

Where are we Going? How should we Pray?

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Turn to 2 Thessalonians 2. We'll look at a two-verse prayer in 2 Thessalonians 2. The prayers of the Bible are so helpful. Obviously, they show us how to pray, how to talk to God. We need to pray, so it's good that God shows us different good ways to pray.

The prayers of the Bible also show us how to think about God, how our relationship with God works. We are his people, and we have a relationship with Almighty God, Maker of heaven and earth. What a remarkable thought! The whole Bible shows us how this relationship works, but the prayers especially, the Psalms and all the other prayers, gives us different sides of what happens between God and us.

In this sermon today, we will ask and answer nine questions, but they boil down to two: where are we going? And, how should we pray? Knowing where we're going helps us understand why we pray the way we pray. Where are we going? Then, how should we pray?

We will actually read three different Scriptures in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The first two tell us where we're going. The third is the actual prayer, showing us how to pray, which will make more sense after we know where we're going. Now 2 Thessalonians 2:14.

God called you through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Th 2:14).

1, How did God call us?

God called us by means of the gospel. However you and I first heard the good news about Jesus the Savior, that was God's way of calling you, and calling me. He called us with the gospel. I did not experience the gospel as God calling me. I thought the gospel was offering me something good for me, that I'd be crazy to turn down. We first believe for many reasons, good and bad.

But this is how it looked from God's side: the gospel was his way of calling us to something.

2, To what did he call us?

To share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is almost certainly not why we believed the gospel and turned to Jesus. No problem, God knows very well what our reasons were. But God is telling why *he* called us, and where *he*'s taking us. He called us because he knew he would glorify Christ immensely, and he wanted us, you and me, to share in that glory.

That's not how we think about the gospel, but that's how God was thinking. God wanted his Son to have followers who would receive glory too, because they followed Christ. *God called you through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

3, What is “glory”?

We will share in his “glory.” What does that mean? What is glory? The Hebrew word for “glory” can also mean “heavy” or “weight.” Picture a person weighed down with wealth, and honour, with position and power and respect. Light and radiant splendor are also a part of this. Majesty and heavy dignity.

In the OT, the bright cloud called the “shekinah,” the God-cloud, got so thick people couldn't stay in the building. God was invisible, but that cloud was somehow his glory. “Glory” somehow sums up this whole package, wealth and respect and position and power and radiant splendor.

Christ emptied himself, and he became a slave. Christ humbled himself, and became obedient, right to death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place, and glorified him, and God wants that glory to spill over onto the followers of Christ. So God used the gospel to call you and me into this, that we would share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, 1 Th 2:12.

4, To what did God call us? (again)

We were urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

Here in 1 Th 2:12, Paul reminds them how he taught them when he was with them in Thessalonica. *We were urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.*

Again, we read about being called. The gospel was actually God calling us. And the core of this call is not to live worthy lives. The core of the call is God saying to us, “come into my kingdom and glory, I want you in my kingdom and glory, believe the gospel and follow my Son, so I can bring you into my kingdom and glory.” That's the call.

In the other verse we read, we were called to share in Christ's glory. Here God wants to bring us into his kingdom and glory. The words are a little different, but it amounts to the same thing. God wants us to enjoy his kingdom and his glory with him. That's where we're going, and from God's side, that was the purpose of the gospel all along, to get us into his kingdom and glory.

We dumb down Christianity quite a bit, don't we. I don't know why, but we do. These Thessalonians were new believers, and had not learned that much, but for Paul, these things were basics.

5, What are we urgent about now?

We urge you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. Worthy lives are not our calling, they are the result of our calling. Our lives shall fit our calling. But it is urgent that our lives must fit our calling. That's what the Christian life is.

This is not the place to describe the Christian life, but to get to the heart of it, soak up the two big nines. Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with nine beatitudes, in Matthew 5. Paul listed nine fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. If we grasp the nine beatitudes, and the nine fruit of the Spirit, we'd have the foundation of the Christian life. In short, love one another as Christ loved us.

We have an unbelievable calling, into God's kingdom and glory, and it is urgent that our lives fit where we are going. And now we are ready for the prayer, in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12.

We constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill your every desire for goodness and your every work of faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified by you, and you by him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

6, It's a prayer: "by his power," "may our God make you worthy," all this "according to the grace of God and the Lord Jesus."

God does this! God helps us live the Christian life, helps us live worthy of our calling. God's grace leads us to good works. We can pray this for ourselves, and for each other. I love this. Prayers like this are the backbone of my own devotional life, and the backbone of my prayers for this church. "God, work in us what pleases you. Make us worthy of our calling." God does this!

The Bible teaches this in many places. If you keep your eyes open you will see them. I was taught that God gave me the resources, and now the choices were up to me. God freed me from bondage to sin, God gave me the Holy Spirit, and then he sat back to see how I would do. That's what I assumed, that now it was up to me and my choice.

I was doing the wrong thing once, when I was younger, and I had to make a hard choice. (Oh, that sounds like I only did the wrong thing once when I was young. I don't mean that.) One of the times when I was doing the wrong thing, I knew what was right, but could not get myself to do it. I told God, "I don't know if you answer prayers like this, but if you can make me willing, I'll do it." God did it! Not right away, but before long I was ready to obey him, and I did.

And then I found more and more Scriptures that had already promised that, and this prayer is one of them. Paul prayed that God would help them live worthy of their calling, because that's one of the great things God does for us, coming from his power and grace.

7, The centre of the prayer request, and how that actually happens.

The centre of this request is that God would make us worthy of our calling. We have been called to share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. God called us into his kingdom and glory. “Come to me, and share my kingdom and glory with me.” That’s our call.

People who have that destiny should act like it *now*, we should live *now* in a way that fits where we’re heading. That’s what it means to live worthy of our calling. The trouble is that we are dark and selfish, pulled around by all kinds of nasty things, so that we don’t live worthy. But God helps, God answers this prayer.

In the prayer, living worthy gets filled out by two other phrases. We pray “*that by his power he may fulfill your every desire for goodness, and your every work of faith.*” Your every desire for goodness. I will think of a way I could be genuinely good, and I will desire to do that, but if I’m left to my own, that’s as far as it will get. My faith in God will suggest to me that I do something, coming from that faith, but if I’m left to my own, that suggestion is as far as it goes.

In the prayer, we ask God by his power to fulfill these things, to see it through, so that it won’t just be a desire or an idea, we will actually do it. *We constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill your every desire for goodness and your every work of faith.*

And folks, the Thessalonians had troubles. They are the only church Paul wrote to that was being persecuted, but their persecutions come up in both letters. In 1 Th 1 Paul says to them, “you welcomed the gospel amidst severe suffering.” In 2 Th 1 Paul writes about “all the persecutions and troubles you are enduring.”

He does not write like that to any other church. But he does not pray for relief! No, he prays that they would live worthy of their calling, so that they can bring glory to Christ, and Christ can bring glory to them. It is not wrong to pray for relief, not at all. But we’re still getting some guidance from this about what’s important.

8, What happens when God answers this prayer?

Let’s read the last half of the prayer again, which is not prayer at all, but telling us why to pray this. “*We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified by you, and you by him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

We’re back to glory again. The first verse we read, from the next chapter, told us that God called us through the gospel so we would share in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. If God answers this prayer that we would live worthy of our calling, then Christ gets glory from us, and we get glory from him.

That means that the future glory has quite a bit to do with our living worthy lives here and now. We pray that by God's power he would help us live worthy lives now *so that* when we meet Lord, he will be glorified by the kind of people we were now, and he will give us glory because of the kind of people we are now. For that to work, we need to live worthy lives. And that takes prayer.

People, we have desires to do something good, and then we do it. Our faith prompts us to do this or that, and then we do it. Our good desires and our faith prompts are actually fulfilled. I see all kinds of this in you. That only happens because God, by his power, is answering prayers like this, and by his power he's seeing to it that we fulfill and complete the things our faith prompts.

We don't do this always, but we do it often enough that we're very different people than if God never completed these desires. That means we can glorify Christ, and he can glorify us, which is what we're really after.

9, What about human choice?

Paul urged them to live lives worthy of their calling. He also prayed to God, that by his power they will live worthy of their calling. Our choice is essential, but it is never enough. Our choice to obey is always necessary, but never sufficient.

Every right thing we've ever done began with our choice and was completed with God's grace and power. Our every act of faith began with our choice and God's power saw it to completion. And prayer is the bridge between the two. We choose and we pray, or we choose and others pray, or others pray and then we choose.

In this way our choices and God's power produce worthy lives that bring glory to Christ and bring us glory from Christ. Amen.

PRAYER: God, we know what to pray. Oh God, make us worthy of our calling. By your power, fulfill our every desire for goodness, and our every work of faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified by us, and we by him, according to your grace, God our Father, and your grace, Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

BENEDICTION: Now may the God of peace equip us with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.