

Will Jesus Strengthen Your Deeds?

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2 Thessalonians 2:13 - 17 (NIV) ¹³But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. ¹⁶May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

How much will you give me for this working bathroom sink faucet? Before the bidding starts I need to tell you this is an expensive faucet.

Why is this an expensive faucet? Renee purchased new faucets for our master bath last November. They didn't get touched until three weeks ago. Since the leak in her faucet was growing and we are moving I finally decided to put the new ones in. Renee asked me if I wanted her to call a plumber. Good ole frugal and overly optimistic Dan thought, "What? I can whip this out in about 2 hours on Saturday morning. I don't need no stinking plumber." My bruised knuckles, sore back, and 3 trips to Lowe's by seven o'clock that evening screamed out, "You should have called the plumber!"

This faucet and its twin cost me an entire day of my life. This faucet also cost me several pounds of dignity.

I had come to the end of replacing the first faucet. I had gone under the sink to set the drain stopper. It worked great. I came to the point where you turn on the water let it run through the pipes to check for leaks. So I reached up from below, turned on the water, and then went back under the sink to check for leaks. I kept checking for leaks as the water ran and ran. I began to smile and get happy – no leaks. Then a dignity crushing wave of cold water cascaded over the edge of the bathroom sink cabinet, right onto my crotch, and onto the floor. Plumber Dan left the drain stopper closed.

To tell you the truth if you need a faucet I'll give you this faucet just to get it out of my sight. But you know what? I will probably keep attempting small plumbing jobs? Why? I learned a lot from that day in my life. I learned a lot last summer from the two days it took my father-in-law and me to replace the hot water heater in our house. I learned a lot three years ago

when I replaced the kitchen disposal and reseated a commode in our house. The truth is that all four of those projects work great. No leaks. No stoppages. Hot showers every morning.

Do you call the plumber or do you get your hands dirty?

Let's forget about faucets and talk about faith. When it comes to faith do you call it in or do you get your hands dirty? Do you let others live for Jesus or do you live for Jesus?

Living for Jesus is about getting our hands dirty. You and I cannot grab the Yellow Pages to call a professional Christian to follow Jesus for us. Real faith calls for you and me to jump right in and get about the work of building and making a life that honors God and serves others.

This is the theme of that prayer the Apostle Paul prays and writes down for the followers of Jesus in the city of Thessalonica. These Christians loved Paul. Paul had come to their city for several months. He was the first to tell them about Jesus. He spoke of the life death and resurrection of Jesus. He watched as the Holy Spirit opened their hearts and minds to believe. Paul helped them commit their lives to know and follow Jesus. He stayed for only a short time and then moved on to other cities like Corinth and Athens.

Paul never forgot these Christians. He kept wondering how they were getting along in following Jesus. He sends one of his traveling companions, Timothy, back to teach them more truth about knowing and following Jesus. He directs Timothy to help them live out this new faith in real actions. Paul writes them two letters – what we call 1st and 2nd Thessalonians – to remind them of the truths they have been taught and to encourage them to live a life full and overflowing with good deeds.

Hear again Paul's focus at the end of this prayer, **“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”** Paul believed that as he prayed and the followers opened their hearts, Jesus would encourage them and give them strength to get their hands dirty with an active and strong faith.

The reason Paul prays and writes about this concern is that some of the Thessalonians started phoning in their faith. Now why do I say this about these Christians?

Parts of both 1st and 2nd Thessalonians tell us that some of the Thessalonians made an error in the way they responded to one truth about Jesus. What was the truth? The truth that captured the minds of these Christians is that Jesus is soon to return to the earth to claim His church and bring about the fullness and completeness of the kingdom of God. The Thessalonians

loved this truth told them by Paul. Perhaps Paul related the story of the time Jesus spoke clearly and strongly when He said, **“I go to prepare a place for you. And If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me...” (John 14:2b-3a)** The problem came in how they acted on this truth.

These Christians decided that since Jesus was coming back and coming soon all they needed to do was get ready. They thought the best way to get ready was to use their last days on earth to worship Jesus, pray, and spend time with other believers. How could they make more time to do the spiritual things? They stopped working.

It was as if they had hit the Mega Mega Spiritual Lotto. They didn't need to work anymore. Jesus was coming soon so why should we waste another day sweating in the fields or in the kitchen. Don't need money in heaven so why worry about money.

Problems started happening when Jesus did not return as soon as they hoped. They discovered what happens when you don't work. Without work you don't have money. Without work you don't have food. Without work you have to rely on others to provide food. Without work others have to provide you a place to live.

Without work you have way too much time in your hands. Without work and focus you begin to digress spiritually. Without work you spend your time gossiping and buzzing like pesky gnats around and in other people's business. Without work busybodies began to give all the followers of Jesus a bad reputation in the city.

Paul prayed that the Holy Spirit will use the words of his letter and the encouragement of Timothy to help the Thessalonians learn a better way to react to the truth that Jesus is coming soon. How are Christians to react to the truth that Jesus may come this afternoon?

Christians don't just get ready. Christians **STAY READY**. Christians don't wait for Jesus. **Christians STAY FAITHFUL TO JESUS.** Christians stay faithful by living out a strong faith that gets our hands dirty in good deeds and good words for the people of the city in which we live.

As I have thought about how the Lord works to strengthen Christians as people of good deeds, I thought about a time the Lord actually made this prayer come true in the life of LakeRidge. In one of the early years of Backyard Mission a team was working on an elderly widow's house in east Lubbock. The team discovered a great problem with the heating unit. This widow had a very old, broken down and lethally dangerous stand- alone open flame heater. The unit had to be taken out. This left the widow without a source of heat. This also ruined the

BYM plan because they did not have the funds to provide a new heating unit for the house. So what did they do? Led by the elderly widow they began to pray. “Lord, you know this house needs heat. Lord you know we need a new heater. Lord, help.”

What the BYM team did not know was on that very same week Jan and Polly Wampler were going through their garage to see what they could move out. They discovered a relatively new and safe stand-alone house heater they were not using. As they looked at that heater the thought just happen to pop into their mind, “I wonder if Backyard Mission could use this heater?” Later that week they asked Laurie Foster if BYM could use a heater. What do you think Laurie said? What do you think the BYM team and the elderly widow learned that week?

Listen to another prayer Paul writes in **2nd Thessalonians 1:11-12**, **“we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.”** The Lord saw the widow’s need for a new heater. He filled up the faith of the BYM team. He completed the act prompted by the faith of Jan and Polly Wampler. He showed His power to complete and expand the life of those who ask Him to make them strong in good deeds.

One of the prayers and hopes I have you LakeRidge is that your lives will be filled with experience after experience and moment after moment where Jesus fulfills and completes good deed after good deed after good deed after good deed. If that is going to happen you have to ask this question, ‘Am I phoning in my faith or do I have a dirty hands faith?’ I challenge you to keep asking that question because you and I face several major enemies to a dirty hands kind of faith.

One major enemy to living out a “hands on” faith is the way we choose to use time? Too often we fill the calendar of our lives with actions and activities whose sole purpose is to enhance our own lives. We are so busy serving our lives we have no margin left over to help others. We build our lives around a 55-60+ hour work week that we call normal. After work we rush to baseball or soccer tournaments, Extreme cheer weekend trips, academic decathlons, and a whole host of life-enhancing experiences to build up our kids. We work in great pleasure vacations and time for ourselves. We are experts at building up our own lives. But do our kids know how to serve others? Do we know how to build up others?

The way we use time can fight against a life of good deeds. Another enemy is what I call a spirit of privilege. This is how the spirit of privilege gets lived out in the world. One aspect of the American dream is to achieve enough success and make enough money that I can afford to

call people. I don't want to change out the faucets in my bathroom so I'll call the plumber. The spirit of privilege glorifies "calling in" life. Something needs to be done. I'll call somebody else to do it.

At one level calling somebody to do what I cannot do is wise. However, we make a huge mistake when we carry the spirit of privilege into being followers of Jesus.

We look at all the ways people need to be served. We see kids needing a Sunday school teacher at 9:15 am. We see youth small groups needing an adult mentor. We see kids from East Lubbock in the ROK ministry needing a tutor. We see homeless families with kids needing an overnight host at Hope House. We elderly widows setting out 15 pans and buckets under the leaks in the roof. We see adults needing a new member mentor and friend. The spirit of privilege tells us to call the plumber to come fix the problem.

We fail to see Jesus standing right beside us asking us to be the plumber. He wants us to get our hands dirty He can help us make a difference and serve those who need to be served. When Jesus presents us the opportunity to serve we can help ourselves by asking two questions. The first is simply this, 'Will I believe that Jesus and these people are worth the time it will take me to serve?' The second is this, "Will I believe that Jesus has the power and the ability to strengthen and encourage me and others meet needs as I give my life over to good deed after good deed after good deed.

Do you believe Jesus is worthy? Do you believe others are worthy? Do you know that Jesus can and will strengthen you to grow in power and impact when you do good deeds?

There are a group of parents in this church that believe and are helping their children believe. This group of parents got tired of the cultural expectation of throwing big production birthday parties. You know those big productions with 15-20 kids at the newest and most expensive party place in town. All those 15-20 kids are supposed to bring a gift for your kid.

These parents started having anti-birthday parties. They still invite the kids. The kids still bring presents. But these presents are not for the birthday boy or girl. A big part of the party is going to the ROK or other type ministries where the birthday boy or girl and his/her friends spend time making friends with new kids and then giving basic presents like simple clothes, shoes, and some toys to the kids who need the simple basics of life. The birthday boy or girl celebrates their life by giving to and serving others.

How about you and how about me? Are you phoning in faith? Do you believe Jesus is worthy of getting your hands dirty? Do you believe Jesus is more than able to encourage and strengthen you as you build up others through a life of good deeds?