

STEADFAST CHRISTIANITY

A STUDY OF 2 THESSALONIANS

STUDY SIX

Cords That Hold Pastors and Flocks Together

2 Thessalonians 3:1–5

How do pastors and flocks stay together? They pray for each other. They pray for each other through highs and lows. They pray in season and out of season. They pray to do the will of God.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

It's an idyllic sight. Strong, loving, vigilant shepherds tenderly guiding and caring for their flocks in a beautiful, fertile, and verdant valley. The sheep obediently respond to each call and whistle from the shepherd. They feel nourished and cared for as they graze free of threat.

The relationship between shepherd and sheep, however, is not always serene. Wolves may attack. Shepherds may neglect their duties, even abandon their flock. Sheep may stray, fight with each other, or resist their shepherd's tender direction.

Scripture often refers to pastors as shepherds and the churches they serve as flocks. Peter encouraged church elders to “shepherd the flock of God among you” (1 Peter 5:2). If the cords that bind pastors and flocks together are knotted in love, prayer, and mutual support, the church thrives. Lives are transformed, the gospel is proclaimed, and Christ, the divine Shepherd, is glorified. But if the cords fray—pastors neglect their calling, members hurt one another, spiritual predators slip into the flock—then the church suffers.

Paul shepherded the flock at Thessalonica as their founding pastor. Persecution drove him out of town after only a few weeks, but nothing could force Paul to stop shepherding the sheep.

In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we feel the heartbeat of Paul's relationship with the believers at Thessalonica. In their healthy shepherd-flock connection, we find a model for today's pastors and congregations.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

What Paul modeled, Peter recorded when he wrote:

Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. (1 Peter 5:2–3)

As you open the Word, express your gratitude to God for the pastors who have faithfully shepherded you.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul poured out his heart in prayer at the close of 2 Thessalonians 2:

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope, comfort you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say. (2 Thessalonians 2:16–17)

Love, grace, comfort, and hope—Paul knit together these beautiful threads into a warm blanket to wrap around his readers who had been shivering in the cold winds of persecution. While he concluded chapter 2 in prayer for his beloved Thessalonian flock, he opened chapter 3 requesting prayer from them. In his requests, we learn qualities that shepherds and sheep can emulate.



Observation: Strengthening the Pastor-Flock Relationship

Use your skills of observation like a shovel to dig into the biblical passage and uncover gems of truth. Often these gems lie just under the surface! As you read, examine Paul's thoughts like an archaeologist sifts dirt in search of treasures. Take your time and look carefully. Read [2 Thessalonians 3:1–5](#) and see what you can find.

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Strengthening the Pastor-Flock Relationship: The Pastor

In Paul's requests for prayer, we find four qualities of pastors.

Admission of Need

First, Paul simply requested prayer: "Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we ask you to pray for us" (2 Thessalonians 3:1). Although he was an apostle with remarkable talents and gifts, he still needed people to pray for him. He wasn't above asking for help! What character quality did his admission of need display?

Declaration of Objective

What did Paul request prayer for in 2 Thessalonians 3:1b? Here he declared his ministry objective. What was it? Notice the NASB footnote for the word *spread*. What does the Greek word *trecho* literally mean? How did Paul affirm the flock at end of the verse?

Recognition of Human Opposition

According to Paul's prayer request in 2 Thessalonians 3:2, who opposed Paul and how did he describe them? What did he request prayer for?

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Proclamation of God's Faithfulness

Evil people may threaten, wreaking chaos and stirring anxiety. “But the Lord,” Paul reminded his readers (2 Thessalonians 3:3). What contrast did he draw between the “wicked and evil people” (3:2) and the Lord (3:3)? As a pastor, what attribute of God did Paul hold onto as his anchor of truth?

Strengthening the Pastor-Flock Relationship: The Flock

With the change in pronouns from “us” and “we” to “you” and “your” (2 Thessalonians 3:3–5), Paul’s focus shifts from pastor to flock.

Protection from Attack

The doctrine of God’s faithfulness stands at the core of Paul’s instruction and forms a watershed in his thought. Just as Paul trusted God to be faithful in helping him spread the Word, he urged his readers to trust God’s faithfulness as well.

According to 2 Thessalonians 3:3, what *two* things did he assure his readers the Lord would do for them? How do those provisions complement one another? From whom would they be protected?

Cooperation with Leadership

Paul’s next charge to the flock rested squarely on their shoulders. God’s faithfulness should inspire a response from church members. About what did Paul express confidence in 2 Thessalonians 3:4?

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Cultivation of Love for God

Like God's faithfulness, God's love is equally steadfast and everlasting. According to 2 Thessalonians 3:5a, what did Paul ask his readers to rest in and to cultivate?

Determination to Endure for Christ

What did Paul pray for in 2 Thessalonians 3:5b? Who is our ultimate model of perseverance?

There isn't any man who stands for God today who doesn't have enemies who stand against him. When you pray for your pastor, pray for those who oppose him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Spiritual and Human Opposition to the Gospel

As the apostle to the gentiles, Paul was a giant among men. God granted him surpassing revelations and the ability to perform signs and wonders as a prominent missionary and church planter. Paul knew his own weaknesses, and he frequently asked those he led and served to pray for him (*Romans 15:30; Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1*).

How did this attitude of humility and dependence function as bonding glue with the fledgling and persecuted Thessalonians? What lessons are apparent for today's pastors and flocks?

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In 2 Thessalonians 3:2, Paul sought prayer for rescue from “troublesome” (NASB) or “wicked” (NLT) people. Other renderings read “perverse,” “antisocial,” or “unreasonable.” The Greek word he used is *atopos*. Review this term in Mounce’s Greek dictionary at billmounce.com. What do you glean from your research about his usage of this word? What clarity does it add?

In 3:3, Paul assured the church that the Lord would “strengthen” them. He used the Greek word *sterizo*. Read the definition of this word and how it is translated in other verses at Mounce’s Greek dictionary at billmounce.com. From it, we derive the English word *steroid*. What nuance is added to Paul’s assurance that God “will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one” (2 Thessalonians 3:3)?

Never think for a moment that the one who ministers the Word to you can pull it off in the flesh or has any interest in doing that when under God’s control.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Fulfilling One’s Ministry amid False Teaching

Enemies of Christ attack pastors and their congregations like juggernauts. The world system surrounds and inundates Christians. Satan is conniving and convincing. When Paul penned 2 Timothy, likely his final letter, he was a grizzled ministry veteran. From the perspective of years in the trenches, he gave his protégé, Timothy, a charge in *2 Timothy 4:2–5*. Summarize Paul’s message. With what commands and warnings did battle-tested Paul offer to prepare the new-recruit pastor?

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Paul’s sober warning about false teaching is graphically illustrated in *1 Timothy 1:18–20*; *2 Timothy 4:14*. Whom did he cite? What had they done? What was their consequence?

Paul had experienced aggressive opposition to the gospel firsthand, and he perceived the source of these attacks as Satan himself—against whom our surest defense is God’s Word. Our charge is the same that Paul gave pastors and their flocks centuries ago: *stand firm and stay grounded in sound doctrine!*

A ministry is not to be endured; it’s to be fulfilled. This word means “to bring to full measure, to discharge all the duties connected with it.” Fill your day full of the things that mark your responsibility as a minister of the gospel.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Secrets for Long-Term Ministries

How can pastors and flocks stay together? What are some secrets of long-term ministry? Several principles leap off the page that are crucial for lasting ministries.

1. *Pastors and flocks must **commit to praying for one another**.* Intercessory prayer unifies the church, keeping leaders humble and vulnerable, and keeping the flock obedient to leaders’ guidance and direction.
2. *Pastors and flocks must **agree on essentials**.* To keep the church moving with unity in a God-honoring direction there must be agreement on doctrinal essentials.
3. *Pastors and flocks must **be involved in ministry together**.* Ministries must be shared as pastors and church members toil and sacrifice together.
4. *Pastors and flocks must **humbly acknowledge their need**.* Shepherds and sheep stand on equal ground before the Lord. Both need to draw strength from God and be willing to share their burdens.

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What is the Spirit doing in your heart right now based on this study? How are you serving and sharing the load at your church? Is the Lord prompting you to engage in some capacity? If so, where?

Conclude by praying Paul’s prayer in 2 Thessalonians 3:1–5 for your church and its pastoral staff. Pray for God’s protection from the evil one. Express your dependence on God’s faithfulness and love.

Paul enjoyed a deep, warm, and reciprocal relationship with the Thessalonian church, and he was not about to abandon these people. Too much was at stake. Prayer was Paul’s most effective weapon in battling for the souls of those he loved, and it can be ours as well.



A FINAL PRAYER

Today, Lord, I thank You for the church. I pray that as a result of my digesting these truths that changes might occur and good might result in the church—and, ultimately, greater glory be brought to Your name as I serve You through the local church. Thank You, my Father, in Jesus’ name for the privilege of being able to participate in this eternal work together. Thank You for Your blessings and for Your favor as I continue to serve You in this manner. In the name of the Lord Jesus I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*”

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 1986, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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