

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 Answers
How to Pray for Missionaries &
How Missionaries Ought to Pray for Churches

Introduction: It is very important that we pray for the missionaries we support. The missionaries a church supports must be able to depend on prayer from the church. When home on furlough, many missionaries give out commitment cards and people can commit to pray or to give (or both). Of the two, prayer is a greater commitment of time and effort than a pledge of money (Shogren, p. 319).

Andrew Murray: “The man who mobilizes the Christian church to pray will make the greatest contribution to world evangelization in history.”

Charles Spurgeon: “I would rather teach one man to pray than ten men to preach.”

At the same time, the Bible gives examples of how missionaries should pray for churches. Today’s passage deals with both.

******What prayer requests did the missionaries have (3:1-5)?** They asked the church to pray that the word of the Lord would speed ahead and be honored and that they would be delivered from evil men (3:1-2).

1. Based on 3:1-2, how can we most effectively pray for our missionaries? *See also Matthew 9:37-38, Romans 15:30-31a, Ephesians 6:18-20, Colossians 4:2-4.* It is important to pray for missionaries.

ESV 1 Thessalonians 5:25 Brothers, pray for us.

ESV Ephesians 6:19-20 [pray] for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Note that he did not ask them to pray him out of prison!).

ESV Colossians 4:3-4 . . . pray . . . for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison - that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Insight: As concerns prayer and evangelism, most of the prayers found in the New Testament are for the effectiveness of the missionaries rather than the salvation of the lost. For example:

ESV Matthew 9:37-18 Then he [Jesus] said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

2. What did Paul mean by the word of the Lord (3:1)? See *1 Thessalonians 1:8*. The context suggests this is a reference to the Gospel message. Earlier the same phrase was used synonymously with the word Gospel (1Th 1:8).

3. In 3:1, Paul wrote of the Gospel spreading and being honored. What standard did Paul give for what constituted a speeding head and honoring of the word of the Lord (3:1)? Compare *1:3-4* and *1 Thessalonians 1:2-10*. The standard is “as happened among you” (the Thessalonians). The believers in Thessalonica accepted the Gospel message from Paul with full conviction despite much affliction and their faith and love were growing.

4. Based on 3:1-2, what are two common responses to the Gospel? Some people honor it and others attack the evangelists.

How did Paul describe those who opposed the Gospel (3:2)? He said they were wicked and evil men who do not have faith.

5. Paul asked them to pray he would be delivered from wicked and evil men (3:2). What does that suggest about in the way in which the Gospel was opposed? See *Romans 15:30-31*, *2 Corinthians 1:8-10*. The opposition to the Gospel was much more than a mere disinterest in it or rejection of it. The opposition involved an active attack on the evangelists themselves, a physical attack from which they needed to be “delivered”.

ESV Romans 15:30-31a I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea . . .

ESV 2 Corinthians 1:8-10 . . . we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

6. Paul likely was in Corinth when he wrote 2 Thessalonians. What wicked and evil men did he encounter there? See *Acts 18:1-17*. Things weren't too bad for Paul in Corinth, perhaps in answer to the prayers of the Thessalonians. God had special work for him there:

ESV Acts 18:9-10 . . . the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."

7. Based on 3:3, what made Paul confident that the Lord would establish the church and guard it against the evil one? Paul's reasoning was based on the fact that the Lord is faithful (*pistis*). Not all men have faith (*pistis*, 3:2b) but the Lord is always faithful (*pistis*, 3:3a).

8. Who is the evil one (3:3)? See *1 Peter 5:8-9*. This is a reference to Satan, who is seeking to destroy the church.

ESV 1 Peter 5:8-9 . . . Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

Application: Don't be fooled. Satan is alive and well on planet earth. It is true he can do what God allows and he has been hobbled so that he cannot ultimately oppose the spread of the Gospel. Yet he is still a foe to be reckoned with.

Note: The Greek here could also be translated, "from evil" (i.e. the evil done by evil men).

In 3:4, what confidence did the missionaries express about the church (3:4)? The missionaries had confidence in the Lord that the church was doing the things they had commanded.

9. What gave these men the authority to command anybody to do anything (3:4)? See *1 Thessalonians 2:13, 4:2, 8*. It was not these men who were to be obeyed so much as it was the Truth they represented. Their message was not their own, but the Lord's.

ESV 1 Thessalonians 2:13 . . . when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God . . .

ESV 1 Thessalonians 4:2 . . . you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

ESV 1 Thessalonians 4:8 . . . whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God . . .

Leadership Insights: Even though biblical church polity is arguably by elder led congregational consensus, it remains a duty of leaders to command obedience to the teachings of Jesus. Properly understood, consensus and command are not incompatible. Shepherds usually lead sheep, not drive them.

10. What commands had been given to the church (3:4)? See *1 Thessalonians 4, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 3:6-12*. In this letter the commands are found previously in 2:15 (hold to the traditions) and next in 3:6-12 (discipline the idle). Back in 1 Thessalonians he had commanded them to live lives pleasing to the Lord (1Ths 4).

What prayer did Paul pray for them in 3:5? Paul prayed that the Lord would direct their hearts to the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ.

11. What does it mean to have your heart directed to the love of God (3:5)? It has been said that the love of God is like the ocean; you can see its beginnings, but you cannot imagine its width and depth. God loves His elect immensely in a way we can scarcely imagine.

12. What does it mean to have your heart directed to the steadfastness of Christ (3:5)?

See Hebrews 12:13.

ESV **Hebrews 12:3** Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

So What?

13. What did we learn about how to pray for missionaries?

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people's minds in gear and gives them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the ESV.
- You can hear a recording of this actual lesson being taught at www.SermonAudio.Com/NTRF

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