

August 9, 2026 - 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 - "The Lord is Faithful"

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Preacher: Carman Arroyo

[0:00] Please turn with me to 2 Thessalonians 3, verses 1-5.!

Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored. As happened among you, 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. The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God indeed.

Can we hear me okay today? Or right now? We can hear you? All right. Sweet. So, once again, church, good morning. For those of you who couldn't hear me earlier this morning, my name is Carmen Arroyo.

[1:16] I'm one of the pastor elders here at Steel Valley Church. And I'm back. They let me back into the pulpit. Some of you guys might be thinking, he's back here again already? What's going on?

But anyway, I am very excited to be back here to tell you the good news about Jesus Christ. So, before, amen. As we begin, I do want to ask you guys a question.

Question I want you to think about is when people ask you, how can I pray for you? Now, most of us, when we get those texts from either me or some of the other elders, Brent or Micah or Rick, you might not text us back right away or maybe not know what to say.

Some of you might start talking about the most pressing things that are on your mind, whether it's a medical concern, financial, relational, or anything like that.

And now all of those things are good because our Father does invite us to bring every concern before Him because He cares for us, right?

[2:26] But in this passage this morning, however, Paul asks the church to pray for something even greater than his own comfort.

You see, Paul faced real opposition while preaching the gospel, and danger could rise very quickly at a moment's notice. Yet when he asks the Thessalonians to pray for him, he does not begin with his own safety.

He begins with the word of God. He says, Pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored.

Paul wants the gospel to move freely so that people will hear about Jesus Christ, that they will receive the message as God's word and be changed by its power.

At the same time, Paul knows that Thessalonians are facing trials of their own. Now remember, this was a young church. They were frightened.

[3:29] They were scared. We've been reading over the last few weeks about Paul's reassurance to them. And Paul spent only a brief time with them before he himself actually had to leave this persecuted church.

And they also, as we've been reading, have been enduring false teaching and confusion about the return of Jesus Christ.

They could have easily have wondered whether God had forgotten them. But Paul answers this fear, this concern, with one of the clearest and strongest statements in this letter.

But the Lord is faithful. That one truth holds the entire passage together. And the gospel can advance.

The church can endure. And the believers can obey, continue to obey, even when they feel weak and afraid and alone because the Lord is faithful.

[4:42] And that so happens to be the title of today's sermon. And our main point this morning is going to be the faithful Lord advances and preserves.

And Paul develops this truth in three movements. And first, we'll see and we'll call to pray for the word to run. Second, we will call to trust the Lord to preserve.

And third, we are called to ask the Lord to direct our hearts. And so this passage begins by turning our attention outward. And Paul asks the church to pray for the advancement of God's word.

But before we advance any further, let's take a moment and pray. Father God, we thank you. We thank you again for this opportunity to gather as your church, as a people that you have chosen to come and worship and be surrounded by others through your son, Jesus Christ.

Father, we pray for those who are here that are struggling, that are maybe on the fence, that you move within them, that their eyes are opened, that their ears can hear, and that their heart is softened.

[6:08] Father, we lift all of this up in your son's holy name. Amen. Amen. So first, we're going to start with section one, pray for the word to run.

So let's go ahead and look again at verse one, where it says, finally, brothers, pray for us. So we were just going over the last few weeks at the end of chapter two, Paul prayed for the Thessalonians and now he asks them to pray for him and his fellow laborers in Christ, co-laborers in Christ, Silvanus and Timothy.

Paul was an apostle who had just seen the risen Christ and planted churches throughout much of the Roman Empire, yet, he never thought that that experience, that his position as an apostle, made him independent of the prayers of ordinary people.

He understood something that we often forget, don't we? That growing in Christ does not make us independent. That the fact that the more mature we become in Christ, the more important it is for us to recognize our need for God.

Because we see that Paul could preach clearly, he could reason from the Bible, and he could endure persecution, yet, he could not open the eyes of the blind or give life to a dead heart.

[7:49] Only God can do that. This is why prayer and preaching belong together.

prayer. We proclaim the truth because God commands us to speak and we pray because only God can make that truth effective in the heart.

Prayer does not give God information that he didn't have or that he lacked, nor convince him of doing something that went against his will to become more gracious.

No, prayer is one of the means he has appointed to carry out his will. God ordains not only the outcome, but also the prayers through which he brings that outcome about.

Does that make sense? some people hear that God rules over everything, that he's in control of everything, and they conclude that our prayers don't matter because God knows the outcome, right?

[9:04] But I want us to see here that Paul reaches the actual opposite conclusion because God rules, prayers matter, because when we pray, we're not sending our prayers up to some mysterious being in the universe.

We are sending our prayers to the being that created the universe, that created time, that created every single thing that we have. So when we partake in prayer with this almighty God, we are participating with him, and we are giving to him the glory and the worship that he deserves. we are children, and we take part of this work, this glorious work that he has done.

And so Paul says, pray for us. Church, I want you to pray for those who are preaching, who are teaching, who are on missionary trips, either abroad or even here, that are going into areas that they may be persecuted, that they may die.

I want you to pray for them. And pray for every believer who has an opportunity to speak about Christ. You don't have to be a preacher, you don't have to be a teacher, you don't have to be a missionary.

[10:27] You are commanded to speak about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pray for each other. Ask God to make them faithful, courageous, clear, and fully dependent upon him.

Because Paul's request, however, reaches beyond the needs of the messenger. His first concern is what actually happens to the message.

That the word of the Lord may speed ahead. We continue reading. That the word of the Lord may speed ahead.

I want us to think of a runner that is moving very quickly and freely, even when others try to block him. While I was thinking about this, the Rocky montage in my head started popping up.

Where he woke up early Philadelphia in the first movie. It was darkness and he was running and there was cars in the way, there was railroad tracks. And he got to his destination.

[11:42] And in the second one, they did a similar montage. And it was the same thing. He kept on running through the crowds, cheering him on, through the cars and the benches he hurtled over them, actually.

See, Paul wants the word of God to advance without any hindrance. Because the gospel is not some type of artifact that the church needs to protect, that the church needs to put behind a glass to make sure it's okay.

No, it is the living news for people who are living under judgment, under sin, that there is life, that there is forgiveness.

It doesn't need to be protected and buried away. It needs to be proclaimed. Because Christ Jesus, this gospel, this word, because he is the eternal son who lived a perfect and obedient life.

Though he had no sin of his own, he died beneath the judgment and rose again on the third day and is sitting at the father's right hand.

[13:09] Forgiveness and eternal life are offered to everyone who turns from sin. and believes in him. A church can affirm every essential doctrine and lose this apostolic urgency.

We can become so focused on guarding the truth that we forget why God entrusted it to us in the first place. The truth, yes, it must be protected from error, from perversions, the truth.

But it also must be proclaimed. The question is not only how can our church guard the truth, truth, we must also be asking ourselves how will the truth move through our church, Steel Valley Church, and into Mahoning Valley?

How will it move through our homes, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, and our conversations with our friends, our family members, our children? children? We should regularly pray, Lord, cause your word to run among us and beyond us.

I often think of the quote, I forget who it was, but I don't know if it was Flavel or some other theologian, but it was preach the gospel, die, be forgotten.

[14:54] Amen. Paul also asks that the word be honored.

The word is already glorious because it reveals the glory of God, his holiness, justice, mercy, wisdom, and love. all displayed in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

And Paul wants people to recognize that glory by receiving the gospel in faith and bringing their lives under its authority. That is exactly what happened in Thessalonica.

Paul had already reminded them of the gospel, that the gospel came to them not only in word, but also in power and the Holy Spirit with full conviction.

conversion. They turned from their idols to serve the living God and the word of their conversion traveled so far that Paul could encounter another city and already hear people talking about the work that God had done in Thessalonica.

[16:03] Now Paul asks them to pray that what God had done in their city would happen in other cities and among other people.

Shouldn't the same be true for us? Our lives cannot make the gospel true because its truth is not dependent on us.

So ask yourself, are you revealing the beauty of the gospel or are you hiding it? who are you doing it?

When we see a bitter person learning to forgive, when a proud person beginning to serve, or when a hurting believer continues to trust the God that gave them life through their tears, the world catches a glimpse of what the gospel can do.

we should not merely pray that sermons will be preached, we should ask God to make them fruitful, bringing people to repentance, faith, holiness, and love.

[17:15] We should ask whether the relationships within this church reveal the reconciling power of the gospel.

does the life of our congregation here show that Jesus Christ truly changes people? Yet, wherever the word advances, it will eventually meet resistance.

Paul knew that the gospel would not be welcomed everywhere, and he continues, come with me, that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not all have faith.

One of Paul's words here can carry the idea of something unreasonable or absurd even. There is something deeply irrational about people fighting the very message that offers them life.

love. The guilty reject pardon, and those who need life reject the one who gives it. Now, this does not mean that we stop reasoning with unbelievers.

[18:41] Some of you Calvinists out there might be like, what's the point? If they're not going to believe God already said that they're not going to believe, why should I even bother? Wrong. You're not God. You don't know.

you don't know what God has in store for them. So you reason, you talk. Paul reasoned from the Bible and tried to persuade them and all those who heard him.

Yet, I also want us to see the flip side of it. No argument that we create, no way that we are able to articulate the gospel message, no way that we're able to present it through charisma or logic or anything like that, is going to be able to create life within a heart.

Only God can open a heart. So Paul's main concern is not his own comfort because he knew hardship was coming.

His prayer is not merely, Lord, keep me safe. His deeper concern is, Lord, keep the word moving.

[19:59] This distinction should shape how we pray for gospel workers and believers under persecution. Yes, their safety matters, and it is right to ask God to protect them.

Yet, the advancement of the gospel matters even more. we should pray not only that God would remove opposition, but also that he would keep opposition from silencing the truth.

We pray for the word to run. We preach Christ clearly. We reason from the scriptures. We plead with people to be reconciled to God, and yet, not everyone who hears the gospel will receive it. some will remain indifferent. Some will reject it. Some may even become hostile toward the very message we long for them to believe, but hear this, that does not mean the gospel has failed.

You haven't failed because it's not your message. God hasn't failed because he doesn't. it does not mean we preached the wrong message.

[21:16] It does not mean God has lost control of his mission. The unbelief of man has never been strong enough to overturn the purposes of God.

I want us to notice the contrast Paul gives. He doesn't say, not all have faith, but perhaps things will work out.

No. He says, but the Lord is faithful. People may reject Christ, but Christ does not cease to be faithful.

People may oppose the word, but they cannot overthrow the one who sent it. People may prove faithless. They may prove resistant.

They may prove deceived. That's what they prove.

[22:23] But the Lord never will. Paul now moves from the unbelief of those who oppose the gospel to the faithfulness of the Lord who keeps his people.

As we move on to section two, trust the Lord to preserve. We'll be looking through verses three through four.

I want us to go back to those five words that stand in the center of this passage. But the Lord is faithful. people. The Thessalonians lived among people who did not have faith.

They lived among pagans. But their future did not depend on the character of the world around them. Their future depended on the character of their Lord who never changes and never abandons his promise.

And Paul continues and says, he will establish you. establish. It means to strengthen, to steady, to make firm.

[23:39] Those words would have brought a deep comfort to a church shaken by the false teachings that they've been enduring, pressed by persecution, and tempted to return back to their former way of life.

Paul does not deny their weakness. Instead, he turns their attention away from themselves and to the strength that is in Jesus Christ. This is the foundation of what Christians call the perseverance of the saints.

We do not believe that believers have some natural quality that makes them impossible to move. No, we mean that God keeps those who belong to him.

And because he keeps them, they continue the faith. God's people keep believing because God keeps holding them.

I want us now to imagine a child in rough water holding onto a rope that's attached to a buoy.

[24 : 51] it's dark. There's thunder. There's lightning. The waves are crashing all about him.

There's salt water in his eyes. And he keeps on gripping on, but he feels his hands starting to slip.

He feels his hands starting to get weak. But what that child can't see is that his father behind him with his hands over his sons grasping that same rope.

And the child does not sink. The child perseveres. because this is what we mean by Christian perseverance.

We, as Christians, truly believe, we obey, and we resist temptation. The Bible never treats us as passive.

Yet beneath every act of faithfulness, is the keeping grace of God. We hold fast because Christ holds us fast.

[26 : 12] Paul continues. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. The devil is not merely a picture of human evil.

evil. It's not this fake theological ideological myth. He is a real enemy who tempts, deceives, accuses, and seeks to devour.

The Thessalonians could see the human faces of those who opposed them, but Paul knew that their struggle went deeper. Behind the hostility of men, the evil ones sought to deceive them and pull them away from Christ.

Yet, the enemy does not rule. He works, but God limits him. He poses a real threat, but he is no rival to God.

He may tempt, he may accuse, he may wound the people of Christ. The promise is that the devil will never attack us. The promise is that he cannot destroy us, finally destroy us.

[27 : 35] Because Jesus, the good shepherd, purchased his people with his own blood, and he will not abandon those that he has bought.

For he said himself, I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. Our assurance does not rest in how tightly we hold on to Jesus.

It rests in how firmly he holds us. Yet, the Lord does not keep his people merely so that they will survive.

he keeps them so that they will continue to obey. Because we see here in verse four where Paul says, and we have confidence in the Lord about you.

I want us to notice something here. I want to read it again. And we have confidence in the Lord about you. Paul doesn't say, I have confidence in you.

[28 : 52] No. Because Paul knew human weakness all too well. He did not want to place his ultimate confidence there. His confidence is in the Lord concerning them.

And that little clause in there changes how we read that entire verse, doesn't it? Because there is hope for a weak believer because Christ is strong.

There is hope. Paul continues, you are doing and will do the things that we command.

God's keeping grace does not make obedience optional. produces obedience. Paul does not reason since God is faithful.

God is the faithful one. I can mess up. I can sin. I can continue to live in my ways. But since God is faithful, I'm going to be able to do whatever I want.

[30 : 08] No. He doesn't say that. His confidence in the Lord gives him confidence that the Thessalonians will continue to follow his teaching, including the hard commands that will come later in this letter about those who do become idle and disorderly.

God's rule and human obedience are not enemies.

So many of us think that. That since God is sovereign, then my obedience, how does that fit my theology? How does that fit my worldview?

how does that fit how I see scripture? Maybe you should challenge it against scripture. Maybe you should look at scripture to make that decision.

So, God makes his people firm and therefore they stand and God guards his people and therefore we are able to resist the evil one.

[31 : 33] The proper conclusion is not that if God will keep me, I do not need to pursue holiness. The proper conclusion is because God is keeping me, I can pursue holiness in confidence.

We do not resist temptation because our willpower or go-get-it attitude is enough. We resist it because the Lord guards us and has given us his spirit, his word, and his church. God keeps his people and his grace enables them to continue going. So, having assured them that the Lord will guard their lives, Paul now prays that the Lord will govern their hearts because preservation is not passive and the Lord continually directs our hearts towards what we need most. So, we move on to section three, to ask the Lord to direct your hearts. We'll see here that after declaring his confidence in God's faithfulness, Paul immediately returns back to prayer where it reads, may the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. Again, we see here that Paul doesn't say God is faithful so there's nothing left for me to do. He prays because he trusts that God is faithful.

[33:13] faithful. The Lord's work of making them firm and guarding them is decisive source of their obedience, of our obedience.

Paul's prayer is one of the means God has appointed to bring that obedience about because God's rule does not remove prayer, it gives prayer confidence.

Paul asks the Lord to direct their hearts. That word direct that carries the idea of making paths straight, of removing debris from the pathway.

Every believer needs that work because our hearts do not naturally remain pointed to the Lord or in the right direction.

Over time, comfort can begin to matter more than faithfulness. I don't want to go to church today, it's cold outside, I'm going to have to shovel the driveway.

[34:23] The approval of others can begin to matter more than the truth. Ooh, my family thinks I'm nuts because I love Jesus.

Maybe I should try a different church or not go to church or not read my Bible. Am I nuts?

Anger can settle into the hearts and quietly begin to shape our response. hearts and I think that one's self-explanatory.

Because a heart can wander long before anyone notices, including the heart of the very person it belongs to.

God. Paul knows that commands alone cannot fix this, that his letters cannot fix this. He's already told the Thessalonians what to do, but now he asks God to work beneath their conduct and redirect their desires.

[35:35] A preacher can preach to the ear, a teacher can teach the mind, but only God can change the heart.

That should shape the way we respond when someone we love begins to wander. We should speak the truth with patience and courage, but we should also pray, Lord, direct their hearts. It's also a prayer that we should pray for ourselves when we recognize that desire for approval is beginning to control us. We should pray, Lord, direct my heart.

When comfort becomes more important than obedience, we should say, Lord, direct my heart.

When anger begins to shape the way we speak to another person, we should pray, Lord, direct my heart.

And Paul asks the Lord to direct their hearts towards two realities, two things. First is the love of God.

[36:56] And now, the love of God, that phrase may be God's love for us or our love for God, but I don't think those things are combating each other in this passage at all, because in truth, those things belong together, because God's love for us awakens our love for him.

I don't want us to get it twisted. Don't get that backwards. God's love for us awakens our love for him.

Because the Father sent his son, and Jesus willingly gave himself for us. And at the cross, the righteous one died for the unrighteous, so that the enemies of God could become his children. We did not earn that love. We cannot explain it away by anything worthy within us. When your heart grows cold, merely telling yourself to love God more will not be enough, you must look again to Christ.

Remember what your sin deserved, and then remember what he willingly endured in your place.

Remember, and the second reality is the steadfastness of Christ.

[38:26] Paul directs our attention towards the patient endurance we see perfectly in Christ. Christ. Jesus faced temptation. He faced betrayal, false accusation, rejection, and physical agony.

Yet, none of those things moved him from his father's will. In the garden, knowing exactly what awaited for him on the cross, he prayed, not my will, but yours be done. he then continued toward that cross. His endurance is first the foundation of our salvation. He bore the wrath his people deserved so that we could never face condemnation. our pain in this life, however deep it may be, is never enough for the payment of our sins. Because Jesus has already paid that debt in full. His endurance also becomes a pattern for our own.

[39 : 51] But Jesus is not merely an example standing far away. The risen Christ is present with his people, giving them the grace they need to continue.

I have watched faithful people, couples, relatives, friends, who've aided and prayed for the health of either their spouse or a friend or a family member, really prayed.

Prayed hard enough for some of those of you who may have heard that phrase. And their prayers didn't come out the way that they wanted, nor had hoped.

But what kept them from despair, what kept them from going mad, wasn't something that they had within themselves.

It wasn't their own willpower. But since they believed and they knew who God was, who Christ was, I saw week after week, they returned to the truth that is Jesus Christ, that he had already walked this road, that he had suffered before them, and that he had not left them to walk this road alone.

[41 : 27] That is the endurance of Christ's at work within us. Not merely an example placed before us, because I don't know how some of the things I've been through, it's not within me.

It's not within you unless you believe and the Holy Spirit dwells within you, and his grace is giving you the strength to move on, because you know and you trust that his plan is perfect, and his timing is perfect.

because we see that love and endurance are exactly what believers need in order to obey.

This love for our God, for Jesus, is what makes our obedience joyful. We don't obey because we have to, we obey because we get to.

and endurance keeps us faithful when obedience becomes costly. Without love, the Christian life becomes cold and mechanical, and without endurance, even genuine affection can give way when hardship shows up.

[42 : 52] the Lord gives us both by directing our hearts towards his love and towards the endurance of his son. Look at what Christ has done.

Look at what Christ has done for us, and look to see what he has gone through to make sure that we are rejoined with him forever. forever. We see that if the Lord advances his word and keeps his people and directs their heart, then this passage should shape both how we pray for others and how we pray for ourselves.

And so, I want to give you one practical way to respond to this passage. We have prayer request cards in the chair in the back of you or write in your own notebook, but I want you to choose one person who may not know Christ in your life.

And if you say that you don't know anyone like that, then praise God. I'm sure a majority of us do. I want you to also choose one ministry of either this church or another church or another organization.

I want you to write both of those down. And each day this week, I want you to pray that the word would run to that person and be honored through that ministry. Ask God to open the unbeliever's heart.

[44 : 27] Ask him to give wisdom and courage to those who serve and ask him to produce visible fruit through his word. word. And then I want you to consider your own heart.

Where is it currently wandering away from the love of God or the endurance of Christ? Perhaps you're discouraged because ministry does not appear fruitful.

Perhaps the approval of others has become too important. comfort. Perhaps anger, lust, anxiety, or whatever it may be is beginning to influence your thoughts and your words.

Perhaps you're just too weary of obeying. It's becoming too exhausting. It's becoming too costly.

Wherever your heart is wandering, pray, Lord, direct me into your love and into your endurance of Christ. Pray it. But before we speak about a heart being redirected, we first must examine whether the heart has even been made alive through the faith of Jesus Christ.

[45 : 53] Because Paul says in this very passage, not all have faith. The question is not merely whether you have heard the word. The question is whether or not you have received Christ by faith.

You may understand a great deal about Christianity. You may know biblical language, attend worship, regularly, and agree with many of the Christian teachings that you hear from this pulpit or anyone that you hear from online.

Yet none of those things can make your soul firm or reconcile you to your God. Just knowing doesn't mean nothing.

You need a faithful Savior because Jesus obeyed where you have disobeyed. He endured the judgment your sin deserved, died in the place of the guilty and rose in victory from the grave. Forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life are offered to everyone who turns from their sin and trusts in him. Do not reject the mercy you so desperately need and trust yourself to Jesus Christ.

[47 : 01] He is able to save you completely and he will receive everyone who comes to him in faith.

So whether you're praying for the lost, enduring opposition, or struggling to remain faithful, our confidence rests in the same unchanging truth that he is faithful.

faithful. And as we see here today, Paul has given us these three movements as we look and we pray for the word to run.

We trust the Lord to preserve and we ask the Lord to direct your heart. The gospel does not advance because the church discovers this perfect program or because the preacher becomes more clever enough to persuade everyone.

God gives his word success. The church does not endure because believers possess extraordinary strength. Christ makes his people firm and guards them.

[48 : 12] Lasting obedience does not grow from willpower alone. The Lord redirects wandering hearts into divine love and Christ-like endurance.

silence. Not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful. So when the world appears hindered, the Lord is faithful.

When opposition becomes fierce, the Lord is faithful. When your strength is nearly gone, the Lord is faithful. When your heart begins to wander, the Lord is faithful.

He advances his word. He makes his church firm. He guards his people. And he directs our hearts. The faithful Lord will not abandon the works of his hands.

We pray because ministry depends on him. And we endure because he holds us fast. may may may Gloria Solus Christus for the glory of God in Christ alone.

[49 : 18] Let us pray.