

WHEN IN TROUBLE, PRAY

2 THESSALONIANS 3:1-15

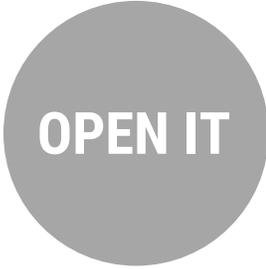


Finally, brothers, pray for us...”

On the day when the war in Iraq broke out, Channel 5 in Chicago sent a news team to cover our special prayer meeting that night. Hoping to get some good sound bites, they interviewed several people, including Soo Ai Kudo. When the reporter asked her why we were having a prayer meeting at the very moment when the 48-hour ultimatum was coming to an end, Soo Ai gave a simple answer, “We believe our most powerful weapon is prayer.” There is a world of truth in her words. The psalmist declared, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God” (Psalm 20:7). In the last two weeks we have seen the marvels of modern technology: laser-guided bombs, missiles that can hit a tank under a bridge and leave the bridge standing, bombs guided by satellites, goggles that enable you to see at night, and planes that cannot be seen by radar. Fifteen years ago this was the stuff of science fiction. Now we sit at home and watch the war unfold in real-time on television.

As amazing as those things are, they only touch the physical realm. There is a weapon far greater than anything we have seen in the war. It is a weapon that is supernatural in power. It is the weapon of prayer. I hope in this sermon to encourage you to pray when you are in trouble. One of the men who prayed in my office before the first service said, “Lord, it’s easy to get into trouble but it’s hard to get out of trouble.” Heads nodded in agreement when I mentioned that to the congregation. Psalm 50:15 offers this wonderful promise: “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.” When we are in trouble, God wants us to cry out to him. “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). Our God delights to rescue His children when we are in desperate straits. “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles” (Psalm 34:17). God invites us to turn to him when everything in the world has turned against us. When in trouble, pray! That may seem obvious, but sometimes we forget to pray. And sometimes we don’t know how to pray. Second Thessalonians 3:1-5 gives us five requests that are always appropriate when trouble comes our way.¹

¹ Sermon by Ray Pritchard found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2003-04-06-When-in-Trouble-Pray/>



OPEN IT

1. Describe a time when you were in some sort of trouble that you were unable to address on your own. Who came to your aid in your time of need? What help were they to you?

READ 2 THESSALONIANS 3:1–5



EXPLORE IT

2. What three things does Paul ask the Thessalonians to pray for in verses 1 and 2?

3. What two things is God faithful to do for believers?

4. What was Paul confident the Thessalonians would do?

5. How did Paul want God to direct his friends?



GET IT

So in this passage, the apostle Paul provides an excellent example of genuine pastoral concern that his people prosper spiritually and thereby contribute to the edification and glorification of Christ's church. No shepherd of a local congregation could ask more from his flock than that they pray for him, trust in the Lord, obey what is taught from the Word, and grow spiritually.²

6. In what ways does leadership within a church help the body to grow spiritually? In what ways can a church hinder that process?

7. Why is it important to pray for your leaders and their message? What can happen if we fail to live out this command in verse 1?

The first thing Paul asks is that people would pray for the proclamation of the gospel. In Greek the request is literally "that the Lord's message might run." Those of you who like to jog will appreciate this word picture. May the message of the gospel go quickly from city to city, from house to house, from one heart to another. His desire is for the gospel to have free course as it hurries into the hearts of hurting people.³

8. Do we still have a confidence that the Word of the Lord may spread rapidly today even as it did in the early church? How powerful do we estimate the Word and prayer to be?

9. What things keep us from seeing the same kind of spiritual impact in our communities that was taking place in Thessalonica and throughout Greece at the time of Paul's writing?

² MacArthur, John, Jr. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary – 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2002.

³ Sermon by Ray Pritchard found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2003-04-06-When-in-Trouble-Pray/>

“...THAT WE MAY BE DELIVERED FROM WICKED AND EVIL MEN.”

This request may seem unexpected: “And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith” (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Some people will do anything to stop the good news of Jesus Christ, even to the point of violence. Think of it this way. Not everyone is happy that you are a Christian. Not everyone is glad that your life has changed. Not everyone applauds when you speak up for Jesus. Not everyone thinks it’s a good idea to “Stand up, stand up for Jesus.” Some people want you to “sit down and shut up.”

The “wicked and evil men” were the opponents who chased Paul out of Thessalonica and hounded his steps in every city he entered so that he was hindered from preaching the gospel. Later they would succeed in having him thrown in jail in Rome. Paul cared little for his own safety or comfort, but he was passionately concerned about the progress of the gospel. That’s what mattered to him.⁴

10. What is it about the gospel or the proclamation of Christ that causes people to respond so negatively to it?

11. How might Christians inadvertently cause themselves trouble in sharing the good news?

12. Paul asks “that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men.” This connotes an ability by God to keep evil and wicked men away in the first place. Why does God allow the wicked to fight against His people if He could deliver believers from them in the first place?

“BUT THE LORD IS FAITHFUL,

“and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command” (2 Thessalonians 3:3–4). *This request is very simple: Growing confidence in God that he will give you everything you need when you need it. And growing confidence in God’s people that the Lord will be faithful to them just as he has been faithful to you. It all goes back to your view of God.... Nothing is more basic than the confidence that our God is sovereign over every detail of the universe. You will have what you need when you need it. Why? Because God is faithful. Pray for growing confidence so that when trouble comes, you will still believe that God is faithful even when the circumstances aren’t going your way.⁵*

13. How has God been faithful to you in the recent past? How does God’s faithfulness in the past give you courage to step out in faith in the days to come?

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14. In what areas do you need God to guard against the evil one? In what areas can you become better established in Christ so that you might stand strong against the evil one's schemes and temptations?

"WE HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD ABOUT YOU"

This authoritative tone is softened by the gracious acknowledgment "that you are doing and will do" these things. It gives them full credit for their present performance and notes that they confidently expect this to continue. The writers have no occasion to question the loyal obedience of their converts and have no reason to doubt their ready compliance in the future.⁶

15. If Paul was writing that about our church, what areas of obedience would give him confidence that we are doing what God has called us to do?

16. If Paul was looking at your personal life and ministry, what things would give him confidence regarding your obedience?

"MAY THE LORD DIRECT YOUR HEARTS"

*The verb "**direct**" conveys the picture of opening up the way by the removal of obstacles so that the desired goal may be reached. Its New Testament usage implies that this is brought about by the divine providential controlling of human action.⁷*

17. How does God go about directing His people to love as He does? What can we be doing in the coming days that will allow us to see where He is leading us to love more deeply?

⁶ Hiebert, D. Edmond. *The Thessalonian Epistles – A Call to Readiness*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1971

⁷ Hiebert, D. Edmond. *The Thessalonian Epistles – A Call to Readiness*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1971