

Dr. Scott Fahlman has been working on artificial intelligence (simply known as “A.I.”) for his entire 40-year career at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University. ... In particular... Fahlman wants to revolutionize our human-computer interactions. ... But on September 19, 1982... he created something that he speculates has (and always will) overshadow and outlast any of his accomplishments in his work with artificial intelligence.

(You see) Dr. Scott Fahlman is the inventor of the emoticon... those little symbols to depict your emotion when you don't want to use words... as you text a message or send an email to someone. It all started with "the smiley."

Fahlman invented the smiley when his colleagues at the university were having trouble recognizing sarcasm in their electronic communications. "The need for a 'joke marker' arose after a series of posts on the campus faculty web site started speculating about various things that could happen in a free-falling elevator. Someone asked: "*Would a pigeon in the elevator keep flying?*" Another added: "*Would a lit candle go out?*" And on-and-on they came. "*What would a puddle of mercury do?*" ... Several "heady" professors had to be told that the thread of posts were all "in jest."

As Fahlman says in the story: "What's amusing is that [after] a forty-year career working on artificial intelligence — I could unravel every unsolved issue with AI... and I know what the first line of my obituary would be: " *Dr. Fahlman is the guy who invented the emoticon.*" ... [P A U S E] ...

What will you be remembered for?

Do you ever give any thought about your legacy? ... Will there be any remembered impact your life has had on others? ... An inheritance for the kids? ...nieces? ...nephews? ... Stories about adventures in your life? ...Great times spent together? ... Talents you possessed? ... Things you have made? ... Lessons you have taught?

(Now) I'm guessing that many of us want to leave behind a spiritual influence. ... So... what can you do right now that will increase it?

Today... our passage in 1 Thessalonians brings up one thing you can start doing today... that would have tremendous impact for being remembered.... My hope is that our entire church develops a collective and powerful legacy – because of our diligently doing this.

We need to fervently pray for one another. Now... I am not talking about frivolous... rote... “*God, please help Mrs. Jones...*” ... “*God be with Fred Smith...*” ... or “*Please bless all the people in our church...*” ... Those are shallow... thoughtless... maybe even flippant. ... But (you know what?)... and this might surprise you... but... neither am I talking about a prayer that would be along the lines of: “*Lord, Jimmy Johnson is being persecuted for being a Christian at work. Co-workers ridicule him and steal his personal belongings. Even his boss demeans him in front of others and promotes others who are less deserving than he is to higher positions. God, please stop his persecution. Let there be an easing up of his difficulties... Have his co-workers give him respect... Show them that what they’re doing is wrong...*”

Perhaps after evaluating how Paul prayed for the Thessalonians in our passage today... we will have a better idea... about affectively praying for

other members of our church... and having a significant impact. Isn't that something worth being known for... as someone who spiritually influenced others through affective praying?

1 Thessalonians is like so many of Paul's letters. In several... he suddenly *bursts* into outright prayer. Each of them provide a model for how we can impact other lives. Today's is no exception. But let's recognize it as a model – **not** words to repeat. ... What is it that Paul models for us? ... He models *A prayer centered around thanksgiving (for) and intercession (on behalf) of others.*

We will see that he requests four things. **#1.** Paul asked that God would make it possible for him to return and minister to them in person. ... Now God did **not** grant him this request immediately. God had a better plan. Instead He had Paul write letters. ... And I am glad He did... because these letters (1st and 2nd Thessalonians) have strengthened the faith of countless believers through the ages. ... However Paul and Silas did (eventually) return (in person) to Thessalonica on Paul's 3rd missionary journey... according to Acts 20:1-4.

#2. Paul prayed that their faith would mature. ... Paul was well aware of the harsh persecution that the Thessalonians were going through. But Paul **doesn't** pray for their relief (as you or I might do.) ... (LISTEN!) God will often answer our praying for mature faith in ourselves and in others by allowing us to **face** trials.

Abraham is a good illustration of this principle. God called him to the land of Canaan... and when he arrived... he discovered a famine. God permitted

that famine so that Abraham's faith might be tested. ... Unfortunately... Abraham failed the test and went down to Egypt for help.

Each step of the way... God brought circumstances to bear on Abraham that forced him to trust God... and grow in his faith. ... (You have heard it said) that faith is like a muscle: it gets stronger with use. ... Abraham had problems with his worldly nephew (Lot.) ... He also had problems with his wife (Sarah) and her handmaid (Hagar.) ... And the ultimate test of faith came when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son (Isaac.)

Faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. ... God tries our faith... not to destroy it... but to develop it. ... Had Abraham not learned to trust God in the famine... he could never have trusted Him in the other difficulties.

Paul prayed that the suffering Christians in Thessalonica might grow in their faith, and God answered his prayer. Paul wrote in his second letter, "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers ... because your faith is growing abundantly" (2 Thes. 1:3).

#3. The next thing Paul prayed for... was that their love might abound. ... Times of suffering can be times of selfishness. Persecuted people often become very self-centered and demanding. What life does to us depends on what life finds in us; and nothing reveals the true inner man like the furnace of affliction. Some people build walls in times of trial, and shut themselves off. Others build bridges and draw closer to the Lord and His people. This was Paul's prayer for these believers, and God answered it:

2 Thessalonians 1:3 (ESV)

³ *We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right,*

because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

#4. Paul requested for them *holiness of life*. ... With this... he referred to the return of Christ... which motivates us (as believers) to live a holy life. Our Lord's return is a source of stability in the Christian life.

Paul's prayer is very instructive for how we need to be praying for everyone in this church. Oh! May you and I be challenged today to fervently pray for every attender... that their faith will mature... their love grow... and their character and conduct be holy and blameless before God. ... Look (now) how Paul did this. (Let's go to the passage.)

1 Thes. 3:9-10

Timothy has just returned from Thessalonica... and brought a report to Paul and Silas that gave them a new lease on life. It has caused them to revive... like water poured on a dying fish.

When Paul was in Thessalonica... after only three weeks... Jewish leaders stirred up mob and chased them out of town. ... Timothy went back for a short visit... and has just returned with a report for Paul and Silas: "*Tell them that we remember them with great affection and are as eager to see them as they are to see us.*"

When Timothy rejoined his senior colleagues and brought them this news (telling them that the faith of the Thessalonian Christians had not wavered under stress)... Paul and Silas were relieved and filled with joy! ... A burden was lifted from their minds... and life seemed good. ... Their relief and joy overflowed in renewed thanksgiving to God; at the same time their

longing to see their Thessalonian friends face to face once more was redoubled.

Paul had received good news from Thessalonica... but he did not relax his disciplined prayer life on their behalf on that account. ... Instead... he redoubled his efforts because he recognized a need they had. ... They needed a better understanding of the second coming of Christ... which he gives them in the next chapter. Paul would have to deal with these issues... (as far as possible)... by mail. ... However... another visit to them was clearly desirable.

Last week... when I previewed verse 10 (and today's message) with you... I kind of laughed at what Paul wrote at the conclusion of verse 10: "*I cant wait to see you and address your shortcomings.*" "*How would you like to get a letter like that from a friend*" – I snickered. Most of us wouldn't. We would cower and perhaps try to find a reason to be out of town... rather than allow them to come and address our shortcomings.

However Paul is not referring to an improper faith... as much as he is acknowledging that there are gaps in their instruction. The Apostle only had 3 weeks or less with them... before they were run out of town on a rail. Paul knew that (like children in eighth grade being plucked from their schools and thrown into a profession)... they needed more instruction in the doctrinal and practical dimensions of the Christian faith.

Wow(!)... was Paul ever burdened for the needs of the Thessalonians! Continuously (night and day) his burden was for these church members. Do you ever pray (night and day) for the needs of fellow church members?

Most people... if they pray continuously... it is for their own needs and desires.

1 Thes 3:11-12

The Thessalonians were already noted for their **love**... but Paul prayed that it might abound — **increase and overflow** —even more! Even if we see obvious signs of God's people around here... sacrificially loving one another... we need to be constantly praying that it will **increase**. Don't ever think this is something we don't need to pray for in this body!

Agapē love is something that we need to fervently and persistently pray for – because it requires God's constant support for us to carry it out.

(LISTEN!) You know... and I know that this kind of love cannot be produced by human ability. We simply don't have the resources (in and of ourselves) to exercise this *agapē* love — the kind of love that looks out for others above ourselves... that gives our very lives by following Christ's lead in sacrificing Himself for the sake of others. ... If left to our own strength... we would run out of gas and start rolling backwards in our every attempt to love. ... Only by God's Spirit are we able to increase and abound in love.

Paul prays that their love would abound toward each other (in the church) – and then overflow that receptacle into the city (and onto the **un**believers.) Love's overflow was to splash all over the very people who were persecuting them. (Now) **this** kind of love **definitely** requires God's intervention.

Perhaps one of the best ways that we can pray for a fellow brother or sister in Christ who is suffering persecution... is to pray for them to be able to love their persecutors. We have been acknowledging the very REAL

possibility that persecution is coming to American Christians. Let's start praying for this NOW.

1 Thes 3:13

Notice carefully what Paul prayed. Paul longed that when Jesus Christ would return... He would find them (1) blameless before men and (2) holy before God. What if you and I diligently prayed for this to happen with every church member...! *“Lord, when Jesus returns, may He find Frank and Lisa Smith blameless before men and holy before God...”*

But also notice that Paul did not pray that they would be sinless. That was impossible. He prayed that they would **be blameless** ... that is... that after they sinned... they would deal with it as God requires... and so be free from any reasonable charge by their fellowmen.

Now... as I get ready to close our brief lesson today on how to leave a spiritual impact on others... let me make a two general suggestions about praying for people in the body of Christ.

First – we need to pray thankfully. ... As you pray for the members of our church... find reasons to offer thanks to God for them. Start off with that. Let it permeate your prayer for them.

But here is an insight I found that astounds me: Paul gives thanks for the Thessalonians – and then he **TELLS THEM** that he is doing it. (LISTEN!) If you tell someone about a specific thing you are thanking God for doing in their life... you will encourage that brother or sister – without feeding their pride or sense of self-importance. (We are talking about some REAL potential for leaving a legacy... aren't we? This is a sure way to have

spiritual influence.) Actively look for God's activity in the lives of others. Thank God for it... and tell the person that you are.

Second – we need to pray in light of eternity. Paul prayed for them with Jesus' second coming in mind. He knew that it would be a time – not only of salvation – but also of judgment. Even believers will come before God and have Him test our hearts. This will not be about getting into Heaven. It will be about receiving eternal rewards. ... If our motives were not right – when we involved ourselves in Spiritual activities here on earth... we will see all those works burned up. (Poof!)

My Christian friend... what kind of life are you living today? ... Do you live in light of eternity? ... Do you pray that others will too?

One of the Christian commentators that I often read when I study a passage for a sermon... is John Phillips. I must confess that I do not know a lot about him... but he often sheds light on passages for me with much insight.

Anyway... John Phillips tells the story that I shall end on. He says: A preacher friend of mine was driving through Louisiana, past vast cotton fields, some years ago. He drove past the weighing station and the cotton wagons. It was very hot, although the sun had just gone down and the day was already dying in the west. He could see a small family, a father, a mother and their children, all coming in from the field. They had picked cotton to the end of the row and were now coming into the weighing station, bringing in their stuffed cotton bags to be weighed. The father was a massive man, well over six feet tall. He wore no shirt, just a pair of khaki pants. His skin glistened with sweat. He had slung over his shoulder a

cotton sack that must have weighed a hundred pounds or more. As he looked back along the row, the preacher could see the others straggling along behind. Besides this man and his family were all kinds of other cotton pickers—short ones, big ones, little ones, young ones, and old ones.

The preacher began to think of the great men of the past—the apostle Paul, Martin Luther, D. L. Moody, Spurgeon, Finney, men who had preached to thousands. At the time, my preacher friend was still a young man, new to the ministry. He compared himself unfavorably with the great preachers of the past.

He looked down the long cotton rows again. The cotton pickers seemed to him to represent the great soul winners of the past, men who had harvested the field for God. As he looked, he saw, way down at the end of the row, some twenty or thirty yards behind the others, a little boy. He couldn't have been more than three feet tall. He had a little cotton bag made from an old flour sack in which he had about five pounds of cotton. The preacher could see him bobbing along back there. He, too, had been out in the hot sun all day. He, too, had been working hard, just as hard as had the big man out in front.

The young preacher bowed his head. He said, "Oh, Lord, I may never be a Jonathan Edwards or a Billy Sunday. I'm only a young preacher, but I want to be like that little boy. I want to keep hard at it. I want to have done all I could and have something in my sack for Jesus when I get to the weighing station in the sky."

When the sun goes down and we arrive at the judgment seat, we shall all be there. We shall all be in at the finish. The important thing is to be faithful, through the burden and heat of the day, and to have something in our sack to put at Jesus' feet.

Please pray fervently and continuously for the members of this church!