

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

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. ¹² May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each 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. (NIV84)

A PASTOR'S PRAYER

The kinds of things that make a pastor smile: an overflowing parking lot on Sunday morning, Catechism students that know their memory work, a Church Council that loves to lead by example, the sound of young children in worship, when the offerings of the congregation correspond with its wealth, when there are visitors in worship, when those visitors are warmly welcomed, when church feels like a family, when people are built up and encouraged by one another.

Those would be just some of the many things that make your pastor smile – just some of the things that I have to thank God for because of you. What a blessing and a privilege it is to be called to lead the flock here, to be given such an opportunity for joy!

I've only ever had you people to pastor. I've only been at one congregation. But it's not a surprise to hear that the apostle Paul had great amounts of joy from the people that he was privileged to serve. He had many congregations and had grown to know and to love many people in the Lord. Before us is an inspired expression of the love that he had for one particular group and I'm sure that those thoughts and this prayer would be echoed into the hearts and lives of all those groups and all those people that he served.

Pastor Paul's prayer is such a good one – one that you don't have to be a pastor to pray. You can pray it about yourself and pray it about those in your life as well. May God make this **Pastor's Prayer** come true in your life and may he put this prayer on your heart as you pray for your brothers and sisters here, the friends and neighbors that God's put in your life. Lord God, we pray strengthen our faith and deepen our love.

Not that Paul would need an excuse to pray this prayer, but knowing the backstory between Paul and the church in Thessalonica may help these words to have some extra meaning for us. Paul would come to a new place, find a place to gather, go meet people in their lives, preach the Word of God to them. He'd become their pastor and would stay with them for an extended period of time. He would train elders to carry on his work when he left. Sometimes he would leave a companion to pastor a bit in his absence. But he would always decide when it was best to leave and then would find a new group of people to preach the gospel to. God was guiding his way and blessing his effort and the kingdom was growing as a result of Paul's mission work.

It was on Paul's second journey, likely around the year 51 AD that Paul came to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1ff). Paul and Silas had just left Philippi where the jailer and his family were converted. Paul

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and Silas traveled to Thessalonica and there they met with the Jews there and on 3 Sabbaths in a row. They preached to them and taught them that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. But on that third day, there was a riot.

⁵ But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." ⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. ⁹ Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

¹⁰ As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea (Acts 17:1).

Paul was their pastor for 3 weeks. Then the brothers, the church told them to leave – it wasn't safe for them to stay! Paul opened their eyes to Jesus and then 3 weeks later was gone. He preached to them the Christian truths for 3 weeks and then under the cover of darkness, likely without getting to say good-bye, they were forced to leave. You can imagine the angst that must have caused. You can imagine the concern that Paul had for those newbies to the faith.

And I suppose you can imagine Paul's joy when Timothy returned to him with an update on these dearly loved brothers and sisters. In the verses that immediately precede our text, Timothy's report is given that the Thessalonians have remained firm in the new faith that was planted in them. They took to heart the word of God and were living their lives, even in the face of persecution, according to it. What a joy for Pastor Paul to hear that report! He's almost speechless. Pastor Paul, who wrote 13 New Testament books almost doesn't know what to say! ***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? ¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.***

Paul rejoiced to hear that good news about the Thessalonians faith and faithfulness. And he longed for them to stay connected to Jesus so that their faith could be filled even more.

It was a brisk March day in the country near the Rocky Mountains. An old man was out for a drive and when the gas gauge told him he needed to, he pulled into an old fashioned full service gas station. The young attendant came running out to serve the man. He took off the gas cap and began refilling the car. A few moments later, the attendant replaced the gas nozzle, screwed the gas cap back on and then tapped on the driver's door. "All filled up, sir!" he reported. The man handed over the cash that he needed for the fill-up and added a tip and was on his way. He started on his way up that old mountain road, but it was 10 minutes later that the car began to sputter. It hiccupped and coughed and rolled it's way to a peaceful stop. And that's when he looked at the gas gauge. The arrow was buried well below the "E!" "What happened, I just refilled?" he wondered. He thought the tank was full.

"All filled up, sir!" is one of the devil's favorite lies. He knows how powerful the Word is. He knows what happens when a person is regularly in the Word of life. He knows about how grace overflows into gospel proclamation. He knows that people grow stronger in their faith and that Church families grow tighter. He knows that all sorts of spiritually good stuff happens. That's why he taps on our door and says "All filled up!" He wants us to believe that we are full enough. He lies to the newly

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confirmed student – convincing them that they have learned what they need – they’re all filled up. He lies to the mature in the faith. You don’t need to come to Bible Study – you know all that stuff already – you’re all filled up! He lies to the once faithful Christian – worship is kind of repetitive and it’s not exactly the way I would do it. I’m not getting what I want from it, plus I’m good, I’m all filled up. He lies to us when he convinced us that we have enough to face the challenges of life, the temptations of the world. “All filled up!” he says, because he loves to see us broken down on the side of life’s road.

And that’s what we deserve, for the times that we listen to the lies and avoid regular refueling from the Word, for the times that we think we know better than God and go our own way, for the times that reject God’s clear path for our lives, and follow our own selfish and sinful ways. For all those self-centered sins, we deserve to have the wheels come off in our lives. In fact we deserve worse than that – we deserve to pay the price for sin with our own punishment, torture and death.

But it’s to broken down sinners that Jesus comes. He comes to give rest to the weary and peace to the undeserving. He comes to restore life to those who have thrown it away. He comes to give forgiveness to people like you and me. He fills us up with his love, by allowing himself to be filled with our sin. He took all our weakness, rebellion and sin inside of himself and then he bore our punishment on the cross. He offered his body and shed his blood so that we could be forgiven, washed clean, granted new life. He left heaven so that he could return there one day with you and with me. He gave up peace, so that he could administer peace and grace and hope. He fills us with his love and then gives us faith to believe and receive his blessings. He fills us up for real – not with the lies like Satan does – but with rock solid promises of love, protection and everlasting life.

The Pastor’s Prayer continues. *May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.* And after being shown such awesome love, amazing grace, how can we do anything besides reflect that love to others. We’ve been forgiven so much, we can’t help but let go of the grievances we once had and love others the way that Jesus loves us. We’ve been adopted into God’s family, we can’t help but rejoice when a baby is baptized and joins our family of faith. We can’t help but be overjoyed when a visitor comes and wants to join our family of believers. Another person for us to love, another light to help us shine more brightly with the love of Jesus into the world.

What’s your number prayer for your children or for your loved ones? I think even more than to have a good name, to be respected, to have a loving family. Even more than those good things would be – that they stand at your side on Judgement Day, that they keep the faith to the end and join you in the glories of heaven. That was Pastor Paul’s prayer for his family of faith. 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.*

That’s my **Pastor’s Prayer** for you – my Peace family! Even more than a full parking lot, loud kids in church, and A+ students, my prayer is there with Paul’s *that you all will be blameless and holy in the presence of God when Jesus comes.* Everything else is icing on the cake – that’s what truly matters. And what truly matters has been truly given us by a loving and generous Savior. **Lord Jesus, fill us with faith, and deepen our love for one another that we might praise your name here and forever in heaven. Amen.**