salvation is something God continues. God gives us a new nature and a new direction. And that was being evidenced by how the Thessalonians received the word of God, and how they were living out the word of God. Paul, Silas, and Timothy knew that God had started, and was continuing, a work in this church. So, they were thankful. And Paul is about to tell us how and why they were thankful.

constantly mentioning you in our prayers – Prayer was *how* they were thankful. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were genuine ministers. And all Christians are ministers, because all Christians are serving the Lord (Colossians 3:24). And genuine ministry includes genuine prayers. And genuine prayers require a genuine effort, which includes being heartfelt, constant, specific, and fervent. In Colossians 4:12, Paul said – *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.* This is what we are talking about, agonizing, struggling in prayer, earnestly desiring that God would mature the Colossian church, and grant them a godly assurance. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were praying like this for the Thessalonian church. And in vs.3, we see specific reasons for their thankfulness (*your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*). And then, in vs.4-10, these reasons are detailed. Prayer was *how* they were thankful. And Paul tells the Thessalonians specific reasons *why* they were thankful.

Now listen up, because I don't want to discourage you, I want to encourage you. Yes, genuine prayers are heartfelt, constant, fervent, and specific. But not all these factors are all present, or present to the same degree, in every genuine prayer. General prayer can be genuine prayer. Not all simple prayer is just superficial prayer. And you don't have to pray constantly for someone for that prayer to be genuine. The amount of prayer isn't as important as the genuine quality, the heartfulness of the prayer. And you may not have prayed constantly for someone, but your prayer might still be genuine. You don't have to know someone well to pray for them well. You don't have to be close to a situation to care deeply about a situation. You don't have to sweat in prayer to put genuine feeling in your prayers. But the better you know someone, and the better you know their situations, the more you'll pray for them, the intensity will increase, and the more specific your prayer will be. It will be more than mere routine; it will be genuine.

And think about this; Paul, Silas, and Timothy had spent very little face time with the Thessalonians. And yet they were genuinely thankful to God about what he was doing with this church. And they were genuinely praying for

them, because seeing them believe and grow and witness was a confirmation to Paul, Silas, and Timothy. And Paul, Silas, and Timothy were a confirmation to the Thessalonians, because they could see faithful men who were staying the course through all the hardships they encountered. Therefore, they knew that they would be able to stay the course, too, because they knew it was God who saved them and God who would keep them. Their assurance was based in God, and so their thankfulness for the people was toward God. They told God in prayer how thankful they were to him for them. And they let them know they were thankful to God for them.

So, let's hear those questions again. When is the last time you told someone that you were thankful for them? And when is the last time you told someone *why* you were thankful for them? And when is the last time you thanked God for them in prayer? And when is the last time that we, as a church, thanked God for a particular ministry or mission or missionary?

People often talk about "praying for you." And that is good, of course. It is encouraging when someone tells you that they are praying for you. But how encouraging would it be if instead of just telling someone you were praying for them, you also told them that you were thanking God for them? And why you were thanking God for them? Imagine how that might impact your relationship with people. And with God. And you don't even have to imagine. You can read about it in God's word. And you can see that God wants you to thank him for other people.

I thank God for the people in our church. I thank God for the confirmation that he is still saving people, growing people, and keeping people. I thank God I can see examples of people who have been strong in the faith for many years. And I thank God for all those who have fallen back, but who God turns around. And yes, I thank God for all those I don't really agree with, and even those who I don't get along with, but who I know are Jesus' people still. Part of learning to forgive other people includes learning to thank God for them. Whoever you are, wherever you are, whenever you are, I thank God for you, and all my brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you. Amen.