

“Earnest Prayer”
1 Thessalonians 3:9-10
(Preached at Trinity, August 18, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we've seen, Paul had the heart of a shepherd, of a pastor. He loved those God had placed under his care. As an apostle, this was a great number.
 - a. Notice how Paul described his relationship in **Chapter 2**
1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 NAU - "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children. ⁸ Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us."
 - b. Paul was filled with great joy over hearing of their faith and love.
1 Thessalonians 3:7 NAU - "in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith" – "*because of your faith*"
 - c. Paul said it was like a fresh breath of life. For Paul, he saw it as the meaning and purpose of his life.
1 Thes 3:8 NAU - "for now we *really* live, if you stand firm in the Lord."
2. God had granted him joy unspeakable. In **Verse 9** Paul states what more could he ask for? How could he possibly render to God the thanksgiving he owed?
As I stated last week, for Paul there was nothing more important than the Gospel.
 - A. It was the power of God unto salvation. He was prepared to die in order to carry the Gospel far and wide. He was dogmatic to protect the integrity of the Gospel.
 - B. But for Paul, the only thing more glorious than sharing the Gospel was seeing the effect it had upon the lives of sinners. Paul is saying here that this was also good news. It is what he labored for. To see Christians prospering in faith and love was Paul's great pursuit.
3. Hearing this good report from Timothy only made Paul desire all the more to see them face to face. He was overjoyed to hear that they were standing firm in their faith, but he desired to seem them growing more and more.
4. Paul understood this important theological truth about the Christian life.
No matter how much we progress in the faith we will never reach full maturity. We will never stop growing and increasing in our faith. Understanding this is infinitely important. Although Paul was overjoyed that they had received the Gospel of Christ and were standing firm in their faith, he knew there was still much they were lacking. Because of this, Paul prayed earnestly that God would provide for his return to Thessalonica to continue his teaching among these brethren.
5. There are two primary duties at the heart of pastoral ministry. They are preaching and prayer. Last week I set before you some of the marks of a successful ministry. Chief among these is faithfulness to the Word of God.

- A. The Word of God is the chief means of grace. The NT continually holds this duty before pastors. One of the qualifications for pastoral ministry is being an able teacher—being able to take a text, dissect it and digest it, and then make it understandable to others. In the pastoral letters this duty is held high:

1 Timothy 4:11-13 NAU - "Prescribe and teach these things. ¹² Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. ¹³ Until I come, give attention to the *public* reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching."

2 Timothy 4:2 NAU - "preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."

Titus 2:1 NAU - "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine."
 - B. The Word of God was the means by which they came to saving faith, and it was the means by which they would continue to grow as believers.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 NAU - "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not as the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."
6. But Paul also continually demonstrated his confidence in the importance of prayer. This was considered an Apostolic axiom.
- Acts 6:4 NAU** - "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."
7. In this passage Paul declares his ongoing prayer for the Thessalonians. Paul describes his prayers for them as being full of joy and thanksgiving.
- 1 Thessalonians 3:9 NAU** - "For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account,"
8. As we look at **Verse 10** we can see several aspects of Paul's prayers.
- I. First, we can see that Paul's prayers were persistent "as we night and day keep praying"
- A. Paul's life was characterized by persistent prayer
 - 1. We see it often in his letters
 - a. He prayed for the Church of Rome

Romans 1:9-10 NAU - "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching* of the gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you, ¹⁰ always in my prayers"
 - b. He prayed with joy and thanksgiving for the Philippian church.

Philippians 1:3-4 NAU - "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all"
 - c. We read of his unceasing prayer for the Colossian church

Colossians 1:3 NAU - "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,"

Colossians 1:9 NAU - "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding"

2. The phrase “night and day” expresses that Paul prayed continually for them. Paul persevered in prayer.
 - a. We see it again in his letter to Timothy.
2 Timothy 1:3 NAU - "I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day,"
 - b. Paul used this expression in his description of faithful widows. He is implying that such faithful prayer is a sign of true piety.
1 Timothy 5:5 NAU - "Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day."
 - c. We should note that in **Chapter 2** Paul stated that he labored at his trade night and day.
1 Thessalonians 2:9 NAU - "For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, *how* working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God."
 - (1) It is important that we take notice of this. Paul labored hard to provide for his support, working night and day.
 - (2) Yet, we see here in **Verse 10** that he prayed night and day. This tells us that Paul was in a continual state of praying. This is the meaning of Paul’s words, “Pray without ceasing” in **Chapter 5**
 - (3) This is what happens when we live our lives *Coram Deo* – before the face of God. When we have a constant sense of the presence of God, we will maintain a constant sense of contact with Him – constant prayer.
- B. Paul knew it was his duty as a shepherd of God’s people to pray
1. Samuel declared he would be in sin if he neglected prayer.
1 Samuel 12:23 NAU - "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you"
 2. We are to expend great energy in building up Christ’s church, but we are powerless without the work of the Holy Spirit.
Ephesians 3:14-16 NAU - "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,"
- C. Prayer is not just for pastors. All of us have a duty to pray
1. Paul will state this clearly in **Chapter 5**
1 Thessalonians 5:17 NAU - "pray without ceasing"
 2. All of us have a duty to pray for the increase of the Gospel and of our Lord’s Kingdom.
 - a. Jesus commands this in the Lord’s Prayer –
 “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven”

- b. Paul pressed this upon the Ephesian church
Ephesians 6:19-20 NAU - "and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."
 - c. We'll see this again in 2 Thes.
2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 NAU - "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as *it did* also with you;² and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith."
 - d. Jesus commands all of us to pray for more laborers – that we would be involved in the labor
Matthew 9:37-38 NAU - "Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.³⁸ Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."
3. We have a duty to pray for one another. After admonishing the Ephesian Christians to put on the whole armor of God and the shield of faith with the sword of the Spirit they were commanded to pray.
Ephesians 6:18 NAU - "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,"
- II. Second, we can see the gravity of Paul's prayers – "praying most earnestly"
- A. The only way to approach God is with earnestness
 - 1. This is true of our prayer life. It is true of our worship. We must approach God with holy reverence, with sober seriousness.
 - 2. The word means, "most earnestly" "superabundantly"
 - a. It's the same word Paul uses in Eph. 3:20
Ephesians 3:20 NAU - "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think"
 - b. God isn't interested in half-hearted prayers. He demands that we see our helplessness and confess our great need of Him. He expects us to press on in prayer.
 - 3. As Hannah prayed she wept earnestly and prayed fervently
1 Samuel 1:10 NAU - "She, greatly distressed, prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly."
 - 4. As Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord he persisted and exclaimed:
Genesis 32:26 NAU - "I will not let you go unless you bless me."
 - 5. James declares that it is the fervent prayer that God hears
James 5:16 – "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

6. Jesus told a parable pressing the importance of persistence in prayer
Luke 18:1-8 NAU - "Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,² saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man.³ There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.'⁴ For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man,⁵ yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'⁶ And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said;⁷ now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?⁸ I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly."
- B. We must go before God with reverence and pray with earnestness.
1. Spurgeon describes the importance of earnest prayer:
 "Alas, a great many people play at praying. They do not expect God to give them an answer, and thus they are mere triflers, who mock the Lord. He who prays in a business-like way, meaning what he says, honors the Lord. The Lord does not play at promising, Jesus did not sport at confirming the Word by His blood, and we must not make a jest at prayer by going about it in a listless, unexpected spirit."¹
 2. Time is passing quickly. The doors will soon be permanently closed. This is a time for serious contemplation and earnest prayer.

- III. Finally, as we continue in this passage, we can see the content of Paul's prayers
- A. Paul's prayers were not chiefly about himself – his needs, his concerns, his desires.
1. **Verse 10** is a continuation of **Verse 9**. In **Verse 9** Paul expresses the depth of his great gratitude and overwhelming joy in hearing that the Thessalonians were standing firm in their faith. How could he thank God enough for the joy he was experiencing in the progress of these Thessalonian believers.
 2. This provides the context of Paul's continued prayer in **Verse 10** – "As we night and day keep praying . . ."
- B. After expressing his great gratitude to God he turned his attention to the Thessalonian Christians. He prayed for their spiritual wellbeing
1. That they would abound and increase in love
 2. That they would be established in holiness
 3. We'll see next time that our faith in this life will always be incomplete. We are always growing and increasing in the knowledge of Christ. We are always growing in obedience. Our faith is always growing and increasing.
- Peter describes it:

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Sermons on Prayer*, (Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2007), Pages 54-54.

2 Peter 3:17-18 NAU - "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,¹⁸ but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity"

- 4. Prayer is one of the means of our growth in grace – our personal prayer for ourselves as well as the prayers we lift up for one another.
- C. Paul also prayed that he might personally come to them. – **Verse 11**
He is praying for himself, but the focus was upon how he might serve others.
 - 1. Paul was a teacher. He wanted to see them face to face. He wanted to teach them. He wanted to help them grow in the faith – **Verse 10**
 - 2. Paul wrote this also to the Church of Rome:
Romans 1:9-11 NAU - "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the gospel of His Son*, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you,¹⁰ always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.¹¹ For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;"

Conclusion:

- 1. Prayer and the Word of God were central to Paul's life as an Apostle of Christ. It is also true of pastors, and it is also true of every believer.
Acts 2:42 NAU - "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."
- 2. May this be at the heart of our church, as individuals and as a congregation—that prayer and the Word of God would be of a high priority. Never forget the importance of your prayers for the success of our church and the preaching of the Word.
Spurgeon spoke to his ministerial students: "A certain preacher, whose sermons converted men by scores, received a revelation from heaven that not one of the conversions was owing to his talents or eloquence, but all to the prayers of an illiterate lay brother, who sat on the pulpit steps, pleading all the time for the success of the sermon. We may discover, after having labored long and wearily in preaching, that all the honor belongs to another builder, whose prayers were gold, silver, and precious stones, while our sermonizing, being apart from prayer, were but hay and stubble."²
- 3. Will you be that man, that lady whose prayers open the gates of heaven for God's blessings to come raining down.

² C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, (Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008) Page 48