

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 6/7/2026

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1 Thessalonians 1:2-3; 2:13-14; 3:8-13; 5:23-24 “Learning from Paul’s First Prayer for the Thessalonians”^{**1} Special 2026 series: *Redeemed People...Pray the Word*

Main Idea: From Paul’s first prayer for the Thessalonians as recorded in 1 Thessalonians, we learn that our prayers should express two key elements. First, thanks to God. Second, requests to God for things that will matter eternally.

- I. Our prayers should express thanks to God (1:2-3; 2:13-14; 3:8-9).
 - A. He thanked God for the demonstration of their faith (1:3a).
 - B. He thanked God for the demonstration of their love (1:3b).
 1. Love is more than feeling and talk.
 2. Love shows up in action.
 - C. He thanked God for the demonstration of their hope (1:3c).
 - D. He thanked God for the way they treated God’s Word (2:13).
 - E. He thanked God for the way they suffered (2:14).
 - F. He thanked God for the God-centered joy they gave him (3:8-9).
- II. Our prayers should express requests to God for things that will matter eternally (3:10-13; 5:23-24).
 - A. May God allow us to see and serve you again (3:10-11).
 1. People who have faith still need to grow in their faith.
 2. People who have a growing faith want to help others grow.
 - B. May God make your love increase and overflow (3:12).
 - C. May God strengthen your hearts so you will be blameless and holy (3:13).
 1. Lasting change works from the top down.
 2. Lasting change works from the inside out.
 - D. May God sanctify you (5:23a).
 1. God isn’t interested in partial change.
 2. God is committed to total transformation.
 - E. May God keep you blameless at Christ’s coming (5:23b-24).
 1. We need to live with the big picture in mind.
 2. We need to live this day in light of that day.

Make It Personal: Ask yourself two important questions.

1. When I pray, am I thanking God for what He has done?
2. When I pray, am I asking God for things that will matter for eternity?

Special 2026 emphasis: We’re began 2026 with a special focus. *Redeemed People Pray the Word*. We challenged ourselves to allow the Word to shape the way we pray in 2026 and beyond. In January we learned from Jesus by looking at “The Lord’s Prayer,” then considered “Praying and the Promises of God” from 1 John 5:14-15, and then moved to Ephesians 6 and learned that redemption produces prayer warriors.

We then hit the pause button and launched another series, an exposition of the book of Hebrews, which is not really another series. In Hebrews we gazed at the One who makes prayer possible. We’ve beheld the Son in our journey through Hebrews 1-6. The Lord willing, we’re continue to do so in Hebrews 7 in September.

But for our summer series, we now return to the school of prayer. Our teacher for this important class is the apostle Paul. Our text of study will be the epistles that Paul wrote. Tucked away inside these letters that Paul wrote to churches and individuals, we find a considerable amount of material that tells us what Paul was praying for them. He knew that what they needed most he could not give them, but God could. And he asked God to do so again and again.

Redeemed people pray the Word. And we’re going to invite Paul to show us how. We’re going to look at his recorded prayers chronologically, from earliest to latest. We’ll

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the messages preached at WBC in 2008, 2014, and 2021.

start today with his prayer recorded in 1 Thessalonians, which he wrote around AD 51. Next week we'll examine his prayer in 2 Thessalonians, which he wrote about six months later. Then comes his prayer for the Corinthian believers (AD 55) and for the church in Rome as recorded in Romans (AD 57). Next we'll look at the prayers he prayed and wrote while in prison, the "prison epistles," in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians (AD 60-61), as well as prayers for two friends, Philemon (AD 60) and Timothy (recorded in 2 Timothy in AD 66-67).

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

Paul had a special relationship with the believers in the city of Thessalonica. He met them during his second missionary journey, as recorded in Acts 17. As was his custom wherever he went, Paul headed for the synagogue and preached the good news about Messiah Jesus for three Sabbaths. Some Jews believed. So did a large number of Greeks, including some prominent women in this seaport city.

But then, out of jealousy, certain Jews tried to blackmail Paul and Silas, causing a riot. A mob stormed the house of Jason, a believer who had opened his house to Paul, in search of Paul and Silas. When they couldn't find the missionaries, the mob arrested Jason and some other believers, made them post bond, and eventually set them free. Paul and Barnabas left Thessalonica that night under the cover of darkness, leaving behind an infant church in a city of wolves.

Out of sight but NOT out of mind certainly captured Paul's heart for the Thessalonians. It wasn't long before Paul wrote a letter to his spiritual children, probably his first inspired letter. We call it 1 Thessalonians. It's a warm, encouraging letter, filled with pastoral counsel for young believers facing persecution. And for our purposes, it's a letter filled with indicators of what Paul was praying for his friends.

Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians as recorded in 1 Thessalonians included two key elements. And so should ours. Let's ponder them one at a time.

I. Our prayers should express thanks to God (1:2-3; 2:13-14; 3:8-9).

Notice 1: 2, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers." For Paul thanksgiving wasn't just a feeling inside, but an activity. He says that he, Silas, and Timothy thanked *God* for the *Thessalonians*. That indicates that Paul spent time expressing his appreciation to God for the people he met and loved in Thessalonica. He thanked *God* for them.

Paul made it clear that if there was anything good happening in the church in Thessalonica (and there was, as we'll see), it was because of God. "Every good gift comes from above," says James 1:17. And when God does something good, He deserves our thanks for it. All glory belongs to Him!

But Paul didn't just thank God for these believers. He told them so. We might think, "Well, if I commend people for the good things I see happening in their lives, they might get a big head and God would be robbed of honor." Perhaps, but that didn't keep Paul from doing so. He encouraged his brothers and sisters by telling them exactly what he was thanking God for in their lives, with the focus on *God*.

There's a lesson here for us. When we see God's grace at work in a brother's life, we ought to first thank God for it, yes, but also let our brother know. D. A. Carson illustrates, "Bob, I thank God for the faithfulness you display in your task as an usher. I can't help but noticing how you greet everyone by name, even the smallest child, and that

you arrive early and go out of your way to make everyone welcome. I thank God for your ministry.” And, “Pat, I constantly thank God for your influence not only in the nursery, but on the parents who bring their children there. Only heaven will disclose what good God has accomplished through you.”²

That’s good. Let’s do that more and more this week, church family. Let’s express thanks to God and to each other when we see evidences of God at work. Let me go first. I thank God for all of you who worked in VBS this week. I thank Him for Josiah and Brooke and Adam and Haley and the wonderful team of servants who invested a labor of love this week so that children could see and learn about the love of Christ.

Now what was it in the Thessalonians’ lives for which Paul thanked God? He mentions six reasons throughout the letter, with the first three in verse 3. “Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

A. He thanked God for the demonstration of their faith (1:3a). He says He continually thanked God the Father for “your work produced by faith” (NIV). Please notice that true faith produces works. When a person comes to believe in Jesus Christ, when he puts his trust in Christ’s atoning work, that person is justified by God, by faith, apart from works. But a person who is justified apart from works begins to work. Immediately. The justified sinner begins to give solid evidence for their faith, and people can see it.

In a few moments we’ll see the evidence of faith in the baptism of Isaiah and Mark. These two brothers have put their faith in Christ and want to make it public.

For the Thessalonians, we might say it happened right after they left the birthing room. As soon as they were born into God’s family, their faith was put to the fiery test. Jason opened his home to the missionaries, knowing it could cost him dearly. And it did. He’s just a three-week-old Christian, and he’s thrown in prison for his faith. Yet his faith worked. True faith always does. And for this Paul says, “Thank you, Father.”

B. He thanked God for the demonstration of their love (1:3b). “Your labor prompted by love (NIV),” says Paul. Like faith, true love also demonstrates its presence.

Does it include feelings? Sure, at times more than others. Does it include talk? Again, yes. *But love is more than feelings and talk.* God’s kind of love, the fruit of the Spirit kind of love, is much more than feelings and talk. As Paul here acknowledged, *love shows up in action.* Love prompts a born-again person to *labor*. The Greek word is *kopos* which refers to laborious toil (Paul used the term elsewhere to describe the backbreaking work he did making tents, the physical exertion).

Think about it. When there’s persecution, love must demonstrate itself or the church would perish. When a man is thrown into prison for his faith, he’s not the only one who suffers. What will happen to his wife and children? They’ll need help. Someone will need to do dad’s work and put food on the table. And the church provided that help. And for this love, once again Paul says, “Thank you, Father.”

C. He thanked God for the demonstration of their hope (1:3c). “Your steadfastness of hope,” says the ESV. In the NIV, “Your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” What produces endurance? Hope does. The certain anticipation of what’s coming is what produces hope.

² D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, pp. 87-8.

I remember the month of August as a high school cross country runner. Grueling, intense workouts, twice a day at times, three or four miles in the morning, eight, ten, or more miles in the later day heat. What keeps a runner going when his body feels like it's dying one step at a time? The knowledge that the first Saturday in November is coming. That's when the state cross country meet would take place, and that's when the endurance would reap a harvest.

The Christian life is not easy. The Thessalonian believers learned that painful truth right out of the blocks. It takes endurance to stay in the race, and it's the hope of the outcome that keeps us going. More specifically, our hope is in a *person*, in what that person *did* for us, and what that person *will do* for us on that day. Our endurance is inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith, love, and hope—these are the hallmark traits of the true Christian, produced by Christ through the ministry of His Spirit in the lives of His people. And these virtues produce a visible demonstration in the Christian's life, expressed by work, labor, and endurance. When present, these are worthy incentives for saying, "Thank you, Father."

In case you're wondering how Paul knew this fruit was on the trees in Thessalonica, we're told in 3:6 that Timothy had just returned from a visit. It tore Paul to pieces to leave his spiritual children behind when he fled the city, and he wanted to return but couldn't. So he sent Timothy to check on them and encourage them (see 3:6-8).

Let's move to Paul's second "thank-you text" in the letter and see a second reason.

D. He thanked God for the way they treated God's Word (2:13). In 2:13, "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers."

I have great admiration for pioneer missionaries. To go to a place where the name of Jesus Christ has never been heard with the goal of not only telling the people there about Jesus, but aiming to see them turn from their idolatrous ways to Christ, now that's an awesome task! That's what our brother Bob Litteral faced when he moved to the remote jungles of PNG in the 1960s. It's what Adoniram Judson faced centuries before, as did William Carey before him, and many others.

It's what Paul and Silas faced the day these two first-century pioneer missionaries entered that massive city of 200,000 people. And remember, these weren't religiously neutral people either. The Jews in Thessalonica were zealous adherents of Judaism, and the Greeks were devoted polytheists. How in the world are you going to penetrate a city like that? It's the same way Judson penetrated Burma, Carey penetrated India, and Bob and Shirley penetrated the Angor villages in PNG.

Give them God's word. Why do that? Because the Word of God is the instrument that the Spirit of God works through to regenerate hearts that are dead in sin. Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, says Romans 10:17. James 1:18 explains, "He [that's God, the Father of lights] chose to give us birth through the word of truth."

When God does that, when He uses His Word to birth into His family those who were previously dead in sin, He deserves *thanks* for it. He deserves thanks from the new babes as well as from the preachers and everyone else who hears about it.

When people receive the Word of God that we share with them, that is a spiritual miracle, not to be taken for granted! We *thank God* for that, says Paul, that when we preached the Word to you, you received it. We thank God because if it wasn't for Him,

you *wouldn't* have received it. And when you did receive it, you acknowledged it was God's Word and not merely man's word.

This is what Jesus said would happen. "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me," said Jesus. This is a mark of a true sheep. When the preacher preaches the Word of God, the true sheep recognizes the voice of the divine Shepherd in the word he hears.

Notice the present tense language at the end of verse 13. In the ESV, "which is at work in you believers." In the NIV, "which is at work in you who believe." Paul thanked the Lord not only for what His Word *did* in the Thessalonians, but for what it was still *doing*. When we see people believing the word, "Thank you, Father" is in order.

This brings us to a fifth reason for expressing thanks.

E. He thanked God for the way they suffered (2:14). Notice the very next verse, verse 14, "For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews."

Suffering is inevitable in a sin-cursed world. Disease. Hurricanes. War. Pestilence. But Paul has a particular kind of suffering in mind here, suffering for the sake of being a follower of Christ. And the Thessalonian believers did that *well*, so well that they earned a solid reputation for it. Paul actually highlighted this at the beginning of the letter, saying in 1 Thessalonians 1:6–10, "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

Now that's a testimony! The suffering was intense, but they endured it well. And people throughout that region of the Roman Empire heard about it. And Paul thanked God for it.

Let's not miss the lesson here. When God's people suffer well (and by *well* I mean they make the gospel attractive by the Spirit-generated fortitude and joy they exhibit as they suffer), let's not miss the opportunity to thank the One who made that possible.

I think of our brothers and sisters at WBC who are suffering right now, and of those who are caring for them. The suffering is hard, yes, but the gospel is being adorned by their joyful, Christlike endurance. And for this we say, "Thank you, Father."

There's one more "thanks-giving text" in the letter. It comes right after Paul announces that Timothy has returned with an update from Thessalonica. Listen to 3:8-9, "For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.⁹ For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God."

F. He thanked God for the God-centered joy they gave him (3:8-9). "For now we *really live*," says Paul in the NIV. What is *really live* for you? A bigger house? Tickets to a NASCAR race? A vacation in the Bahamas? Did you catch what *really living* was for Paul? "For now we really live, *since you are standing firm in the Lord.*"

When I see my spiritual children standing firm in Christ, says Paul, when I see them saying by their words and actions that Christ is worth whatever suffering I may have to

endure, it just doesn't get any better than that! I can't thank God enough for you, for the joy I have in God's presence because of you!

Perhaps it goes without saying, but let's not miss that Paul was thankful for people and expressed it. And it wasn't because the people were doing things *for him*. Nor was it because the people didn't have some areas where growth was needed, for they did, as we'll see next. He expressed thanks to God because he saw the evidence of God's work in their lives, work that exalted Christ, and work that was causing Christ's testimony to spread to others, and that thrilled Paul!

What thrills you? When we study Paul's prayers this summer, it's going to be convicting, my friends. Our priorities will be challenged. Paul lived with a distinct, Christ-centered set of values, and if we want to learn to pray like Paul, we may well need to change some values we hold. If we value our health more than holiness, we won't pray like Paul. If we value our own comfort more than the advance of the gospel, we won't pray like Paul.

Here's the first element of prayer we learn from Paul. Our prayers should express thanks to God. Now the second.

II. Our prayers should express requests to God for things that will matter eternally (3:10-13; 5:23-24).

Five requests, to be specific. And the requests are highlighted by the word "may." *May* God do this for you... and *may* God do that for you... and so on. The requests flow right out of the thanks. We see the first request right after the sixth cause for thanksgiving in chapter three.

Before we ponder the actual requests, allow me to make a general observation about what we're going to see. When Paul prayed, he used some specific language. We don't hear him saying merely, "Lord, bless so and so." Nothing wrong with that, but he says much more than that. He knows that God sees his heart, but when he prays, he uses words that communicate thoughts and feelings and desires. When it comes to prayer, *vocabulary matters*. The words matter.

We know this in other areas of our lives. Some of you are good at mechanics, working on cars for instance. If a mechanic came to my house and helped me work on my car, he wouldn't say, "Hand me that thing that looks like a stick with a round handle on the end." Rather he would say, "Hand me that *screwdriver*." And in order for us to work well together I would need to learn some basic vocabulary regarding the tools used in automotive repair, like wrench, socket set, and so on.

The same is true in athletics. If you want to play sports or simply enjoy watching sports, you have to learn some vocabulary. I can still remember the time a Hungarian immigrant came to our living room when I was about nine years old. We were watching the Baseball All Star game on television and the announcer said, "Oh, that's a strike for sure. He broke his wrists." And our guest got wide-eyed, stared at the television and said, "Someone broke his wrists?" Just think of all the vocabulary you had to learn, sports fans, in order to appreciate the game you enjoy. Pick and roll, cleanup batter, bullpen, let the air out of the ball, a three-four defense, and more.

In order to pray, in one sense, words aren't even needed, for the Spirit helps us "with groans that words cannot express," says Romans 8:26. Yet to pray *meaningfully*, words do matter. When we read Paul's prayers, we'll see him using terms and phrases like

‘sanctify’, ‘spirit of wisdom’, ‘enlightened’, ‘the hope of his calling’, and so on. Behind these words and phrases are important concepts and truths that Paul understood and that shaped what he wanted to express to God.

Part of what we’ll be doing in our current series is developing and expanding our vocabulary so we can pray more meaningfully, so we can express more intentionally to God what we mean, using biblical language that’s precise and God-honoring.

Now let’s look at Paul’s first request for the Thessalonians. Listen to what he says in 3:10-11 (NIV), “Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. Now **may** our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.” There’s his first request.

A. May God allow us to see and serve you again (3:10-11). When did Paul bring this request to God? He says he did it “night and day”. That’s interesting. He prayed at night? Yes. Do you ever struggle with sleepless nights? Here’s a way to make the insomnia profitable. Use the time to pray. That’s what Paul did. He brought a request to the Lord earnestly day after day, and also night after night.

And what was the request? “That we may see you again.” Paul asked God to allow him to see his brothers and sisters in Thessalonica. Why? Was he lonely? Did he miss some of the Greek cuisine he tasted while there? No. The purpose of the desired trip wasn’t for his sake, but theirs. He wanted to serve them.

How specifically did he want to serve them? He says he wanted to “supply what is lacking in your faith.” That’s interesting. Back in chapter one he said he was thankful for their faith. But now he indicates their faith was lacking. What does that tell us about faith? A couple of important lessons.

First, *people who have faith still need to grow in their faith.* Faith isn’t static. It’s sort of like a balloon that expands when it’s filled with air. Or better still, it’s like a body that grows as it receives proper nourishment and care.

The Thessalonians entered the family of God the moment the Holy Spirit convicted and regenerated their hearts, and they responded by putting their trust, their *faith* in Christ Jesus. “For by grace are you saved *through faith*,” says Ephesians 2:8. And that was cause for thanksgiving for Paul, for “your work produced by faith,” as he says in 1:2.

But after saving faith comes *living* faith. That’s faith for day by day living. When I was eleven, I placed my faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, but every day since then I’ve needed to exercise my faith, not saving faith again but *living* faith. When the bills mount and I can’t see over them, when the health challenge hits my family, when I’m facing an interpersonal conflict, or whatever the test, I can either put my trust, my *faith*, in God and His promises, or I can trust in my own ability to work out the situation.

Paul said he wanted to come and “*supply* what is lacking in your faith.” That’s interesting. It indicates that we can help other people’s faith grow.

Yes, indeed, *people who have a growing faith want to help others grow.* That’s lesson two. I like the way the NLT expresses Paul’s ambition, “to fill the gaps in your faith.” That’s why Paul wanted to visit his brothers and sisters, to teach them truth that would fill in the gaps of their faith. Hence his request. *Father, please open the way for me to see those dear people again soon. Use me for the development of their faith.*

That’s a good request, isn’t it? For a camp counselor with his campers. For a grandparent with their grandchildren. Let’s all pray it this week concerning the people God has entrusted to our care. And this second request as well.

B. May God make your love increase and overflow (3:12). Listen to 3:12 in the ESV, “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you.” In the NIV, “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.”

Ponder that first word, *may*. *May* the Lord do this. The word indicates, first of all, that this was Paul’s desire. It’s what he wanted to see happen. But it also indicates Paul’s *dependence*, for what he wanted he lacked the means to accomplish. Only God do this. So Paul asked him to do so.

The request? “May the Lord make your love increase.” Hold on. Didn’t he commend them for their love back in chapter one? Yes, but as with faith, so with love. It’s supposed to be growing. Love is action. Love is a choice I make, enabled by God the Holy Spirit, to do what is in your best interest.

On July 23 Sherry and I will celebrate our wedding anniversary. I loved her forty-three years ago when we said “I do”, but my love for her has grown because I know her so much better than I did then. And even now, if I become passive, we’ll be in trouble, for each day brings new opportunities to demonstrate love for my bride.

But it’s not just the quality of our love that needs to increase. Paul prayed that the *quantity* of it would increase, too. He prayed that the Thessalonians’ love would increase “*for one other and for all.*” Even the most hard-hearted pagan often has a circle of friends, but that’s not the standard for us. The question isn’t whether we show love to a few people. It’s whether there’s anybody we *don’t* love.

“This is a hard, brutal world,” writes D. A. Carson. “There are many...forms of pseudo-love... But Christian love, mature, deep, and unqualified, is a rare commodity. When it is displayed, it speaks volumes to a society that gorges itself in self-interest, lust, mutual-admiration pacts, even while it knows very little of love. Show me a church where the choir is known as the War Department, where people divide over evangelistic strategies or over the color of the carpet, and I’ll show you a church that has not been praying along those lines for some time.”³

Church family, I’m grateful for the love I’m seeing you demonstrate for one another. And I pray that this love will abound and even expand to new people this week. Would you pray that with me?

C. May God strengthen your hearts so you will be blameless and holy (3:13). We see this request in 3:13, “So that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”

That is God’s agenda for His children. It’s why the Father chose us and why His Son died for us, according to Ephesians 1:4, to make us “holy and blameless” in his sight. And the fact that Paul prayed this prayer for the Thessalonian believers reveals something about the Thessalonians. It reveals there were some areas in their lives where they were not yet blameless and holy, right?

They struggled with sexual purity, as many in that pagan world did and still do in our own pagan world. No wonder Paul writes plainly in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, “It is God’s will...that you should avoid sexual immorality.” And then in verse 5 he adds that “each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen.” Why would Paul give these instructions on how to

³ D. A. Carson, p. 92-3.

prevent sexual immorality? It's because they needed it. Thessalonica was a cesspool of sexual temptation and some of the young believers were still wading in the pool.

In 4:11 he offered this instruction, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands...so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders." What do those words of counsel imply? Apparently, some of the church members were doing things that, if not changed, would turn off non-Christians to Christ, like loafing on the job and sponging off of others instead of earning a living.

He's showing us how holiness works. Top down. Inside out. *First, it works from the top down.* Paul prayed that *He* (that's the Lord) would strengthen *your* hearts so that *you* (that's the believers in Thessalonica) will be blameless and holy." They didn't have the power to change themselves, not so as to please God. Nor do we. That's why Paul interceded for his friends, because he knew that holiness works *from the top down*.

What's more, *holiness works from the inside out.* "That He may establish your *hearts blameless in holiness.*" The heart is the key to holiness. Rules cannot produce holiness because rules can't change the heart. The heart needs to be established ('strengthened NIV). There must be an internal stability, a fortitude on the inside, that God must provide. Holiness begins in the heart. It works top down, inside out.

And it's not holiness next week that Paul has in mind, or next month. It's hearts that are blameless "before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints [literally "his holy ones"]." How much money we had in the bank account won't matter on that day, nor will how many trophies there are on the mantle. But our holiness will matter when we stand before Christ.

This, my friends, is why we must pray. I can give my children lots of things, but I cannot change their hearts. But God can. Are you praying for the holiness of your children, and the children you're teaching in Sunday School, and for their parents, and for your deacons and pastors? Paul's next prayer request builds on this.

D. May God sanctify you (5:23a). "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely." The verb *sanctify* is from the Greek *hagiazō*, "to cause someone to have the quality of holiness, to make holy."

May God sanctify you *completely*. The NIV says "through and through." It's from the Greek *telos* which signifies carrying something through to the finish. Again, it's that final day that Paul has in mind as he prays.

May God sanctify *you* completely. The "you" is plural, referring to everybody in the church. Holiness is the goal for all of us, and Paul asked God to cause it to be so.

Friends, if you're in Christ, you are holy. But you're also being made holy. Both are true. As Hebrews 10:14 explains, "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."

Perfected. Being sanctified. And the latter is why prayer is vital. Are you asking God to sanctify your brothers and sisters at WBC? We should, because this is God's agenda for them, to *sanctify* them, to make them holy like His Son, Jesus. He wants us all to resemble Christ, not in part, not just on Sunday, but *through and through*, when we're at home, or in school, or in the locker room, at the sleepover, through and through. Deacons, this is a good prayer for your care group members, too.

As is Paul's last request.

E. May God keep you blameless at Christ's coming (5:23b-24). "And may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it."

What is Paul's request? He wants his spiritual children to be *blameless*. When? At Christ's coming? Who can make that happen? Christ can. He is faithful. He will do it. He will *surely* do it. That's why we pray.

Again, beloved, *we need to live this day in light of that day*. This day, today, Sunday, June 7. In light of *that* day, the day Jesus Christ returns. What's going to happen on that day? As we'll see next time in 2 Thessalonians 1, that day is going to be *pay back* day, for when Christ returns, He's going to rescue those who've trusted in Him and punish those who haven't.

Now watch how Paul's fifth request dovetails his first request. How does God sanctify the people under our care so they will be blameless and holy at Christ's coming (that's Paul's fifth request)? The answer is that God uses the ministry of His Word through people. Hence Paul's first request, "Lord, let me go and see the Thessalonians so I can supply what is lacking."

Do you see the connection? God uses *us*. Dads, moms, Sunday School teachers, camp counselors. He uses our teaching of His Word, our modeling of holiness, AND He uses our prayers for the sake of those under our care, that they be holy and blameless when Christ returns.

Make It Personal: In light of Paul's example, let's ask ourselves two questions.

1. *When I pray, am I thanking God for what He has done?* And specifically, for the work He's doing in the lives of people we know. Let's thank Him for the demonstration of faith, love, and hope that we see in their lives. If you see a brother treating God's Word well, or if you see a sister suffering well, and if you're experiencing joy because of it, thank God for it, and tell them that you're thanking God for them too.

2. *When I pray, am I asking God for things that will matter for eternity?* I love John Piper's reminder that prayer isn't meant to be an intercom in the den so we can call the butler and ask for refreshments. Prayer is a wartime walkie-talkie for calling on the Commander in Chief requesting reinforcements for the battle. Let's call on our Commander this week and ask Him for things that will matter throughout eternity.

Closing Song: #364 "*My Jesus, I Love Thee*" (all four verses, Joe at piano)

Baptism: Mark Hamm, Isaiah Steinbrink

Additional singing (led by Douglas and praise team)

Right Hand of Fellowship (By Christian experience: Mary Fischer; Aiden & Grace Hicks; Abby McKinney; By baptism: Mark Hamm, Isaiah Steinbrink)