

PRAYING BIBLICALLY

FOR YOUR MISSIONARY

Effectiveness

By Alan Patterson

Don't you love biblical metaphors? How impoverished believers would be without the image of the LORD God as Shepherd, Jesus as the soul-supplying and enlivening Vine, and the Holy Spirit as our ever-present Comforter. As we consider the concept of effectiveness in biblical praying for missionaries, we find Paul also using an intriguing metaphor. Picture the Word of God in your mind, and then add legs to that picture. That's right, add legs so that the Word can run. This metaphor is found in 2 Thessalonians 3:1, where Paul not only exhorts prayer for himself but also tells us specifically what to pray: "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you." The phrase "have free course" literally and simply means to "run." The English word "trek" comes directly from the Greek word (*trechō*).

Metaphors are helpful but not always easy to decipher fully, so what does it mean for the Word of the Lord to run, to have free course? Anticipating our question, the Holy Spirit gives us the next phrase about the Word "being glorified." Something is glorified when it is honored and exalted, and this happens with the Word when people believe it and obey it.

Still, the glorification of the Word is a concept that can be a bit difficult to grasp, so we are given one more explanatory phrase: "even as it is with you." Excellent! Now we can get a good grasp on the point of the passage, for we know what happened with the Thessalonians. Both 1 and 2 Thessalonians tell us that these people believed the preaching of the Gospel and were dramatically changed; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10 explains most clearly the transformation of these former idolaters. The Word "ran" in their midst as they became followers of the Lord despite much affliction and opposition. The change was so evident that their testimony and example was "sounded out" (literally, "trumpeted abroad") to the surrounding regions. This work of the Word was so well known the Holy Spirit could state that "in every place" the character, strength, and zeal of their faith had gone before them and the apostles did "not need to say anything" about it.

The final explanation of what it means for the Word to run as it had among the Thessalonians is that deep and lasting change had occurred: they had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." So, in a word, we should pray for our missionaries that their ministry would have effectiveness. Consider the amazing progression in what we have learned so far. We should pray for opportunity, but an opportunity is not helpful unless we also have boldness to take advantage of it. However, boldness is not useful unless we use clarity in giving the message. One might be bold as a lion, but the people might not understand what has been said. But opportunity, boldness, and clarity produce no fruit unless God works and gives effectiveness to the preaching of the Word.

Every missionary you know would love to see God's Word run with great effectiveness! It happened among the Thessalonians, and it can happen today. When you pray for missionaries, request that their ministry of the Word would "get legs," with the result that the hearers make a clean break with their past and follow the only true God.

