

1 Thess. Series: Central Baptist
Living At the End of Time!
3:1-13 -- Message #4
February-March 2023

HOW TO PRAY FOR THE PEOPLE WE LOVE

Delivered by Pastor Tom Cowan

Remember that the Apostle Paul is both a theologian and a pastor. When he writes letters such as Romans, Colossians, Galatians, Ephesians – we go looking for those big solid chunks of theology that teach us truth and doctrine. That’s fine. That’s the mind of the theologian at work. However he also has the heart of a pastor – so woven between these nuggets of truth there are often pastoral and personal comments – notes to share his warm feelings towards people and situations. To be honest, it is easy to bounce over these – thinking that there is no or little substance in them – assuming that they have little to teach us. However that is not the case – sometimes hidden in these personal comments are words that we need to hear. They speak to the heart – they encourage the soul – they remind us about relationships.

That is what I suggest we find in chapter 3
– call reader up.

Here’s what we find in this chapter -- Paul’s heart is just overflowing with love for this church in Thessalonica – it just bursts with joy and love for them – but he cannot be there – so he sends Timothy as his messenger to convey his feelings and desire for them. Timothy comes back with a strong and positive report about how they are doing. Woven all the way through it are his feelings for them often expressed as heart-felt prayer.

I began to think – many of us are parents and grandparents – we may have children who are away from home – out of our immediate influence – perhaps studying or working – many of us are grandparents – again our grand-children are perhaps far away from where we are – we are not always sure how they are doing – Harriet and I have a grand-daughter studying in France – we have a grandson just graduated from Royal Military College in Kingston who tells us that next year he may be posted to Europe to train and assist soldiers in Ukraine – we have other assorted grand-children here and there – so many of us are in exactly the same kind of situation that Paul was in – and what his heart was pounding with was this – we are thinking -- how do we pray for people that we love?

Your children or grandchildren may be walking with the Lord – some may not be – I do not know. But I do know with certainty that this is an issue that tugs at your heart.

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We may have parents we need to pray for – perhaps nieces and nephews that we think about and need to pray for.

Our hearts often pound and ache for those that we love – we feel helpless to help them – like Paul we cannot get to them and hug them – what can we do – perhaps more than we know – we can pray for them – and Paul’s heartbeat gives us some ideas – some starters about what and how to pray for those we love. If you don’t have children – or perhaps are single – it may be that you have a close friend that you care for – and again this will give you a framework – some ideas - about how and what to pray for them.

So here’s where we might start. If there is an over-arching purpose or goal for our prayer – Paul tells us what it is – it is the reason he sent Timothy -- **it is to strengthen and encourage you in your faith.**

Strengthen – Greek word is steroids – we are praying that God would strengthen them. Encourage – same word used to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit – that comes alongside them. We cannot be there to come alongside them and encourage them – but our prayers can come alongside them.

When Harriet and I came to Canada some 55 years ago – it was not easy to communicate to parents back in Scotland. We could not afford the long distance telephone charges; every week we wrote using those blue air mail letters that you folded up. Young folk here haven’t a clue what I am talking about. Today – we can call all over the world without charge – we can Facetime – we can text – we can be in touch anywhere instantly. So there is no excuse for not contacting people we love.

So what do we pray for those whom we love? May I suggest our first step is this – either on your sermon notes or in your mind – write down the name and names of those whom you want to be praying for this morning.

Here are 5 topics in the passage – suggesting what we might pray for.

WE PRAY FOR THEM AS THEY FACE THE TRIALS OF LIFE. (verse 3)

Verse 3 -- so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them.

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Trials does not refer to the temptations of Satan (that comes next) Nor is it some end-time tribulation just before the Messiah returns - but just what happens when life throws stuff in our face. It is the day-to-day pressure that comes just because we are living in the world.

Jesus in John 16:33 uses the same word – he says – in this world you will have trouble (pressure) but take heart – I have overcome the world.

James tells us what these trails can do in us.

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

All of want to be mature and complete – that should be a goal for each of us -- one of the ways we get to achieve that is by working through the trials and struggles that come in daily life – if we learn from them, they produce perseverance – and when that does its work in us – the finished product is our maturity. When we sidestep and avoid them – what that often means is that the lessons we really need to learn are simply postponed until a later date.

Pressure these days may be financial – or university courses or jobs.

It is important to realise that God has not permitted or arranged these tests to trap us or to trip us up and make us fall. God can and does use difficult situations in our lives to test our faith – to make us stronger – to refine us – and so our godly response to times that are difficult will prove the quality of our faith.

So when the people we are praying for tell us that they are having a tough time or a tough day – our prayer is that they will not quit and throw in the towel – rather that they will press on through it. There is a prayer for all of us in those times – it is to pray – Dear Father, what is the secret that lies in this event? In other words, what do I have to learn from this?

**WE PRAY FOR THEM THAT THEY WILL BE STRONG IN THE FACE OF TEMPTATION.
(verse 5)**

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1 Thess. 3:5

I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.

We live in what I call - a seductive and sensual culture. It is easy for people to be seduced in their minds and spirit by forces – evil forces – whose goal is to destroy years of faithful living.

Jesus knew the power of evil.

Matthew 4 – he faces the 3 temptation of Satan – who wants control of his life. Jesus knows that he needs the power of the Word in his life.

Matt. 4:4

“It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’

James 1:12 – Blessed is the man/person who perseveres under trial, because when we has stood the test he will receive the crown of life.

Back in James 1:3 – James used the words trials which we said was a trial in life. Here he uses the same Greek word meaning a trial from Satan.

His point is – things happen in life that come before us – God can use them to make us mature – or Satan can use the very same things to pull us down.

James 1:14-15:

¹⁴but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Notice the order – a tempting situation comes before us – that in itself is not evil -- then it grows into some desire that plants a seed in us – this gives birth to sin which means an act of sin – sins grows and then it gives birth to death – word for birth is the animal word for birthing – it is saying is spawns death. God plants life in us – Satan plants death in us.

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We know that there are all kinds of temptations in our society – we will always be tempted by all kinds of things – our weakness does not lie in the fact that we are tempted – our weakness lies in the fact that we give in.

Satan seldom makes a direct frontal attack – remember in the Chronicles of Narnia – the White Witch tempts and seduces by using Turkish delight. Our prayer may be to challenge those whom we love to recognize the dangers of turkish delight!

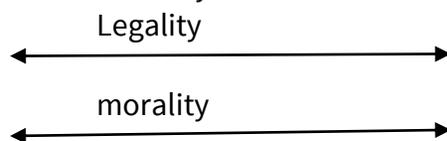
Let me suggest one area in which we need wisdom today in our fast-changing culture – something that we can teach children and young people – this is where we need to see the strength of our internal moral code.

First of all we need to understand the difference between 2 kinds of law.

Legality – this is what the criminal code of Canada allows us to do – when things are legal – it is what you are allowed to do without being arresting. Laws can and will can change to reflect the sociological climate of our day and also the changing moral temperature.

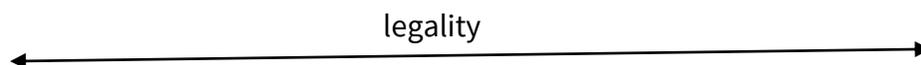
Morality – this is an inner moral law – it is the moral demand of the Kingdom. It is what God and His word call us to. It is what we are expected to do – the moral demand of the Kingdom.

There are 2 ways that these two kinds of law interplay with each other.

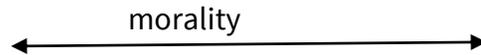


This means - there are many times and occasions in which the legal parameters and the kingdom parameters are the same. The same law and lifestyle is demanded of us whether are Christians or not. Such as traffic laws – red and green apply in the same way .

Next situation -- There will be a growing number of issues in which what is legal is wider or has more latitude than our inner moral code. By the way - We often call this “freedom”!



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We find this shifting/changing legal code in our society in areas such as drugs, sexuality, drugs, alcohol. If we do not have inner moral code – then it is easy to assume that what is legal is automatically moral. No it is not.

This then becomes an easy place in which people with a weaker inner moral code or perhaps no moral code can become tempted and yield to that temptation. We hear such excuses as – but it’s legal – everyone does it – and so on.

To which the answer is – so what!

We are called to follow the moral code of the Kingdom – the Law of God. Just because it is legal – or everyone else does it – does not give us the freedom to follow – we follow a different law – Jeremiah calls this – the law written on our heart.

So our prayer for our friends – our children and our grand-children is to have the commitment to a strong inner moral code – and then to have the strength and the stamina to hold on to that in our seductive society.

In one of his books, Bonhoeffer says simply – Satan demands to have a man (any person) by themselves. Paul in 1st Corinthians say – Bad company ruins good morals.

It means that when we are alone – or in bad company - we are at our most vulnerable. One of the things that we can pray for is for our children and grand-children to find and have a strong Christian friend who will stand with them – and help them to stand firm against the flaming darts of the wicked one. You might read and pray for them to put on the whole armor of God that we read about in Ephesians 6.

I once said to a young woman who was being seduced by the nightlife that was drawing her away from her inner moral code – Satan does not care about you – he wants to use you and to abuse you – then he will discard you - -but God loves you and cares for every inch of you.

WHEN WE PRAY FOR THEM WITH WORDS OF THANKSGIVING (VERSE 9)

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In our human nature – it seems it is so much easier to be critical rather than to be thankful. It is so easy to find fault – to blame others – to be have a critical spirit – we are quick to find fault.

What does it mean to start each day with thankfulness – a text of encouragement – a word of gratitude – a word of appreciation. Once we have stated that – we may find it hard to follow that up with a word of criticism.

Last week – harriet and I were in Walmart – needed to do something in the photography department – making an enlargement in one of their machines – well beyond our technical ability – there was a guy who came to help us – was patient as we struggled trying to do what we wanted – worked with us for about half an hour – eventually got it done -we thanked him – on our way out – we stopped at the customer service department – spoke to person there – said that we wanted to make a report on someone – you could see her eyes roll – another complaint – no I said – we want to write a note of thanks for what this guy had done. I don't really think she had a form for that – had never happened before.

Here's my confession to you -- By my nature I tend to be a critical person – I know that – here is where God was trying to get into the crack in the rim of my soul – He has a way to go – but He will work in me.

Here is a practical challenge – try it for a day – start to those we live – people in the office – people here at Central – people who drive in front of us on the road – that's your training exercise.

We need to understand this -- We will not be able to be thankful for people – especially those whom we love – if we start with criticism or disapproval. It just will not happen. We will not be able to pray into people' lives – to bring God's Word into them – if we start with criticism or disapproval.

Note the full text of verse 9 - **How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?**

Paul says – we have joy in the presence of God because of you. Imagine if we wrote that to the people we love – we have joy in the presence of God because of you – tell them that and start with thankfulness.

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WHEN WE PRAY FOR WHAT WILL HELP THEM FULFILL THEIR FAITH. (verse 11)

What do they need? That seems pretty simple – grand-children – especially if they are away from home – can always use money. We know that. Paul means more than that. Verse 10.

¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

Night and day does not mean once at night and once in the morning – but rather continued prayer.

What is lacking - a strange phrase – what does it mean - it means to repair or restore – eg for a fisherman repairing nets that have been torn and need repaired – or a surgeon settling bones. It has the idea of completing something that needs to be finished – filling up something that is not quite full.

Here is an idea – it sounds really simple – rather than try to guess what is going on in the lives of people we love – what if we asked them – where could I pray for you -- what is it that you need in your life to help you grow – where are you having difficulty – where are you struggling – where is it not coming together for you – and then begin to pray into that. Perhaps it is a book they would like to address some area they are struggling with. You will never know until you ask.

I have a sense that we may not think about doing that – we assume that we know what they need – or where they are struggling in some area – and we may be miles off course.

So what about asking them – and then we pray into that.

The final paragraph in this chapter is a lovely benediction. It is what we call verses 11-13. By the way – the chapter headings and verse numbers we are used to and which help us find our way around the Bible were not part of the original text. Some of them did not appear until after the 1500's.

Here it is – you get the sense that this just bursts forth from Paul's heart – his pen can hardly keep up with what he feels.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. ¹²May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each

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other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.¹³ May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

It gives us the final thing we can pray for --

WHEN WE PRAY FOR THEM TO BE COMPLETE WHOLE MATURE CHRISTIANS.

We sometimes say as we pray for people – those on our list – that we are praying for their spiritual lives – can I suggest we change that. God is not just interested in spiritual lives – that is too narrow – we need to broaden that – because God is interested in their whole lives – all of their lives – everything they do and what they are about – how they spend their leisure time – how school or work is going – where friendships are at – God wants to strengthen their hearts in all these things are more – so that they will be holy and blameless in His presence.

We saw the comment about thankfulness in verse 9. That's the Greek word – eucharist – that's also one of the titles for what we do in these last few minutes this morning.

4 words for this simple service – often different words used by different churches;
Sometimes called --
The Lord's supper
Communion
Breaking of Bread
Eucharist = thanksgiving.

It is how we remember with thanksgiving what Jesus says – as the father has loved me – so I love you – The love of the father flows into Jesus and then overflows into us. We remember it simply in bread and wine.

Sometimes people ask if a church is charismatic – I know what they mean by that especially in terms of the gifts of the Spirit -- I like to think that we are all called to be a eucharistic people – that means a people who are thankful – thankful for all things.

So are we come to this table for the last few minutes – can you ask God to give you a heart of gratitude and thankfulness.

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Take the bread – with thankfulness.

Take the wine with thankfulness.

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ASK WORSHIP TEAM TO COME UP / PEOPLE STAND.

So who have you got in your mind to pray for this morning – child Perhaps a parent – that they might come to know and walk in Christ – and grow into maturity – be strong against temptation and evil – and be blameless and holy in his sight.

Benediction – comes again from Paul writing to this model church.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. ¹²May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.