

Praying for Your Soul
Praying Effectively for the Harvest
Palmetto Baptist Church

Text: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

“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.”

Introduction

61 years ago (in 1960) two men made a wager that changed everything for both of those men. After it was all said and done, one would own a massive publishing company and the other would become an international figure with a household name and untold wealth.

The wager was for 50.00. The two men who made the bet were Bennet Cerf and Theodore Geisler. Cerf was the co-founder of a publishing company (Random House, founded in 1927). Theodore Geisler was a writer in his mid 50's. The bet was this: That Geisler wrote a children's book using only 50 vocabulary words and no more. If successful, Cerf would pay up \$1 per word!

Geisler went to work and actually won the bet! And the book he wrote became an international phenomenon – selling over 200 million copies from then to now. (ABC News story).

By the way, it is a book almost every one of you have read – it was a children's book called *Green Eggs and Ham* and the author was the beloved Dr. Seuss!

The paragraph written by Paul to the Thessalonians contains 47 vocabulary words – words that reveal very powerful realities designed by God to help you and me write the story of our lives in ways that will have far deeper impact and much greater eternal value than a children’s book that sold 200M copies.

Background/Context:

Last week we looked at an amazing passage in Matthew 9 where Jesus went about preparing an amazing harvest and equipping a group of remarkably unremarkable men to reap that harvest. At the end of that paragraph, Jesus exhorted these men who were about to change the world to pray to the Lord of the Harvest about the harvest.

In light of that command, what does this kind of praying actually look like? Do we have an example of it ... a pattern... anywhere in our New Testament that can help to shape our thinking and praying as we ourselves commit to this specific kind of praying?

YES! 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 contains a prayer Paul prayed for himself and for the Thessalonian believers as they invested in the most amazing ministry on earth – the proclamation and spread of the gospel of Jesus that had reached them!

So, who were these people and what are those realities?

A. The People were believers just like us who were living under extreme pressure in the middle of a culture driven by a completely different worldview than the one they had come to embrace.

They are described in 2:13-16 this letter in three ways:

1. God had chosen them from the beginning to be saved

a) by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit – He opened their eyes to the truth about Jesus – and
b) by their personal faith/belief in the truth of the gospel. (2:13)

2. God had called them through the gospel to personally share (be participants) in the Glory of Jesus! (2:14)
3. God had promised to provide strength so they could abound in every good work and every good word about the Gospel in the face of difficulty, discouragement, and personal danger! (2:16-17)

To this end, Paul prays for them in very specific ways (1:11-12)

1. That God would make them worthy of His calling right then and there in Thessalonica! (1:11)
2. That God would bring to fruition every desire they had for goodness to be like Christ (1:11)
3. That God would bring to fruition every work or deed they desired to do for God by faith (1:11)
4. So that Jesus would be glorified in them and they with Him (1:12)

And that all of this would be accomplished by His power and not their own (1:11).

B. The Realities: If we are honest, this is where most of us find ourselves this morning – people who have been called by God to an incredible future because our faith in the Gospel about Jesus. But while that future is certain and sure, we find ourselves living in a very different reality in the present - our right here/right now moment.

Although we have been helped by God to believe and we do actually believe – and while we have deep desires to actually be like God and to do great things for God as we write the story of our lives – we run up against the hard realities of **difficulty** (it is hard),

discouragement (we are weak and tired), **defeat** (we fail), and at times, personal **danger** (direct opposition that costs us).

Thankfully Paul has an answer for us this morning if we will hear and embrace it – 47 words that make up a prayer that Paul asked these believers to pray for him! That prayer contains very powerful realities that, if we pray them for our own souls, will actually strengthen us and enable us to write a story with our lives that will have real and eternal impact for the glory of God!

What does Paul counsel us to do as we write our gospel story? He counsels us to pray for our own souls in the very same way and for the very same things he asked these believers to pray for himself!

There are four things we should be constantly, persistently, and passionately praying for when we talk to God about His harvest – coming boldly to God’s throne of Grace and asking Him to strengthen us in four very specific, practical ways.

I. Pray for the Powerful Success of the Word of God (3:1)

pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you

A. That it would run freely – conviction

- That it would expand rapidly
- That it would experience unhindered progress
- That it would enjoy spectacular success

B. That it would be received appropriately - reception

- That it would be received for what it is – the Word of God
- That it would be believed for what it says – Truth from God
- That it would be personally embraced by the hearers just like it was when we first brought it to you!

So – do you ever pray for your own soul to be receptive to the Word of God? How do you respond when the Spirit brings that Word to bear on your life?

- Illustration: Wallpaper peeling up – do you peel it off and “Home Depot” it? Perhaps you stick a picture over it? Or do you allow the Spirit of God to use the Word of God to do the work in you that He desires to do in preparing you to deliver the word about Jesus that has been so powerfully at work in you?

II. Pray for Personal Protection in the Work of God (3:2-3)

Once the Word of God begins to do its work in your life, there is a second thing Paul exhorts us to pray for our own soul – spiritual protection as the word begins to do its work in us and in others who He desires to reach for the Harvest.

When you determine to announce the “good news” of the Gospel that reached you, there will be incredible, powerful opposition that at times would result in relentless rejection and ruthless persecution. What should we do when we have been called to deliver this news to people who not only resist the truth of the message; they resent the messengers who bring that truth?

Paul’s answer is to exhort us to pray for Divine protection!

A. Protection from wicked and evil People (v 2)

- Morally evil (wicked) – lawless, people who refuse to live inside the boundaries set by God or others.
- Malicious – malevolent people who desire to distract, damage, or distort you!

Paul was at one time one of these people – settled resistance to the message, deep resentment against Jesus, ruthless persecution of the messengers.

He personally knew to what lengths the opponents would go because he personally had gone there in his persecution of the church and even in his joyful participation in the execution of the first Christian martyr – Stephen.

Gal 1:13-14: “For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.”

Acts 8:1: “And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

Acts 9:1-2: “But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

B. Protection from wicked and evil Purposes (v 3)

- And the entire reason for such ruthless, relentless, and unreasonable persecution is this . . . the opponents do not believe ... and they do not want others to believe. And they were willing to use any means ... legal or illegal ... to stop the messengers from advancing this message.
- An example of this is not just what Paul did to the church before his conversion, but what was done to Paul at places like Philippi – ridicule, physical abuse, imprisonment, and eventually execution.
- And behind all of this is an Ancient Enemy who is the source of all Evil personified – the Evil One.
- And Paul did exactly what Jesus told His disciples to do ... he prayed that God would strengthen and protect them!
- That, in the face of beatings, deprivation, loneliness, sickness, shipwreck, snakebite, deep betrayal and even imprisonment ... God would **by these means** (not merely in

spite of them) advance His gospel to Rome itself . . . and once there, Paul would proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom with all boldness and without hindrance!

2 Cor 6:3-10: "We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything."

- Do you ever pray this for yourself? Do you pray this way for your church? Your community group? Your spouse? Your children? The college students that attend? Our teens? The career group? Does this mark your prayers? Do your prayers rise to God with this fragrance? Or are they predominantly flavored by asking God to make life better for you? To fix all the things that you wish were different about your situation? To remove all discomfort or difficulty – ***so that your life runs smoothly, your world meets your expectations, and life in your kingdom is just like you want and expect it to be!***

Could it be that our failure to pray this way is the cause of a good bit of the spiritual defeat we experience in our lives?

III. Pray for Persistent Obedience to the Will of God (3:4)

- Paul expresses his strong confidence in something he observed about the majority of the believers in this church – ***their present obedience*** to the Word of God Paul had taught them.

- And Paul goes on to express the same deep confidence in their ***ongoing future obedience*** to the commands and expectations set forth in God's Word.

Do you ever pray this way for yourself? Do you ever thank God for the way in which He has helped you not just to understand His Word but to actually obey it?

Many of you are actually obeying more of it than you might think! You have fought hard to obey the moral imperatives that come from the Gospel and have succeeded. Many of you have obeyed the Scripture when it comes to being a person who is honest. You have guarded your integrity. You work very hard to be truthful. You give attention to being merciful, gracious, and kind. You strive to live with a clean conscience toward God and toward others – your friends and your authorities. And when you mess up, you respond like God tells us to respond – you repent and seek forgiveness.

Have you ever prayed and thanked God for your present obedience? Do you ever pray that God will help you to keep on obeying tomorrow when it gets hard or your grow weary and discouraged or you face temptation from a “friend”?

What about future, ongoing obedience? With gratitude for today's obedience, are you asking God for tomorrow? What will strengthen you resolve to obey in the face of rejection, resistance, hardship, or even persecution as you live out the Gospel before others and announce it truth to those who most need to hear both its compelling invitation and grace-energized demands?

What will help you keep on keeping on living for this Harvest?

IV. Pray for Progressive Growth in the Ways of God (3:5)

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

Direct – to lead, to incline, to embrace a way of life that is

- Grounded in certain spiritual realities – the love of God
- Modeled by Divine Example – the patient waiting of Christ
- Displayed in joyful experience – daily perseverance

A. Experiencing and Displaying the Love of God

- Do you understand the immense, intense, intimate love God has for you? Do you understand the deep delight and pleasure God takes in you?
- Most of us live our lives knowing that God loves us but wondering if he really likes us. We silently wonder, “Does He love me because he has to? Because I prayed the prayer and said the magic words He saved me but now He is stuck loving me?”
- If we could see for one unfiltered moment the true nature, the depth and heat of God’s love for us – the intense pleasure and deep joy God takes in us – it would change everything!
- And we need to pray and ask God to help us see and believe this – so that we can model it! So what is the proof?

B. Remembering and Reflect the Endurance of Christ

- **The Father** loving Jesus with intense delight and out of that love giving to him a people for His name.
- **Jesus** loving the Father enough to give up His rights and his life to glorify the Father by dying in the place of those people
- **The Spirit** delighting in both the Father and Son and wanting the whole world to know and experience that love by drawing those people and sanctifying them so they would experience and share in this amazing love from God and from Jesus!

- So that they would become like Jesus and spread this love to the world just like Jesus did when he was on earth – in spite of suffering, persecution, and even death!

Conclusion:

47 words intended by God to change you and help you write a powerful gospel story through your life that will make an eternal difference in the life of others around you.

So ... what are these ancients words speaking to you this morning?

- A. *Are you allowing the word of God to run freely in your life this morning? Are you receiving its particular ministry to you with joy or have you convinced yourself that it is fine, given your situation, to resist?*
- B. *Are you praying that God will give you boldness to proclaim the wonderful message of Jesus to others – even in the midst of resistance and opposition? Have you considered that the very difficulties, trials, and pressures you are begging God to remove may be the very way in which God intends to spread the Gospel through you?*
- C. *Are you asking God to strengthen you, enable you, and give you grace for obedience? Have you thanked Him for the obedience you are rendering or are you overly focused on all the places in your life where you wish there were greater obedience? Are you humbly but confidently asking Him for future grace for future obedience?*
- D. *Are you resting in the immense love that God has for you – no matter where you are or what you have done? Have you reflected in awe on the depth of that love that was displayed and declared unmistakably, undeniably, and irrevocably by Jesus on the cross?*

Digging Deeper – Beyond the Pulpit

Working through this paragraph and allowing the impact of this powerful prayer to speak to me as I prepared to deliver this truth on Sunday was refreshing, convicting, and encouraging – something that should happen to each of us when God uses His Word to shape our thinking and guide our living.

As is always the case, there is so much more that can be said (and perhaps should be said) about a text of Scripture than can be said in the context and constraints of a single sermon no matter how well delivered. With that in mind, this section of the notes are intended to take you along on the journey I traveled as I explored the contours of this amazing passage.

Background

The city of Thessalonica was founded in 316 BC by Cassander, one of the four main generals in Alexander the Great's army. Cassander married Alexander's half-sister and named this city after her. So, the city had deep Greek roots and was both prominent and important in the home kingdom (Macedonia) of Alexander's vast empire.

When Macedonia became an important Roman province in 146 BC, Thessalonica became its capital city and functioned as a 2nd Rome for that part of the empire – sort of a “Rome away from Rome.” Anything you would expect to find, see, or experience in Rome, you could find, see, or experience at Thessalonica.

Almost a hundred years later, three men arrived in this city having come from Philippi – Paul, Timothy, and Silas. They came into the city bruised and battered, bearing the marks of a severe beating. But they came with an amazing, unbelievable story about the arrival of an

anointed appointed champion of a God unfamiliar to all of the city except its Jewish citizens.

When these three men opened their mouths and began to talk about this message – the gospel word about Jesus – an amazing, unexplainable thing happened – those who heard began to believe! They received this word even though it was costly to do so. They received it in spite of affliction and they did so joyfully because the Holy Spirit was at work in them helping them to receive and believe those who had come among them announcing this message (1 Thess 1:6).

Consequently, many in this city turned to God from idols to worship and serve the true and living God and were confidently waiting for the return from Heaven of His Son Jesus. And on top of all of this, they had come to believe two amazing, unbelievable things about this Jesus – God had raised Him from the dead; and He would deliver them from the coming wrath of God upon sin and sinners.

Their belief in this gospel had transformed them into a spiritually fervent band of believers deeply committed to the truth they had heard, fervent in love for each other, and fruitful by grace in their labor for Christ – and the entire region had heard what had happened to them (1 Thess 1:7-8).

But – their faithful living, fervent love, and fruitful labor was not unnoticed nor was it always well-received. In fact, Paul warned them and encouraged them to remain faithful in the face of relentless opposition and ruthless persecution knowing that God would strengthen and establish them and that He would deal justly with their opponents (2 Thess 1:5-12).

Context

This paragraph (2 Thess 3:1-5) is the fourth prayer that Paul records in these three brief chapters. The first prayer is expressed in 1:3-4 where Paul expresses gratitude to God for their growing faith toward God, their abounding love for each other, and their steadfast faith in the midst of persecution and affliction that had come upon them because they had become believers. The second prayer is found in 1:11-12 where Paul prays that God would make these believers worthy of the calling He had given them through the gospel. Paul described what a worthy walk looks like in Ephesians – a walk of unity in the church of God, distinctive holiness in a pagan culture, marked by love, light, wisdom, and fidelity in the midst of spiritual warfare (see the “walk” passages in Ephesians 4:1:1-16; 4:17-32; 5:1-7; 5:8-14; 5:15-21; 6:10-20). He prayed that God would bring to fruition every good resolve, and every good work that was rising up out of faith as He impelled them forward in the spread the gospel. And he prayed that in all of this, Christ would be glorified by them, and they would be glorified by Christ. The third prayer Paul prayed is in 2:13-15 where he expresses thankfulness for God’s gracious and glorious calling of them and for their ministry to extend that same glorious calling to others that God had appointed to eternal life. He concludes this third prayer by asking God to comfort/strengthen their inner man and to establish/stabilize them in every good work and every good word.

So, this little band of new believers in Thessalonica became the object of the prayers of the one who had first brought the gospel to them. Paul wants us to connect their success, their stability, and their endurance in the face of all the opposition and resistance they were encountering to two things: their conviction about and commitment to the Word of God and the prayers that were being prayed on their behalf.

In the final chapter, Paul actually invites them to join him in this kind of praying! And that is the text out of which this message is drawn (3:1-5). This text is born out of prior praying and models the kind of praying that strengthens a church for the work of the Gospel!

Paul and these beloved Christians at Thessalonica shared a common faith, a common Lord, a common message, a common mission, and a common experience – suffering and persecution on account of that message and in that mission. But they also had common access to a faithful, just, wise, and powerful God who promised to strengthen, stabilize, and sustain in the mission and for His glory.

Digging into the Text

3:1 Pray that the Word of the Lord – the message from the Lord and about the Lord – would run freely and be received properly. The term “run” is referenced in Psalm 147:15 – *He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly*. The term “run” was used in Paul’s day in two primary ways. First, it was used in a military context to describe a runner carrying important news about the battle in the heat of the conflict. Second, it was used in athletic contexts to describe marathon runners. The image Paul intends us to have is of a runner running hard in the face of obstacles (athletics) and opposition (battle). This runner is rapidly advancing in spite of the obstacles and opposition – his message is spreading successfully and rapidly.

Paul also prays that this “word” would be received a certain way – that it would be honored by those who heard it just as it had been received by the Thessalonians themselves (1 Thess 1:6; 9-10). The term “honor” speaks to the way this message would be respected and valued by those who heard it for the first time as it was by those in Antioch in Acts 13:48-49 *“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. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.”

3:2 After praying for the powerful success of the Gospel message, Paul now prays for the protection and perseverance of the messengers of that Gospel. And Paul was well acquainted with the kind of persecution that would come to God’s messengers – both because he himself had experienced this opposition and because at time he himself had been one of the oppressors and opponents of the message he now preached. He knew the lengths to which he had gone to stop the message and to oppose those who announced it to the world. Paul’s own testimony was that he persecuted the church violently in his attempt to destroy it (Gal 1:13-14). He joyfully consented to the brutal execution of Stephen (Acts 8:1). And for years he breathed out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord (Acts 9:1-2). Paul knew from his own involvement that this message would be ruthless opposed and its messengers would be relentlessly persecuted.

This intense persecution would come from human opponents, but in reality, it was directed and energized by a force much more powerful than any human hatred – all of this was energized by Satan himself.

And in the face of all of this, Paul prayed that the Thessalonians would experience what he himself had experienced – that in the face of beatings, deprivation, loneliness, pressure, despair, shipwreck, hunger, nakedness, snakebite, betrayal, imprisonment, and eventual death (2 Cor 6:3-10) – God would by these means advance the Gospel to Rome itself and, once there, Paul would proclaim the kingdom of God and teach the truth about Jesu with all boldness and without hindrance (Acts 28:28-31).

3:3-4 He could pray in this manner with confidence because He was resolutely convinced on an important life-sustaining spiritual reality – God is faithful! And out of His faithfulness, God will sustain and preserve the messengers of His gospel in the face of relentless opposition and crushing pressure. Just like the runners would run freely in the midst of heavy fire in battle, here these messengers would be sustained and preserved in the midst of the most pressing and perilous of circumstances. And the evidence of God’s sustaining them is in their ongoing obedience to the demands of the gospel message they are announcing to the world that is persecuting them.

In spite of the cost they may have to pay for announcing the Gospel, in the face of persecution, and under the extreme crushing pressure of adversity and affliction – God would grant them grace that would enable and energize ongoing, joy-filled obedience to this gospel.

This obedience is not grudgingly given nor is it the product of mere human determination; it is the product of something that only God can give – grace! Enablement that comes from Him.

3:5 And for all of this to actually happen, God would have to do something in them. He would have to “*direct*” their hearts – he would have to shape their inner disposition, their heart inclination, their internal conviction, their life orientation.

And this orientation would be shaped by two important realities so that those in whose hearts God had so directed would actually reflect and display the realities they had seen and tasted.

Reality 1: the amazing, intense love of God. As image-bearers we have the capacity to love – and we do. We have categories by which we understand and experience love. We know what it is like to love and

experience the love of a mom or dad. We know how to love and receive love as a child or a sibling. As a friend. As a spouse. But we do not have a category to experience love in the way that God knows it and experiences it between the members of the Trinity. The blazing, white hot intensity of perfect, joy-filled love that the Father has for the Son and that the Son has for the Father all of which the Spirit witnesses and experiences. We have no category for this. We can imagine it dimly. We can long for it – actually we do long for it because we were created to receive it! But we have no way of knowing it or experiencing it, much less displaying it or being channels of it. Until God chose to bring us into this amazing experience – and the Spirit that indwells us actually “sheds/pours out this love in our hearts” (Rom 5:5).

Reality 2: In order to make it possible for us to know and see this love and then to receive and experience it, Jesus engaged in an incomprehensible act of love to the Father and for us – He endured with joy the intense suffering of the cross.

Paul’s prayer ends with this amazing request: that God would help us to experience and rejoice in the amazing love God has for us and that Christ displayed to us so that we would savor the amazing taste of that love and daily drink deeply of its sustaining life. And then that from that sustenance, we would carry that love to others even if it means enduring what Christ endured to bring it to other thirsty souls.

This is the fuel that will advance the gospel in the world. This is what will motivate reapers to go anywhere, endure anything, and suffer any price that others may hear and taste the goodness of God in the gospel of Christ that they are joyfully announcing!

Living out the Truth

Personally

How do the realities in this prayer affect you as you reflect on them? How might the love of God and the endurance of Christ produce a joy-filled embrace of gospel mission? Where might the patient obedience and perseverance of Christ shape your own gospel obedience and perseverance?

Where might God want you to run with the word of Christ? What obstacles or opposition might you face?

Family

In what ways can you reflect what you are experiencing of God's love and Christ's perseverance to your wife, your husband, your children, your parents, your siblings?

The first context where the gospel's amazing power and realities should be experienced and displayed is in the relationships we have with our immediate family. So how might this prayer help us, shape our thinking, encourage us, and enable us to reflect on these important and amazing realities as a family?

Where might my children graciously need to see and experience more of God's love from me? Where might my parents need to see and experience more of Christ's love and obedience from me?

Vocationally

What opposition and resistance am I experiencing as I live out the truth of the Gospel in my workplace? How does this passage inform and equip me to endure whatever the gospel brings with joy and

perseverance? Who in my circle of influence might be an opponent today that might, like Paul, become a proclaimer of the gospel they are currently opposing? How does this passage help me while I wait for God to bring this about? How should it shape my living, reactions and responses, and my praying for this individual?

Help – I am a Teen!! How does this work for me?

Sometimes listening to a sermon can create as many questions as answers – and sometimes more questions than answers. Sermons that are designed to be helpful can sometimes make life more complicated – especially if you can't interact with the person delivering the sermon in real-time. By the time you get around to having a conversation, the moment has passed, and the opportunity lost.

So, with that in mind, this section of the sermon is my attempt to connect the sermon with your life as a young person. I am assuming that you are making a genuine attempt to connect your faith (what you believe) to your life (what you are experiencing) just as I and a whole bunch of others are trying to do in our own lives.

Sometimes there are things that happen that discourage or dishearten us in our journey – someone called these moments “FaithBusters”. This passage provides some ammunition that may help us break through those moments by actually building our faith. Here are a few to think about:

FaithBuster #1 – there is no way I can think of where I could honestly see myself sharing Jesus in a meaningful way with another person in my peer circle. I know I should, but practically speaking – I don't know in the world I could possibly do this. So while the sermon was clear, I don't know quite what to do with this difficult reality in my life. I feel

guilty about this – but my fear actually is real and has been a showstopper in this area for me. I am not a bold person at all in this area – actually, I am quite fearful when it comes to talking about Jesus with others.

FaithBuilder #1 – Paul anticipated this reality in all of our lives, not just yours as a young person. Boldness is not the same as fearlessness. Lots of fearful people do bold things. Boldness means opening up your mouth and speaking up in spite of your fear. And while you may not be ready to speak up about Jesus to other people, that is not exactly where Paul starts in this text. He actually is encouraging you to speak to God about the gospel. And that is something all of us can do – we can take time every day to ask God to advance the gospel somewhere in the world through someone we know. So perhaps you can take time on your way to school each day to quietly talk to God about the gospel and ask Him to advance the gospel in a country where you have a friend or where you took a mission trip.

FaithBuster #2 – If I speak up for Jesus, I will face ridicule and opposition. There will be a price and I am not sure I can pay that price or even want to face the consequences socially and relationally for speaking up at my school or at my job or on my team. What can I do?

FaithBuilder #2 – You can pray and ask God to personally protect you as you live for him in each of these contexts. Specifically, you can identify those individuals who appear most hostile to the gospel and to you and start thinking of them as future apostle Paul's. Sounds crazy, I know. But that is exactly what happened to the apostle Paul – he was about as hostile and ruthless as a person could be against the Gospel and against Christians. But God intervened in his life and totally transformed him. Perhaps your private prayers for one or two specific

people will result in them turning to Christ and becoming champions for His gospel.

Faithbuster #3 – Paul praised these people for their obedience – to be honest, that is a huge struggle for me. It is hard for me to obey and to submit to my parents and to other authorities. I have repented and determined to do better about this but I generally relapse and find myself right back where I started. Frankly, I am embarrassed by this and have a hard time talking to my parents because I feel like I have let them down too many times in the past.

FaithBuilder #3 – Notice that Paul praised these people for their obedience instead of focusing on their disobedience. In other words, we tend to get overwhelmed at the areas where we struggle to obey without stopping to think about the many areas where God has helped us obey. I am not trying to minimize your struggle in an area where obedience may be lacking. But suspend that area for a moment and focus instead on identifying the many areas in your life where God has helped you to obey His Word. List out those areas mentally and thank Him for helping you. I suspect that you are succeeding in obedience in much greater ways than you may initially think. Once you see how much God has helped you to obey in so many areas of your life, you can come to Him with fresh hope and confidence to ask for His help in the one area where you need His help to obey.

FaithBuster #4 – I struggle with texts like this and prayers like this because I feel like a spiritual failure. I have made tons of decisions to share my faith, to speak up, or to stop a sinful pattern in my life and at some point I have not been able to live up to my commitments. I am tired, frustrated, and discouraged. I am disappointed in myself and I know God is as well.

FaithBuilder #4 – Paul points each of us to an amazing reality – the passionate love of God for each of us. We actually don't have a category to fully understand this love. We know what it is like to receive love from our parents and from our siblings. We even know what it feels like to be loved by a friend. But we really don't have a category to know what it is like to be loved by someone like God.

Imagine the intense love that God the Father has for Jesus and that Jesus has for God the Father. It is almost impossible to understand. We need help and there is someone who can help – the Holy Spirit. He witnesses this blazing intense love between Jesus and His Father and He himself experiences this love. And so that you and I will experience it, the Spirit comes and indwells us and causes us to know instinctively that God loves us even when we blow it. No matter what we have done or not done or how far off the path we have wandered – God loves us unconditionally. Perhaps the greatest example of this is the Father who ran to welcome his prodigal son home! And the greatest evidence of this is what Jesus did to make this love possible for us – dying on a cross!

So the next time Satan whispers something in your ear that makes you wonder if God still loves you – ask God to continue to assure your heart of His deep love for you and remind yourself that Jesus went to the cross out of His deep love for you!

Worship FaithBuilder – sometimes a song can help say something in powerful ways that impact our soul and strengthen our faith. There are two hymns that speak deeply about this amazing truth Paul talks about in 2 Thess 3:5. First, Lauren Daigle's *How Can It Be* is a powerful personal celebration of this truth. Second, Aaron Keyes wrote a new version of a hymn we should all be familiar with – *And Can It Be*. As a young person – the messages of these songs are powerful summaries of

what Paul is saying when he points us to the love of God and the perseverance of Christ. Listen to each song several times – think deeply and pray thankfully about the message each hymn.

Note: Here are the links to both hymns. If you don't have access to Spotify, the youtube version is available but you may have to skip through some opening advertisements.

And Can It Be? Aaron Keys

https://open.spotify.com/track/3Z6nm5jGyvKnjNMCD6b1uR?si=kBgtBzXHQoeOMNeVi_5XXg

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=eDiRUYD-3YE&feature=share>

How Can It Be? Lauren Daigle

<https://youtu.be/Wt5X91ciE6Y>

<https://open.spotify.com/track/27wkiHSSNOB0TyfXzNziaD?si=A4Rb5C1mQ26M6xgAsQfyYA>