

LSB 2 Thessalonians 1

11 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill all your good pleasure for goodness and the work of faith with power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I became interested about a month ago in driving my antique wooden station wagon over a portion of the original 1914 section of the Lincoln Highway that has now been completely bypassed for 95 years. It was out of service by 1927, no longer used, and in such a remote section of Nevada and Utah, there really is no reason to go there.

A few Goshute indians and some ranchers are the only current inhabitants, and you can't cover the entire route because eventually you run up against the fence line of part of the Utah Test and Training Range in the desert south of the Great Salt lake.

But as I was flying over the route in Google Earth I became aware that much of the portion of the road I was investigating was also the route that the Pony Express used for it's 2 year life span. Every 20 miles or so along part of the route, there are remains, usually a round stone corral, sometimes remnants of a stone one room structure of the different Pony Express stations along the way.

A good running horse, in it's prime, could maintain the needed speed for only between 15 - 25 miles depending on the terrain. That was it. Horse out of gas. So the stations were relay points where the riders would jump off of one horse and onto another, almost like a baton race, and continue the journey.

And the riders themselves were only good for 4 or 5 of those stations, a hundred miles or so, and then the next rider in the relay would take over. It only lasted two years but for some reason the romance of the entire ordeal

has burned itself into our national memory like few other endeavors. Why?

Let me read you a classified ad from an 1860's San Francisco newspaper. "Wanted: Young, skinny, wiry fellows." "Not over 18." "Must be expert riders willing to risk daily." "Orphans preferred."

In order to achieve getting a single \$2.50 / ounce piece of paper to it's destination the business plan required a focus of effort that is bizarre to us today. Each ounce of paper carried, in our money today with inflation calculated cost about \$90.

But beyond the monetary cost is the selection process for who will be qualified to achieve each leg of the \$90 ounce of paper's journey. Young. Skinny. Wiry. Fellows. We're looking for guys who are built small and light but stamina requires they not be over 18 years old. To get the horse to go the distance, you need teenage boys who weigh perhaps just 95 to 110 pounds, who are all muscle. Then they have to be expert riders. You might be a good physical candidate but you're clueless with horses. We need the right size guys, with the right stamina, with the right skills, and then they have to be fearless.

Everything along that 100 mile path with 5 different horses underneath you is trying to kill you. Indians. Rivers. Sage brush. Heat. Ice. Cold. Snow. No water. Your own endurance limits. Weather. Lightning. Animals. Everything's trying to kill you along the way, you have to have all of the other qualities and be fearless in your determination. And finally the best one. Orphan's preferred.

Why orphans? Because they are unattached. And being unattached allows focus towards the goal. No distractions from the job. No one at home fretting over you and you fretting over them, losing focus of the single task.

Lean. Mean. Light. Strong. Stamina. Fearless. Unattached. Focus intensity. Zero outside distractions. How did they ever even get one guy? History tells us they had guys standing in line for an opening to answer this

strange call.

There are parallels here to the christian call of duty. Think about the apostle Paul. God is looking for lean, mean, light strong people with stamina who are fearless and who are unattached to the distractions of this world.

We have an impossible task to accomplish and we need focus to the task with no distractions that bind us to this world. Fearless focus on our destination. We need to be unstoppable. Undistracted. Focused on the prize set before us.

I look back on my 52 years as a christian. I got sidelined pretty quickly. I wasn't wired to be single, so that quickly knocks you out of the front line guys riding the horses. But perhaps you can be a station keeper who keeps the guy on the horse moving.

Where am I going with this idealistic introduction? Paul has just introduced in vss. 5 - 10 the most ultimate of ultimate things. The revelation of Jesus Christ in judgement on this world. The dichotomy of those who will be with Christ, In Christ at the unfolding of judgment, or those who will be at war with Christ.

Only 2 possibilities exist. You are a citizen of the Kingdom of God, the authority to reign of God, with Him, In Him, or you are a citizen of the kingdoms of this world, under the authority to reign of Satan, in a rebellion against God and His armies. One or the other.

And we saw last week it doesn't go well for the opposers and haters of God. It goes badly. Eternal destruction in flames, alone, separated from God and light for eternity in black darkness of torments. Forever.

Or. Sins forgiven. Under the Authority and protections and love of God the Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ. Eternal bliss with Him for whom you were created. Dwelling with Him forever in unspeakable wealth and

satisfaction of completeness.

You know, normally, Paul just breaks into prayer for whoever it is he's writing to in the first few verses without the context. Here we have the context of either eternal life or eternal destruction and Paul says, I'm going to take just a minute right here to tell you how I'm praying it will go for you.

Now within *that* context, think about the focus and detachment from this world's things and all of its distractions that the qualified riders of the Pony Express had to have in order to achieve an Olympic relay race, every day.

That's what Paul is praying for. He isn't praying for comfort and ease and all of this world's stuff for the Christians. He's praying for them to be Olympic contenders in the Christian effort in the relay race of this world.

There are other analogies we could compare ourselves to. Think of the Olympic games. The focus and work those athletes set themselves apart to in order to be a contender for the prize.

Think about the necessary constraints of the military service in war time. All focus and effort is toward the single common goal. Win the battle or die.

The little group of Christians at Thessalonica were distinctly separated from the world they had just recently come out of. They still lived in the same region, the same real estate, but everything had changed. In order to HAVE Christ, they had to abandon everything else. Family. Job. Sometimes marriage partner. Parents. Children. Job. Security. Position. Career.

They walked away from some or all of those things in order to belong to Christ. It was a high cost to leave the old kingdom and be in God's kingdom. And Paul prays for them as if they are Olympic contenders or Warriors on a battle front.

Paul prays for three things for these Christians. Let's use the Athletic parallel analogy here to understand what Paul is praying for them.

- *11 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, Preparation for the event is complete. Focused, prepared, ready, no other distractions, ready to compete*
- *and fulfill all your good pleasure for goodness and the work of faith with power, The competition itself. The event.*
- *12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The prize!*

Preparation. Engagement. Win the prize.

We're going to take those verses apart a little bit and pray God will use Paul's example to encourage us to maybe get in the games. But first let's consider what's going on in this example of how to pray for the right things as opposed to praying for all of the wrong things.

Last week after our service as I was driving past the apartments down by the Chevron station I thought of our prayer for Megan who has had a horrific accident.

I'm not convinced the lady is a Christian. There is no fellowship of my spirit with hers over Christian things. Clearly she's in a system of heresy that is working their way to heaven by somehow keeping God's old testament laws. And my prayer went something like this, logically.

God, what difference would it make if You healed her body and she lived 10 more years and then went to hell? What's the point in that prayer. Heal her spiritually first, and perhaps make her physically well too, but that's really not the main thing.

We have a whole long list of physical malady's we're praying for people who don't know God.

Let's consider this from a different angle. You woke up one morning and you're a buyer who has the power to purchase things for some government entity. Sandia National Laboratories. You've got the checkbook and the power to disburse almost unlimited money.

So you buy yourself a new SUV and a house with a three car garage and a vacation package and clothes for your wife and a big diamond ring for her and gameboys for the kids and gardeners and painters and you throw up a new 10,000 sq. ft. shop building for all your toys to sit in.

What's wrong with that picture? You were entrusted with government money collected (stolen) from tax payers in order to purchase things needed for the causes and goals of the government. And you spent the money on yourself! Off to prison you go. Right?

We have been drafted into God's army and given a checkbook to purchase whatever we need in order to fulfil God's ultimate goals. How are you doing with that responsibility. What is it that you're writing checks for in your prayers? James says;

You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. James 4:2b, 3

How much time and mis spent money from God's checkbook are we responsible for. We've got God's corporate checkbook and we write checks to spend on personal items.

Jesus alludes to this in the sermon on the mount. *8 Therefore, do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.* Mt. 6:8

He doesn't say don't ask but He does tell us our Father knows what our needs are. Daily bread is included in the Lord's prayer. Mansions and pleasures and robust health, not so much.

So there is a right way and a wrong way to use God's checkbook. Are we writing checks to further God's agenda, or are we only interested in spending God's money on our own agenda's?

Paul prays for three things for the Christians at Thessalonica. Prepare for the games. Get in the games. Win for the King.

Prepare for battle. *11 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling,*

Get in the battle! *and fulfill all your good pleasure for goodness and the work of faith with power,*

Win for the King! *12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Let's unpack those individually for a few moments.

11 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling,

What does it mean to be worthy of your calling?

In late 1971 as President Nixon was ending the draft the decision was made to stop drafting young men who had received their notices to register for that draft at number 89.

Of all the registrants a numerical equivalent was given to all of the registrants depending on month and date of birth. So numbers 1 - 365, drawn at random from a hat. I was number 85 and they quit at number 89.

So I had 6 weeks to join some other branch of the service before I would need to report to the Army. I thought the Coast Guard might be fun but they rejected me for too many speeding tickets in my '55 T-Bird. So I quickly joined the Naval Air Reserve, and off I went to boot camp in Millington Tennessee.

I had a calling. Uncle Sam said, lucky you. But Uncle Sam doesn't send you to your assignments as needed by him on day one. First Uncle Sam needed to sort of beat me into condition. A haircut so I looked like all of the other recruits. A set of clothes like every other recruit, and a rack to sleep in. We learned that all of our previous freedoms to decide for ourselves were put on hold, we were at the bottom tier of a chain of command and absolute focus and obedience towards a common goal was demanded. Exhausting.

Not so different from the recruiters in 1860 looking for the perfect candidates to ride like the wind for 100 miles every day on 5 horses. The military was in the business of making tough, wiry, young, strong, men who could endure hardship with utter determination of focus. No distractions. We were told if Uncle Sam wanted us to have a family, he would issue us one. Period.

Christians need to go to boot camp. Few ever do. That's what Paul is praying for. *11 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling,*

You have been called into God's army in the battle of the ages against the ruler of this world. That's your calling. I'm stunned how few christians even know that, let alone get ready to do battle. Rather what we see and here lately is, *I didn't sign up for this??* And perhaps you didn't.

Paul tells Timothy, his beloved son in the faith;

12 I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me,

because He regarded me faithful, putting me into service, 1 Tim. 1:12

Same sequence here. Call. Strengthened. Engagement.

Jesus called Paul on the Damascus road. Quite a dramatic calling. But Paul didn't immediately ride off into apostolic perpetuity. I see three things happening in this verse that coincide perfectly with what Paul is asking God to grant to the Thessalonians.

First, Paul was strengthened. He was recruited on the road to Damascus, then he went to boot camp. Strengthened.

Listen to Paul's own autobiographical sketch of his recruitment and boot camp and ultimate service; Galatians 1

15 But when God, who had set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might proclaim Him as good news among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. 18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. 20 (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying!) 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which are in Christ; 23 but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now proclaiming the good news of the faith which he once tried to destroy." 24 And they were glorifying God because of me. Galatians 1:15 - 24

The sequence is no different for Paul than it is for those he is praying for. You get recruited by the recruiter in heaven. Then you go to bootcamp. And then when He considers you faithful, you go into His service. With the ultimate goal that God is glorified because of what He is accomplishing

through us.

So Paul tells the Thessalonians here's how I'm praying for you;

11 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling,

Paul says, I'm praying for your worthiness. You're in boot camp. I'm praying that you'll be found worthy. Faithful. Lean, mean, focused, ready for battle.

Next Paul prays for the ultimate purpose of the bootcamp training;

and fulfill all your good pleasure for goodness and the work of faith with power,

Our culture talks non stop about fulfillment. Ad infinitum ad nauseum. You open up a new page in your browser and 21 little click bait pocket articles pop up to lure me into fulfilling stuff I didn't even know I needed to fulfil. My personal favorite today was; *The 'Untranslatable' Emotions You Never Knew You Had*

No wonder I'm a mess. I've apparently got emotions I don't even have words for that need to be addressed so I can be fulfilled. Sheesh. Poor me! That explains everything. And nothing. Don't worry, I didn't click. Wabi Sabi will have to wait.

Paul has a different formula he's praying for these folks to be fulfilled. You got recruited. You go to boot camp. When you're ready to play, God puts you into the event. And Paul says, when that happens, there is fulfillment.

and fulfill all your good pleasure for goodness and the work of faith with power,

Listen, I know a little bit about this. How I wish I knew a lot more. There

is a satisfaction beyond all other satisfactions when you're in a dialogue with someone and God starts doing miracles right in front of your eyes. Suddenly the lights come on for somebody.

When God uses my mouth, and my gifts, and my body to accomplish something that only He can do, that's a miracle that I get to be a small part of.

Ultimately our goal should be first and foremost expanding God's kingdom and God's holdings in Satan's stolen world. Somehow we are supposed to be doing whatever our particular spiritual gifts are in a common cause together to expand God's kingdom in Satan's world.

It's like a battle and we're supposed to be gaining ground for God's kingdom. Making inroads into Satan's holdings and gaining souls for God's kingdom. That's the main thing. Paul simply refers to that event as *goodness and the work of faith with power*.

Why would we do that? Well, pilgrim, that IS what you signed up for. But beyond that obvious truth, Paul says, there is fulfillment of all your good pleasure.

You think maybe it was a good day for David when he cast off Saul's ridiculous armor and picked up a stone and shut the mouth of Satan's main boaster. And then the whole army who was with Goliath fled.

I mean it was a good day for Israel for sure. But don't you think maybe that was kind of a good day for David? Just inside David.

David says, I don't need all of this bulky worldly armor, all I need is one stone, and God. Down goes Goliath and the philistines flee. Who did that. Like the little pictures on the gas pumps. I DID that. About the only fun you're going to have at the gas pump.

Who did it when Goliath went down and the opposing armies fled. God

did that. But I'll bet it was sort of fun for David. That's what Paul prays for the Thessalonian Christians.

You're recruited. You go to bootcamp. God puts you in the battle. And when God causes miraculous gains for good against evil and you get to be part of the miracle that's real actual fulfillment. You can keep wabi sabi. I want the stuff where God uses me to accomplish something totally impossible except He did it.

I've understood that for 52 years. I really won't settle for less. I want the real stuff.

Finally in Paul's prayer. Why? Why would we do that? Go to bootcamp. Get prepared. Single focus in God's armies. Go into impossible battles against a massively powerful enemy in which we are hopelessly outnumbered.

Fulfillment and the pleasure of that is one thing, but it's not the ultimate motivator. It's a byproduct of actual fulfillment the world will never know. That's something Christians can have that the world has pocket articles out the kazoo and never achieves. Pleasure and fulfillment are real.

But the actual motivation is in vs. 12 *so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

As good as real pleasure and fulfillment the world can never know are, the real motivator, the main thing, is that Jesus Christ would be glorified.

When Goliath went down, it was an incredible day for David, but ultimately, everybody knows, it wasn't David who took out Goliath and the whole Philistine army, it was God who accomplished that, and God who deserves the worship and the glory.

But, OH what fun it would be to be a David in God's battles against the evil

of this world.

If you asked me what my favorite verse or passage might be I'd have too many to choose, but one that I love is from 2 Samuel 10

9 When Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him before and behind, he chose of all the choice men of Israel, and put them in array against the Syrians: 10 And the rest of the people he delivered into the hand of Abishai his brother, that he might put them in array against the children of Ammon. 11 And he said, If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee. 12 Be of good courage, and let us play the man for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth good to Him.

Joab divides the warriors of Israel into 2 groups. One will fight with him against the Syrians on one front and the other will fight with his brother Abishai against the Ammonites on a second front. And the idea here is similar to what Paul prayed for.

Let us go into the battle fearlessly, like men, and then let God do whatever it is that seems good to Him. The battle is the Lord's. But He's looking for recruits that are strong, single purposed, ready, tough, lean, mean, focused, who will actually physically engage, knowing full well, the trophy will be His, not ours.

Paul prayed that for the Thessalonians and by extension we are included in that prayer.

11 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill all your good pleasure for goodness and the work of faith with power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A final word from 52 years experience. I talk real big up here in my safe pulpit inside these 4 walls with sympathetic folks but you all know better.

50 years ago I understood all of these concepts perfectly. I was one of the lucky recruits that new exactly what was ahead, and what was expected if I was going to be the actual guy on the horse riding the relay.

I didn't prove very faithful. So, like the Israelites of old, God didn't abandon me, but I wandered in the desert for 40 years. We don't all get to be the guy on the horse in the relay, do we. Somebody has to be in the office in San Francisco. Someone has to run all of the little relay stations along the way, have the next horse ready for the trade.

We are a network. We don't all get to be the star athlete in the arena that everyone sees. I consider God to be very generous indeed to have finally allowed me to even fill this little pulpit in this little out of the way outpost. That is grace upon grace and I am very privileged.

Who are you in God's network and what is your little task that must be done so the guys on the horses can continue to get the mail delivered against insurmountable odds.

Paul's prayer was simple. Go to bootcamp. Get tough. Get ready. Then get in the battle. Somewhere! Get engaged and see what God will accomplish through you for His glory. And I guarantee you, you will be fulfilled in ways this world cannot hope to be.