

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 — How Should We Pray For Those We Love?

September 29, 2024

Good morning, CrossWinds! I hope you could join us at CrossWind's 75th Anniversary in Arnold's Park last week. It was a great time. If you could not be there, we have photos on our Facebook page. Be sure to check them out.

This morning, we return to our studies in the book of 2 Thessalonians. I want to begin with a strange but true story. One of the unusual legacies of World War II in the South Pacific is what is known as the cargo cults. The allied armies of World War II dropped onto remote islands in the South Pacific from Australia to Indonesia and turned them into part of the allied supply route. The natives on the island, who had zero exposure to modern civilization, saw them pushing down trees with bulldozers to make landing strips. Planes dropped from the sky and left their payloads of things like cigarettes, lighters, jeeps, modern weapons, refrigerators, radios, power tools, clothing, and food.

The natives of the islands were fascinated by all this stuff from the sky delivered by white men. Their conclusion was that the white men were gods, and



the gods came to bring them lots of stuff. When the war ended, the army and their supplies left those islands as quickly as they came. The natives did not know what to do. They wanted the white gods



and their stuff back, so they built houses of worship to worship these gods and hope for their return from the

sky. Their houses of worship were replicas of airplanes, control towers, and jets.



It is said that even today, on some of the remote islands in the South Pacific, the cargo god is still worshipped. They

pray to the white gods to return from the sky and bring them more stuff.

While we get a chuckle out of this, this is not too different from some parts of contemporary Christianity. Have you heard of the Word of Faith Movement, the name is and claim it movement, and the Health Wealth and Prosperity movement? They say you pray to God so God gives you the stuff you want. We pray to God so he will dump a bunch of material things on us, like the natives in the South Pacific pray for the cargo gods to return from the sky.

This brings us to this morning's text, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12. In these verses, we get a snapshot of what the apostle Paul prayed for regarding the people he loved. I will give you a hint. He didn't pray that God would drop from the sky and give them a bunch of stuff. Let's see how he prayed for them.

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 1:11–12 (ESV)

Background

If you were with us two weeks ago, we were studying Paul's greeting in this letter and the city's background. We learned the people of Thessalonica were hostile to Jesus and the new Christians in the city. Many in the church were made to suffer financially when their businesses were boycotted. They were considered social misfits. They even ran Paul out of town. When Paul went to a neighboring

town, they ran him out of that town too! It was tough being a Christian in Thessalonica!

Paul comforted the Thessalonians facing this suffering by reminding them to persevere because the just judgment of God was coming. One day, their faith in Jesus would be vindicated when Jesus returned. They will be rewarded by Jesus. Their persecutors will be judged by Jesus and face eternal destruction. On the day of Jesus' return, all the difficulty following Jesus will be worth it.

With the background that Jesus is coming back, and he is coming back to reward believers, and justly judge unbelievers, Paul tells the Thessalonians how he is praying for them. These verses are a great guide for us. Knowing that one day Jesus will one day return for the glorification of those who love him and the damnation of those who reject him, what can we learn about praying for those we love from how Paul prayed for those he loved? These verses tell us how to pray for our children, for our spouse, for our family, and for our church. They are a wake-up call about what is important to pray for given the importance of eternity and the return of Jesus, which will happen soon.

These verses break apart nicely. In verse 11, Paul gives us three requests that he prays to God for them. In verse 12, Paul gives us two reasons why he prays those requests. That will be our outline. What requests should we pray for those we love? They are found in verse 11. What reasons should we pray for those requests? They are found in verse 12.

What requests should we pray for those we love?

We should pray they live worthy of the faith.

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling...., 2 Thessalonians 1:11 (ESV)

This is a request for their Christian character. Paul prayed that God would make their lives worthy of the name of Jesus that they bear. If you are going to go around and call yourself a Christian, it helps if you live like a Christian.

Notice that Paul was not bullying. There is no fear or intimidation in his words. He simply tells them what he is praying for them. He is praying that God will transform their everyday lives to make their character increasingly like Jesus.

They knew what it meant to live a life worthy of the calling they received from Jesus. Earlier, in 1 Thessalonians, Paul explained that that.

we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2:12 (ESV)

Paul says he had taught them earlier what a life worthy of Jesus was like. He encouraged them to live a life worthy of God. What would living a life worthy of Jesus look like? If we are sons and daughters of God through Jesus, we should be different from the rest of the world. The rest of the world is dishonest and manipulative. We need to be honest and truthful. The rest of the world is not sexually pure. We are to live with sexual purity. The rest of the world cares about themselves, not other people. Paul says to the Thessalonians, as Christians, we don't live like that. We are Christians. We care about other people. We are Christians. The word Christian means little Christ. We are like a little bit of Jesus in this world. That is how we are to be different.

Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians is that God would be at work helping them live like Jesus in this world.

Let me comment on this word worthy. None of us are worthy of being saved by God through Jesus. The Bible says all of us are sinners. We deserve the lake of fire. The good news is that God loves us. God chose to save some of us. God chose people who were unworthy, and through the death of Jesus on the cross, he made us worthy. God makes unworthy people worthy. Positionally, we have become worthy before God because of Jesus. Paul's prayer is that as Christians, what we are positionally because of Jesus will be worked out practically in our lives as we live in a way that is increasingly worthy of the name of Jesus because our character is becoming more and more like Jesus.

All of us are unworthy of God. When we trust Jesus, we become positionally worthy before God because Jesus paid for our sins. Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians is that God would change their character to be more like Jesus so they might become practically more worthy of the name they bear.

Sometimes, we run into people who use Jesus like a get-out-of-jail-free card in Monopoly. They are saved by Jesus, but they don't think how they live matters. They live just like the rest of the world. They party just like the rest of the world. They watch the same movies as the rest of the world. They don't have any appearance of holiness to them. They don't have any appearance of supernatural love for others about them. Their speech is seasoned with the same cusswords as everybody else. Paul says, that is not what God wants for you. He prays Jesus helps them live out practically on the outside the positional

worthiness he gave them on the inside. This is the first prayer he has for them on his prayer list.

If we trace our finger through Paul's letters, we find that he frequently talks about Christians living worthy of the kingdom of God. Let's see a few things he says about this.

i. God uses suffering to help us live a life worthy of our calling.

This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— 2 Thessalonians 1:5 (ESV)

How does God help his children live lives more worthy of God's kingdom? One way is that he occasionally brings suffering into our lives. Suffering gets us on our knees, breaks us, and helps us see our sins and repent of them. God, in his love for us, sometimes allows us to go through suffering to lead us to repent of sin, mature us, and get us to deal with issues that we want to ignore.

When God brings suffering into our lives for this purpose, it is not because he hates us. It is because he loves us. He is increasing the worthiness of our lives to bear his name. Suffering peels away the callouses of our hearts and drives us to God. We take large steps of spiritual maturity in times of suffering.

Paul's prayer is that God would continue the process of making these men and women we are increasingly worthy to bear the name of Jesus, and he would use whatever is necessary to continue that process.

This is a great prayer for us to pray for our children. God, do whatever you need to do in their lives so they will live in an increasingly worthy way of the name of Jesus that they bear. It is a hard prayer, a scary prayer, but a good prayer.

What does a Christian life that is not worthy of the name of Jesus look like? Later, in 2 Thessalonians, we will find one example.

A life worthy of the faith is not lazy and given to gossip.

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. 2 Thessalonians 3:6 (ESV)

For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. 2 Thessalonians 3:11 (ESV)

Some Christians in the church of Thessalonica were living undisciplined lives. They were taking advantage of the generosity of other Christians. They were living on handouts. They were not working. It is not that they couldn't work. They just didn't want to work. They were freeloaders. With all the free time on their hands, they became gossips, busybodies minding everybody else's business instead of taking care of their own business.

Were they positionally worthy of Jesus? Yes. Jesus died for them. They trusted Jesus to save them from their sins. But were they living a life practically worthy of Jesus with their gossip and laziness? Absolutely not! They were giving Jesus a bad reputation. Jesus said...

... 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' " Acts 20:35 (ESV)

If someone needs benevolence, that is understandable. It is good to help them, but when someone is lazy and unwilling to work that is a different story. It is always better to be in the position of giving benevolence than in the position of receiving it. Why would you not want to work?

lii. A life worthy of the faith pursues patience, humility, love, and unity with other Christians.

Here is another example of Paul telling us about living a life worthy of the gospel and showing us how to do that.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, Ephesians 4:1 (ESV)

Then he defines what that looks like for them.

with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:2–3 (ESV)

It is being humble around other people. It is not insisting on your way or your preferences. It is being gentle with people, not being harsh. It is treating other people with the kindness and grace that you would like them to give to you. It is being patient with people who never seem to learn and who never seem to change. It is not giving up on them. It is loving the hard-to-love people and believing in them when others have given up on them. It is bearing with one another in love. Everyone has their idiosyncrasies. They have those things about them that are just annoying. It is loving them anyway. In all things, it is working hard to maintain unity and peace in the family of God.

It always burns my bacon when people in the church gossip, stir up division, and promote disunity in the church family. Instead of being humble, they insist on their preferences. They are not patient. Instead of the church being a place where people can come and find life, love, and truth, the church is about the last man standing. They drive away everyone else until they are the only one that remains. They are like ladybugs. Lady bugs kill off other bugs. They kill off

one another until the only one left is one tough old ladybug living by herself. Everything is her way because she killed off everyone who didn't see things her way. That is not living a lifestyle worthy of Jesus in the church. The Jesus that unites us is far bigger than the petty things that can easily divide us.

iv. A life worthy of the faith pursues unity in purpose and mission with other Christians.

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, Philippians 1:27 (ESV)

Paul brings up the topic of what it looks like to live worthy of our calling in Jesus with the Philippians. He describes living in a manner worthy of the gospel as standing firm on the gospel and being united in one spirit and one mind, working together for the faith of the gospel. So many churches go no place because they are like our government. Beneath the surface, there are two or more factions. Each group is trying to stop the other group from making progress. Each group has enough veto power to stop things, but because they won't work together for Jesus, they can't start things. A church that runs like our government, where one side is always running down the other side, is not living in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus. The Jesus that unites us is bigger than the things that divide us.

v. A life worthy of the faith is about good works and growing in the knowledge of God.

so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; Colossians 1:10 (ESV)

In Colossians, Paul says living in a manner worthy of the Lord involves bearing fruit by doing good works and increasing knowledge of God.

At CrossWinds, we are always increasing our knowledge of God. We study the Bible. We encourage you to read your Bible on your own. We encourage you to join a Life Group. We encourage you to get involved in BSF. This is what we are trying to do as a church.

Notice there are two sides of this equation. Living in a manner pleasing to God does not just mean becoming walking encyclopedias of Bible trivia. We are also to be involved in good works, creating good will, and leading people to the good news. That is why we are helping Habitat for Humanity build homes. That is why we are hosting the Night to Shine in February. That may be shoveling your neighbor's driveway in the winter or baking a loaf of bread and sharing it with them.

Living in a manner worthy of the gospel is not just Bible information. It is carrying out good works for others, just like Jesus fed the hungry and healed the sick.

vi. A life worthy of the gospel is about living a holy, righteous, and blameless life toward others.

we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2:12 (ESV)

What does that look like? He tells us in the verses before this one.

You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers... 1 Thessalonians 2:10–11 (ESV)

It is living a holy, righteous, and blameless life. It is not showing favoritism. It is not withholding love or kindness to those who are hard to love. It is not being selfish. It is no outbursts of anger. It is words of love, not words of hate. It means you have nothing bad you can say about a person because of how kindly, fairly, and lovingly they treat people.

To sum it up, walking in a manner worthy of the calling we received from Jesus is living like Jesus. Remember that the word Christians means a little Christ. It is living like a miniature Jesus in this world. To meet us is to meet a Christian, which means a little Christ, a miniature Jesus.

whoever says he abides in him (Jesus) ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. 1 John 2:6 (ESV)

This is the first way we pray for those we love. We are to pray they live a life worthy of Jesus. Let's look at the second way we pray for them.

Pray God fulfills every good plan they have for good works.

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good... 2 Thessalonians 1:11 (ESV)

This is a prayer that God would be sure to carry out every good plan they have to do good. Remember, the Thessalonians were in a city where Jesus was not liked. Christians were being run out of town, their businesses were boycotted. What were they to do? Were they to make pipe bombs or car bombs? Were they to march in the city streets and protest that their rights were being violated? Absolutely not. They were to be about the business of doing good in the community. They were to get involved in the community and help in the community. They were to get involved with the lives of others in the church and

help them, to do good for them. Paul's prayer was that every time they had a good plan to do good for others, God would help them carry it out.

How would the gospel make progress in a society like Thessalonica, where everyone was against it? The church was to be about doing good. The more good they did in the community, the more the reputation of Christ would change for the better.

Those plans to do good didn't have to be exclusively outside the church. They should also be inside the church. When someone is sick and you offer to make them a meal, that is a plan to do good. Of course, there would be extra work, time, and effort. Paul prayed that God would be the wind at their back and help them fulfill their good plans.

Look what the book of James teaches us about our prayers.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. James 4:3 (ESV)

James reminds us that many times, God doesn't answer our prayers because we are praying exclusively for ourselves. We are not asking God to help us do good for others. Praying for the strength and ability to do good for others is the prayer God loves to answer. Let me show you an example.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8 (ESV)

In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul talks about the Corinthian Christians about giving an offering to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem. He reminds them that when they give to help the poor God can fill their wallets back up and make sure you have enough not just to survive but to continue to do good and help others in

need. When Christians do good for others and financially give to others, God has a way of filling up their wallet again so they not only survive but can continue to do good.

Pray God will fulfill every work undertaken in faith by His power.

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power. 2 Thessalonians 1:11 (ESV)

This is addressing every work they do by faith. Paul's prayer is that God's power would show up and enable them to accomplish those works done in faith by his power.

A work done in faith is similar to every good intent for a good deed. What is the difference? I am not exactly sure, neither are many Bible scholars. Here is my best guess. We just looked at good plans for good works. Those are general things and general good works. A work of faith is far more specific. It is planned. It is larger. It is not casual. It is significant. A good plan to do a good work could be as simple as offering to mow your neighbor's lawn. When it comes to a work of faith, where God shows up in his power and gets behind it, I think of something like Samaritan's Purse. That organization began as Franklin Graham's vision of giving children worldwide a Christmas present with a gospel tract in their own language inside. God got behind it, and today, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of children hear the good news of Jesus every year from those presents.

Another example of a work of faith that God got behind would be the Hidden Acres camp. Last week, in the 75th Anniversary video, you saw pictures of people helping Hidden Acres Camp begin. Today, thousands of children every

summer either meet Jesus or take a large step of faith in their love for Jesus every year because of the camp. That camp is a work of faith taken by a group of Christians that God got behind with his power.

Last week, at the 75th anniversary, I talked with one lady who was on two building committees at church. She said, “If you want to see God show up, you need to be on a building committee.” They often had no idea how to pay for a building, but God was behind it, and money showed up. They built the gym in faith that God would provide the funds, and that God would use it to help them reach more children with Jesus. They built this worship space and knew they didn’t have enough money. They made it this big so more people could come and hear about Jesus. It was a work they did by faith. God showed up with his power.

That was Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians. Every time they undertook a project to reach people with Jesus, and there was a gap, God would show up and make a way through.

Paul says it this way to the Ephesians.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8–10 (ESV)

We are saved by God’s grace through our faith in Jesus alone. There is nothing we do to contribute to our salvation other than bringing the sin from which we need to be saved. Once we are saved, we are not saved to sit. We are saved to do good works. We are saved to do good for others in the church and the community. As Christians, we are to be known for our good works.

Let's review. What are the three requests we are to pray for those we love because they are the same requests Paul prayed for those he loved?

1. We pray that God will help them live a life increasingly worthy of the kingdom of God. 2. We pray that God will fulfill all their good plans to do good works. 3. We pray that God would get behind every work of faith they undertake in faith for Jesus.

What is the rationale behind these requests?

Paul gives us two reasons he prays these requests.

We want to bring glory to Jesus' name by the way we live.

so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you,... 2 Thessalonians 1:12 (ESV)

There is no better thing we can do with our life than to bring glory to the name of Jesus with our life. The name of Jesus, the reputation of Jesus, will either be lifted up or torn down by our lives. It doesn't matter what we do with our lives as much as what we do to the name of Jesus with our lives. If we live unworthy of the gospel, we don't encourage people toward Jesus. If we don't do good for others, we don't encourage people toward Jesus.

You may play professional football, but that doesn't make your life significant. What makes it significant is what you do with the platform you are given for the name of Jesus.

One illustration that came to mind was the flood in Spencer. We turned the Spencer campus into a homeless shelter for a week during the flood. It was a good plan to do good for others. We raised and distributed \$92,000 in funds to help those affected by the flood. The youth group in Spencer was going house to

house helping people empty their basements. Pastor Jordan told me the story of one man that the youth group helped. They emptied his basement of the muck. Afterward, he told them that he was not a Christian, but after all the help he received from the church, he was considering becoming a Christian. The good work of loving our neighbors made a difference for the name of Jesus.

Many of you will remember that before FEMA was even in Spencer, Samaritan's Purse was there from the Carolinas. Eight Days of Hope was another Christian disaster service from Mississippi. We were getting calls from churches around the Midwest looking to send in teams to help. All of that softened hearts to the good news of Jesus. It made Jesus' name famous.

Why do we live lives worthy of the gospel and carry out good works for the gospel? We want to make Jesus' name famous in this world and help open hearts to hear about the Jesus who loves them and died for them.

The more we glorify Jesus in this life, the more of his glory we will experience in the next.

so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 1:12 (ESV)

This little phrase is significant. Paul reaches back to verse 10, where he talks about Jesus's return. Jesus will one day return in might, glory, and power. At that time, he will judge those who do not know him but he will also reward Christians who have trusted in Him.

When Jesus came the first time, his glory was veiled. When Jesus comes the second time, his glory will be unveiled. It will be on full display. All of his might, splendor, light, and the fire of his presence will be on display for all to see.

Amazingly, as Christians, as brothers and sisters of Jesus, at that time, Jesus will give us some of his glory, some of his splendor, some of the might of his identity.

While it is not explicitly stated in this verse, it is explicitly stated that the more glory we bring to Jesus in this life, the more of Jesus' glory we will possess in the next life!

I don't know what could be more motivating to live a life worthy of the gospel and to be about good works than that. The more glory my life gives to Jesus, the more glory I will be given from Jesus when he returns. The glory I get from Jesus will last for eternity. It will not fade.

Jesus talks about this in Revelation.

“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.” Revelation 22:12 (NIV)

Jesus is so good to us. He doesn't just save us from our sins, which we don't deserve. He also promises to reward us when he returns based on how we lived for Him. Part of that reward is the more glory we bring to Jesus with our life, the more of the glory of Jesus we will receive from him when he returns.

There are plenty of verses that tell us we will get glory from Jesus when Jesus returns and we see the glory of Jesus.

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Colossians 3:4 (ESV)

The glory, splendor, and radiance of Jesus will not just be limited to Jesus, but he will share it with us. We will appear with him in glory!

...and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:2 (ESV)

This is what we look forward to as Christians. Jesus will return in glory, power, and splendor, and as Christians, we will not just see his glory, power, and splendor, but we will participate in Jesus' glory and power. We will possess the glory of God!

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Philippians 3:20–21 (ESV)

We won't just get a resurrection body like Jesus when he came out of the grave on resurrection morning, but we will get a body like Jesus' glorious resurrection body!

The craziest of all is that God, in his kindness, will give us even more of His glory in the next life as a reward for giving Him glory in this life. What an amazing God we serve. What else could be more motivating to live a life worthy of Jesus and to be about the business of good works than this?

Conclusion

When it comes to those we love, in light of Jesus' return and the amazing glory that awaits us as Christians, the best thing we can pray for is that they live a life worthy of the gospel and be about the business of good works for the gospel. The more glory our lives bring to Jesus today, the more glory we will receive from Jesus on that day.

My friends that is far better than praying to the cargo god of the sky to return to give us more stuff.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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