

2 Thessalonians 3:1-6 — What Do Pastors Need From Their People?

October 27, 2024

Good morning. We are studying through the book of 2 Thessalonians. Last week, we finished 2 Thessalonians 2 and Paul teaching us about the Antichrist. This morning, we begin 2 Thessalonians 3, the last chapter of this short book. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul talked about spiritual issues, such as the truth about the Antichrist. In 2 Thessalonians 3, he talks about practical issues.

This is the way most of the New Testament letters work. The first half of them is spiritual stuff. The last half is practical stuff. In Ephesians, chapters 1-3 are spiritual stuff about Jesus. Chapters 3 to 6 are how we live for Jesus. The book of Romans, chapters 1 to 10, is more spiritual stuff. Chapters 12 to 15 are practical stuff. If you are new to the Bible and reading a New Testament letter, just know the practical stuff is at the end of most letters, not the beginning.

As we get into the practical stuff of 2 Thessalonians, this morning, Paul will talk to the Thessalonians about ways they can help him. Next week, Paul will give instructions on practical ways to live for Jesus. Interestingly, much of it deals with work—how we work, why we work, and practical ways to honor Jesus at work.

This morning, we are in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-6, where Paul will talk about practical ways they can help him. Let's read the text and study it.

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. 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 3:1–6 (ESV)

These verses are about what a pastor should expect from their people. Before we begin, let's flip that around and see what people should expect from their pastors.

What should people expect from their pastors?

The people of the church should have high expectations of the pastors in the church. Anyone who steps into the role of serving as a pastor or elder or who teaches the word of God is to be example for others to follow. Those are high standards.

Being a pastor or a leader in the church is a high calling, maybe the highest calling. There is a tremendous responsibility that comes with this position. Someone who serves as a pastor or elder has tremendous potential for good or for harm in the kingdom of God. Pastors and other church leaders set a standard that people will follow. Today, we know many people who were led astray by smooth-talking pastors in liberal denominations who have a low view of Jesus and the Bible. They replicate their low view of Jesus in the people who follow them. This is why James says...

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. James 3:1 (ESV)

This is why people in the church should have high expectations of the pastors and leaders in their church.

What is the primary job of a pastor? It is to teach the Bible.

But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Acts 6:4 (ESV)

When the early church was growing, and the apostles had many logistical issues, such as caring for the widows, that kept them from teaching the word, they appointed others to take care of the practical, logistical issues so they could get back to their primary duty of prayer and teaching.

...for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Acts 20:27 (ESV)

A pastor can not simply cherry-pick things they want to teach from the Bible. They need to teach the entire Bible. That means the easy stuff and the hard-to-understand stuff.

The Bible gives several character qualities that need to be present in the lives of pastors and church leaders.

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. 1 Timothy 3:2–7 (ESV)

That is a high list of qualifications. Pastors need to manage their households well. If they can't manage their own house, how can they manage God's house? Pastors must be above reproach and self-controlled. Pastors need to be hospitable, which means the pastor should love to open his home and have people over. He can not be a drunk. He must be gentle, not violent. He can't be a lover of money.

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. 1 Timothy 4:12 (ESV)

Pastors and elders are not just to teach with their words but to set an example to follow by the conduct of their lives. They should be known for their love, purity, and faith.

...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 2 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)

Pastors and elders must be ready to teach the word. In season and out of season means they don't just teach the word on Sundays, but any day of the week, an opportunity is provided if needed. What is a pastor's teaching to be like. He is to reprove. That means he needs to help people see issues of sin. He is to rebuke. That means to urge them to turn from their sin. The preacher is also to exhort. That means to encourage people who are broken by their sins. On Sunday morning, some of the pastor's sermons should convict as he helps us see our sin and urges us to turn from it. Other portions of the pastor's sermons should be encouraging us in the brokenness we have over our sins.

Peter describes the job of a pastor this way.

shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:2-3 (ESV)

Pastors are to see themselves as shepherds over sheep. They are not to view themselves as a CEO or business leader. Shepherds love their sheep. Shepherds seek after lost sheep. Shepherds protect the sheep. A shepherd knows his sheep by name. That is the way a pastor should view his job.

How is a pastor to lead? He is not to be a bully who shoves the sheep into line by brute force. He is to lead by example. A pastor doesn't care for the sheep under pressure it is something he must do. He cares for sheep out of love

because it is something he wants to do. A pastor is not in the ministry for the money, but his reward is that he will bring glory to God through his life.

I bring these things up to remind us that the Bible has a high standard for pastors. When someone loses their job because they did not perform well at work, that is not the kind of guy you want to hire as a pastor.

While pastors and elders have a high responsibility to the people they serve in a church, there is another side to the equation. The Bible is equally clear that the people of the church have a responsibility to the pastors and leaders of the church. As myself and the other pastors have a responsibility before God for you, you have a responsibility toward us. Let me show you.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)

The Bible tells the people of the church that they are to submit to and obey the leaders of the church. Remember that the pastors and elders will give an account to God for their leadership of the people. Let their leadership be something they can do with joy, not with groaning. At the end of the day, when the people of the church cause great heartache and stress for the pastors and leaders of the church, it is of no advantage to anyone. When pastors have no joy in the church they serve, there will be little joy in the people they serve. The people of the church have a responsibility not just to obey their pastors and leaders but to encourage and appreciate them.

I want you to know that as we look at this verse, you need to know that you have been a wonderful church to serve. The people of CrossWinds bring

great joy to my heart. It is a privilege to serve as one of your pastors. What makes me especially appreciative of CrossWinds are some of the other churches I served before coming here. In some of those churches, church meetings were like MMA matches. I would break out in a cold sweat before church meetings. There was little joy in those churches. I praise God that serving you at CrossWinds is the opposite of that experience. Thank you for being such a joy to serve.

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 (ESV)

1 Thessalonians, Paul says the same thing as the writer of Hebrews. Respect those who labor among you. Respect those who are over you and who offer correction to you. Esteem them highly in love because of their work.

When we studied this passage a few months ago, I mentioned that sometimes we get this wrong. Pastors are esteemed highly for the wrong reasons. Sometimes, we love pastors because of their personalities. They are great at telling jokes. They tell lots of stories that make you laugh. They are half-pastor, half-standup comedians. Some pastors are esteemed highly because they are hip. They wear the latest fashions. They have a dress coordinator and a makeup artist. Sometimes, pastors are highly esteemed because they have tattoos. The cool people today have tattoos. My pastor is cool because he has a tattoo of his deceased cat from junior high on his forearm.

This isn't what it says. It says we are to esteem a pastor highly because of his work. Our esteem for pastors and church leaders comes from their work as they hold up the word of God and teach it. At the end of the day, isn't that what

we need? I don't care about the tattoos or the fancy clothes. What changes lives in Jesus and the word of God. That is what we need. That is what we should value.

While the Bible sets a high bar for pastors to serve in the church, it also sets a high bar for the people who need to support and encourage the church's pastors.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:1-6, Paul gives us a window into his heart about what he wanted from the people in the church of Thessalonica. He gives us four ways the people of that church could support and encourage him as the pastor of their church.

Pastors need people who pray for them.

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 (ESV)

Paul says, guys, I need your help. I need you to pray for me. Think about this. Paul was incredibly gifted, powerful, educated, and effective. He was brilliant, well-trained, logical, and persuasive. He had seen the Lord Jesus multiple times. Even with all of those natural abilities, spiritual privileges, and academic successes, he didn't see those things as the source of his effectiveness. He knew any success he had in life only came from God working through his life. That way, any usefulness for the kingdom of Jesus he experienced would not bring glory to him, but the glory would go to God. God would get the credit, not him. Look what he said to the Colossians.

For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. Colossians 1:29 (ESV)

Paul was conscious that everything he did was not based on his strength. God gave him the energy and was at work through him. God was the source of any effectiveness he experienced when it came to sharing the good news of Jesus.

Since God was the one at work in him and through him, this is why he frequently asked people to pray for him. Sometimes, we think it is only pastors who are new or pastors who are not as gifted in communication or organization that need our prayer. That is not true. Paul had amazing skills, but he needed the prayers of his people to support him if anything of eternal value was to take place through him. The growth of the church of God is ultimately a work of the spirit of God through the people of God.

There is an enlightening thought that goes with this. Paul was one of the most brilliant and capable men in Christ in his generation, yet he was asking the Thessalonians to pray for him. The Thessalonians were new Christians. They were baby Christians. They had only known Christ for months when Paul wrote this letter, yet Paul considered their prayers essential to the effectiveness of his teaching and preaching. If anything of eternal value was to be done through Paul's life, he needed the Thessalonians to pray for him.

Let the implications of that sink in. Today, you may be a new Christian, a junior high student, or an elderly person. It doesn't matter who you are; for your pastors to be effective, they need your prayer. Even if you are a new Christian, praying for your pastors will make a difference in the effectiveness of your pastor's preaching and teaching.

Before I preach, I sit in the front row, asking God to work through me. I don't want to be the only one praying for the preaching and teaching that morning. I need your prayers for me if anything of eternal significance is to happen on Sunday mornings.

Pastor Brayden also needs your prayers before he teaches students on Wednesday night. If you are a junior or senior high school student, don't just run in the door and play the games. Take a brief moment to pray for Pastor Brayden before he teaches on Wednesday night. Pray he would be effective as a Bible teacher. Both of us need your prayers if anything of eternal significance is to take place when we open the Bible.

There were some specific things Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray about for him.

Pray that the word of God will spread rapidly.

...pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead... 2 Thessalonians 3:1 (ESV)

What is "the word of the Lord?" The entire Bible is called the Word of the Lord. I think Paul was asking that the Thessalonians would pray for his Bible teaching. In spots in the Bible, "the word of the Lord" is another name for the gospel message. The word of the Lord is used as another name for the good news of Jesus Christ by which people are born again. You find that in Acts 8, 13, 15, and 16. He asks them to pray that as he shared the good news of Jesus with people, people would hear it, respond to it, and be born again. This way the gospel message would speed ahead. He asks them to pray that the good news

of Jesus will be like a strong runner, making speedy progress wherever he can share it. He asked the Ephesians to pray for him similarly.

...and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, Ephesians 6:19 (ESV)

He says, "Pray for me that I can share the good news of Jesus boldly and unashamedly. Pray that whenever I have the chance to open my mouth to talk about Jesus, God will give me the right words to say the right thing." When you pray for your pastors pray that God would give them the right words to tell people about Jesus in the right way. Pray that God would help them share the gospel message boldly and unashamedly.

...At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ,... Colossians 4:2-3 (ESV)

When it came to the Colossians, he asked them to pray for an open door to talk about Jesus. Many times, people shut the door on you as soon as you talk about Jesus. If they don't shut it literally, they at least shut it emotionally. You can feel it. You know it. Pray that your pastors would have an open door to tell people about Jesus so the gospel would spread in our community.

...pray also for us,... that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Colossians 4:3-4 (ESV)

I love this. It is so practical. Pray that when your pastor teaches, he will be clear, well organized, and communicate well. We all know there are many pastors who are not clear. Their sermons resemble a fog machine. They say a lot of words, but you have no idea where they are going or what point they are making. If that happens, apply this verse. Pray they will be clear. God has great interest in answering that prayer.

Clarity of communication, an open door to share the good news about Jesus, and boldness in sharing the good news of Jesus all contribute to God's word spreading rapidly.

Pray that the Word of God will be honored.

...that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored,...
2 Thessalonians 3:1 (ESV)

What does that mean? It means respected, valued, and appreciated. It means receiving a proper response. When people hear the good news of Jesus and the Bible as it is taught, they will realize it is the truth. They will value it as the truth. They will embrace it, not reject it.

In Acts 13, Paul taught about Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles heard the good news about Jesus, and they embraced it. They welcomed it. They treasured it. When the Jews saw that the Gentiles were interested in Jesus, it said they were jealous. Instead of embracing what Paul taught them about Jesus, they became stubborn. They were obstinate. They used every occasion to argue with Paul and undermine him.

It is interesting. The Word of God was honored by the Gentiles, but it was rejected by the Jews. Isn't this the way it works? Some people hear the Bible, they hear about Jesus, and they recognize it as the truth. They embrace it. They value it. Others immediately resist it and mock it.

Paul asks his people to pray for the proper reception of God's word when he can teach it. As a pastor, I have learned that I can give the exact same sermon and those with a soft heart will value it. Those with a hard heart will resist it. Your pastors need your prayers, not just that we would have the opportunity to

teach about Jesus, but that God would soften the hearts of the people who hear God's words so they would value it, not reject it.

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. Acts 13:48 (ESV)

Then, he adds a little phrase to the end of this to remind them and encourage them.

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you,... 2 Thessalonians 3:1 (ESV)

He says, do you remember what happened when I told you about Jesus and taught you about Jesus? You guys had open hearts. Pray that would happen again in other places.

There is an interesting bit of historical trivia with this. When Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, he was in the city of Corinth. He shared the good news of Jesus in Corinth, just like he shared it in Thessalonica. Things did not go well. Acts 18 tells us he faced open hostility from the Jews against the good news of Jesus. It was the same message he shared with the Thessalonians, but in Corinth, the heart of the Jews was hardened against it.

...when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." Acts 18:6 (ESV)

He needed their prayer for God to open people's hearts to Jesus. The same is true for me. I need your prayer for God to open hearts. Brayden needs your prayer for God to open hearts to Jesus, and so does Pastor Jordan. It was the same message to the Jews and the Gentiles, but if the heart isn't open, it is like a bullet off a rock.

Pray for the safety of your pastors.

...and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.
2 Thessalonians 3:2 (ESV)

First, he asked for their prayers so that he could successfully share the message of Jesus. Now, he asks for their prayers for the safety of the messenger.

He asks that they would pray for him to be delivered from wicked and evil men. There are people out there who are evil. They are committed to destroying pastors and churches. In the book of Acts, we see the Jews trying to take Paul's life multiple times. When they couldn't take Paul's life underhandedly, they tried to destroy Paul legally.

But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, Acts 18:12 (ESV)

They dragged Paul into court. They couldn't kill him physically, so they tried to destroy him in court legally. This is lawfare. This happens today. There are many people out there who are looking for an opportunity to sue a pastor or a church. They want to ruin pastors legally since they can not take their lives literally. It doesn't matter if a lawsuit is dismissed. The fact that a lawsuit was brought against a pastor or a church is enough for people to assume they must be guilty of something.

Thankfully, we live in a relatively docile part of the country. When I talk to my friends who are pastors in large churches in liberal cities, they spend a lot of time being careful what they say and do so they do not get sued. There are plenty of people looking for an opportunity to legally destroy them.

Attacks against pastors do not always come from outside the church. Sometimes they come from inside a church. There are people in churches who love to make the lives of pastors and spiritual leaders difficult. These people are usually not recognized leaders of the church. They are influence leaders who work behind the scenes at the church. They use the tools of gossip, slander, and accusations to undermine a pastor's leadership, hoping they can force a pastor out of the church.

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 3 John 9 (ESV)

Think this through. The apostle John wrote a letter. He sent it. The apostle John is one of the twelve apostles. Of all the apostles, he was known as the one Jesus loved. Nobody was closer to Jesus or could more accurately represent Jesus than the apostle John. When he writes a letter to a church, you should recognize it and listen to it. Yet a guy named Diotrephes, who has no position of leadership in the church, is telling people to ignore John's letter because he thinks he knows better. He puts himself first over the apostle John in the church. He was making life difficult for the apostle John in the church. Diotrephes has a hardboiled egg for a brain. Who does he think he is? He has no position of authority in the church but he won't submit to those who are in authority in the church. These are the kinds of people that make the lives of pastors and leaders difficult.

Paul adds this comment.

...For not all have faith. 2 Thessalonians 3:2 (ESV)

Some people may be claiming to follow Jesus in the church, like Diotrephes, but their actions reveal they have fake faith, not genuine faith. If they had genuine faith, they would be willing to listen to someone like the apostle John who has proper biblical leadership in the church.

So pray for your pastors. Pray they can teach the word well and that the word makes progress. Pray that people come to church to hear the word of God at church. Pray that people invite their friends to church to hear the gospel at church. Pray that your pastor will talk about Jesus clearly. Pray for soft hearts, so that when people hear the Bible and Jesus' love for them, they embrace it and don't reject it. Pray that God would protect them from wicked and evil men both inside and outside the church who want to undermine the progress of the gospel by lawfare or persecution.

Pastors need people who are confident in God's faithfulness.

But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. 2 Thessalonians 3:3 (ESV)

Paul was not able to be with them. He was concerned for them. He was worried about them. He says, "Look, no matter what happens, no matter how hostile the people in the city of Thessalonica become against you, no matter how much persecution you face, I need you to remember this. God is faithful. I may not be able to be with you, but I need you to remember that God is faithful to you. He hasn't forgotten you. He knows all that is happening to you. No matter what may come into your life, no matter how difficult and messed up your life may get, you need to know that when everyone else has left you, God will still be faithful.

Paul knew this first hand. Look at what he said he learned at the end of his life.

At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me,... 2 Timothy 4:16–17 (ESV)

Everybody else abandoned Paul when he faced trial against Nero. Paul was alone in facing hardships in life. Then he realized he wasn't alone. God was with him, watching over him, and protecting him. When everyone he loved turned their back on him, he learned God did not. He was still there, and God's gracious and good plans for his life would prevail.

What does God's faithfulness look like in everyday life for us? Let me give you an example.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

When we face temptations, did you know that every temptation we face is filtered by our heavenly Father? He promises not to let us face a temptation beyond our ability to say "No" and turn away. Sometimes, we toy with our temptations, and we walk into our temptations. That is on us.

But when the temptation was placed in front of us, it had been filtered by God, so we knew it was not stronger than we could handle. Why do we know that is true? God is faithful to us. He promises to do that for us.

In the text, Paul gives us two ways God would be faithful to the Thessalonians in the trials of their life.

God promises to strengthen us when we are weak.

But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you... 2 Thessalonians 3:3 (ESV)

The ESV uses the term *establish*. That is not my favorite translation. Other translations use the term strength. I like the term strengthen better. The Greek word behind this is the word *sterizo*. It is where we get our English word steroids. Steroids make you strong, strong enough to handle lots of physical weight. Here, we find that God is faithful. When we face incredibly challenging circumstances, God is faithful. He promises to give us the strength we need to handle the challenges we face.

I don't know what you are facing right now, but I do know God is faithful. He promises to filter all the temptations you face so none of them are stronger than you are. He also promises to give you the strength you need to handle all the challenges we face so we can bring glory to God no matter what happens each day.

God promises to guard us from Satan's attacks.

...and guard you against the evil one. 2 Thessalonians 3:3 (ESV)

Not only is God so faithful that he gives us the spiritual steroids we need to give us the strength we need for the challenges we face, but he also promises to protect us from the attacks of the evil one. Satan would love to ruin your life, but he can't touch you unless God allows him to. I think of the Book of Job. Job was the most righteous man on the earth. Satan had all kinds of plans against him, but he was not allowed to touch Job until God allowed him to touch Job's life with difficulty. When Satan was allowed to ruin Job's life, it was only within the parameters God ordained. In addition, even when Satan was allowed to ruin

Job's life, God still had a good plan in all of it. Job's suffering was used by God to bring glory to God's name and to give us a book in our Bible to teach us how to handle times of suffering in our lives.

As a Christian, the same is true for you and me. Satan would love to destroy us, but the only things he can do in our lives are what God allows him to do. God is faithful. He promises always to protect us against every attack from evil.

Paul wants the Thessalonians to not just pray for him but to remember that God will be faithful to them. Even when the world was falling apart around them, God did not forget them. God would not let them down. God would give them the strength they needed for the challenges they faced, and he would protect them from every scheme of Satan to ruin their world.

I want you to remember the same things. God is faithful to us. I don't know what mess you are in today, but God has not forgotten you. He won't let you down.

Pastors need people who are obedient.

And we have confidence in the Lord about you, [that you are doing and will do the things that we command.](#) 2 Thessalonians 3:4 (ESV)

This is a very positive approach by Paul. He is absent from them. He has already instructed them about how to live for Jesus, and now he tells them they are doing and will continue to do the things he commanded them to do.

He does not find his confidence that this will continue to do what he commands in their character but in God's character. What God began in them, he will be faithful to complete in them.

Pastors need people who pursue spiritual maturity.

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. 2 Thessalonians 3:5 (ESV)

Paul closes these verses where he lets the Thessalonians know how they can help him by letting them know what he is praying for them and what he desires for them. This is what the Thessalonians can do that will bring the greatest joy to Paul's life

I need to grow in my comprehension of how much God loves me!

Paul's hope and prayer is that God may direct their hearts. The word direct in Greek means to remove all obstacles and hindrances out of the way. To open up a path. To steer you through. You aren't there yet, but I want God to make a way for you to get there so you better understand and more fully comprehend the incredible love God has for you. Paul's hope and prayer for them is they would be enabled to comprehend better the incredible love God has for them. The best way to comprehend that is to look at Jesus.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 1 John 4:9 (ESV)

They would understand that God loves them so much that he sent his only son to die to save them. Jesus loves you so much that he left the throne room of heaven and joined himself permanently with a human body forever. He died for you. He became sin for you. Jesus took all of your sin and my sin and absorbed it into himself. He also absorbed an eternity of God's wrath that we deserved for our sins while he hung on the cross. God did all this not because he had to but because he wanted to. He did this because he loves you! Your spouse may not

love you. Your children may have forgotten about you. You may feel isolated and lonely, but God will not leave you. God loves you!

How many of you have children? Imagine if you had one child, an only son who was the apple of your eye. How many of you would be willing to send your only son to suffer the most heinous death created by man and suffer an eternity of hell on the cross, all to save rebellious and irresponsible people like you and me? You would have to really love someone to do that. That is how much God loves you! I don't care how much your life is broken, God loves you more than anyone will or could love you.

I need to increase my comprehension of Jesus' faithfulness to me.

May the Lord direct your hearts... to the steadfastness of Christ. 2 Thessalonians 3:5 (ESV)

Paul says his other prayer for them is that God would clear the way for them to better comprehend the steadfastness of Jesus.

Over the years, I have been involved in several counseling sessions where marriages and family relationships are struggling. I have often been with people who shed tears over broken relationships, such as when someone left them, someone gave up on them, or someone turned their back on them and said it was over. They had enough. They have no more patience. They have no more love. You have blown it too many times. I am done with you. It is over. I am walking away from you.

Paul says, my prayer is that God would make a way for you to understand not just how much he loves you but how faithful Jesus is to you.

No matter what you have done. No matter how low you have gone in this life. No matter how many times you have failed, right now, Jesus is looking at you with love in his eyes. Right now, Jesus' arms are open wide. You may have left him, but Jesus is always faithful. Jesus will never give up on you. He will never turn his back and walk away from you. Jesus is the faithful bride to his church. No matter what you have done, he still loves you; he wants to welcome you home if you will, but turn to him and come back.

I think of the parable of the lost son. The son ran away from home. The father let him go. While his prodigal son left his home, he never left his father's heart. Every day, the Father's eyes scanned the horizon, looking for his son, hoping he would return. After the son had blown all his money and ruined his life, he finally decided to come home. How could he look at his father's face again after what a fool he had been? When he was coming home, his father saw him on the horizon. He ran to him. He embraced him. He had never given up on him. He was always waiting for him to come home, and nothing could change the love he had for him. That is Jesus right now for you. God the Father loves you. Jesus' arms are open wide to you. If you will but turn to him and come home, he will run to you and kill the fattened calf and celebrate that the son or daughter he loves has come home.

Paul says, if you want to help me, grow in understanding that and everything else will take care of itself.

Conclusion

Pastors have a serious responsibility to their people, but people also have a serious responsibility to their pastors. What do pastors and church leaders need?

1. **People that pray for them.** Pray that God will help them teach the word well. Pray that God will provide more opportunities to tell people about Jesus, either by more people coming or more opportunities to share. Pray for open hearts to hear the word of God and honor it as such. Pray for your pastors' safety. There are plenty of people out there, both inside and outside the church, who would love to destroy pastors, their families, and their churches.
2. **People who are confident in God's faithfulness.** No matter what hits you, know God will not leave you. Know that when life gets hard, God promises to strengthen you to handle the challenges, and he promises to protect us from the attacks of Satan. No temptation that hits us will be more than we can bear. All of them are filtered by Jesus.
3. **People who are obedient to God's word.**
4. **People who are growing in their comprehension of God's incredible love for them and Jesus' faithfulness to them.**



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