

Thessalonians, Pt 7: Growing in Discipleship and Love

1 Thessalonians 3:6 ESV (Pg. 574) But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— **7** for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. **8** For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. **9** For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, **10** as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? **11** Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, **12** and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, **13** so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

- I. There is nothing more discouraging to a believer than to watch someone they love as their faith fails. I remember in the youth group where Ginger and I met, there was a girl named Melissa who had come from a terrible situation at home; abused by her drunken parents. But she was at church faithfully, and active in the youth group.
 - A. After I was saved, Melissa, along with Ginger and a few others, became my “inner circle”. We had a great time, traveling to camps and Six Flags, hanging out at our favorite pizza place, or going to concerts together. But we also spent countless hours worshipping, praying, and studying the scriptures together.
 1. But when Ginger and I were about 18, her demeanor markedly changed. She started to hang out with boys who were using her sexually, and she became increasingly distant. It wasn’t long until she stopped showing up at all.
 2. Well, we weren’t going to just sit idly by and let that happen to our friend! So one night a few of us loaded up in the church van, and went out to the sketchy bar where her mother worked, and tried to appeal to her to reengage. But our pleas fell on deaf ears. She embraced what she thought the world gave her, and it wasn’t long before we didn’t see her anymore.
 - B. I remember coming back to the church on the night she refused to listen to us. I was devastated and got alone in the parking lot and sobbed, knowing that her soul was in jeopardy. My agony was deep, and I’ll never forget the way I felt.
 - C. But there is a “flip side” to all of this...there is nothing so refreshing to the heart of a believer than to know that those around them are “making it”; through they might have looked incredibly fragile or hopeless at one point, when you find out that their faith has real roots, your whole soul rejoices at the encouragement.
 1. In a different youth group, I had another friend. Nate, who claimed to believe, knew me well before I was a Christian, and was a partner in many of my depraved activities. When we went to church, He and I would compete to see which one of us could make our sweet, female youth leader cry first! We were disrespectful, self-centered rebels without a cause and we loved it!
 - a) When our family moved on to Ginger’s church, Nate and I stayed in contact. But when Jesus saved me, we started to slowly drift apart. We would still hang out occasionally, but the more I fell in love with Jesus, the more troubled and convicted I was by Nate’s sinful behavior and influence on me. In truth, he was unsaved and utterly unconcerned.

- b) But after not seeing him for almost 25 years, I got to spend a few days with him in May. And I found someone who loves Jesus and is following him, wrestling with same issues of truth and the gospel that I am.
 - 2. When I went to him, I had no idea who he would be in his 40's, but I was so happy to come home and let Ginger know about the transformation that had taken place in him, and the way he was genuinely living for Jesus!
- D. I imagine that my joy was like Paul's when he heard from Timothy that the Thessalonians were pressing forward in Christ. **“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the *good news* of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction *we have been comforted* about you through your faith.”**
 - 1. Paul calls Timothy's report “good news”. Paul had been gravely concerned that the persecution had discouraged the new believers and scattered the church when we was abruptly whisked out of town, but Timothy reported that exactly the opposite had taken place. They were holding on!
 - a) Furthermore, instead of resenting Paul's departure from them (as he feared they would), they ***sincerely*** missed him. He said “you always remember us kindly and long to see us”. They felt exactly as he did!
 - b) When Paul wrote this letter, he had been run out of Thessalonica because of the riot incited by the Jews. The Jews followed him to Berea, the sister city of Thessalonica, and he had to flee from there and go to Athens, where he was mocked for proclaiming the resurrection from the dead.
 - 2. From there, he traveled to Corinth where he was opposed, reviled and arrested, and one of his hosts was severely beaten. So Paul had non-stop persecution since Thessalonica, and even before that in Philippi, where he had been arrested, beaten and imprisoned.
- E. But he says two things about the persecution he experienced at this time that we should pay close attention to: **“for this reason, brothers, in all *our* distress and affliction *we have been comforted* about you through your faith.”**
 - 1. First, Paul mentions “all ***our*** distress and affliction”. He reminded the Thessalonians earlier in this chapter how, when he had been with them, he told them they were destined for tribulation. It was entirely unavoidable.
 - a) Now he assures them that he, the apostle, is not exempt from anything that they are suffering, but that they are in this thing together. He shares their experience of suffering and loss for Christ. It is not merely ***their*** distress and affliction, but rather it is “all ***our*** distress and affliction”.
 - b) There is much to be said about laboring and suffering together, in some form of community. A soldier knows this. A husband and his wife knows this. Certainly this is one of the great benefits of church life as well.
 - 2. **Ecclesiastes 4:9 ESV** Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. **10 For *if they fall, one will lift up his fellow***. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! **11 Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?**

12 And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

- F. But he also tells them that he (along with Timothy and Silas) is greatly encouraged and comforted by their perseverance in their faith, even in the midst of harassment and trouble. There are a couple of reasons for this:
1. First, it confirms the genuineness of the Thessalonians faith in Jesus, proving that what they experienced was a real spiritual rebirth, and not just a religious decision they made based on Paul's power of persuasion.
 - a) In chapter one, Paul affirms this, saying: "we know, brothers loved by God, **that he has chosen you**, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."
 - b) Their legitimate conversion is proven by their determined perseverance. Someone who was "kicking the tires" on Jesus wouldn't last through the trials. But they have continued to press forward in spite of it all.
 2. Next, their continuing in the faith confirms that Paul, Silas and Timothy labored effectively while among them.
 - a) We're responsible to proclaim the gospel faithfully and accurately, but we aren't responsible for the results of that proclamation. In other words, none of us will account for whether people listened and responded to our proclamation of the gospel; only whether we actually proclaimed it. It is God alone who moves on hearts and calls dead sinners to life.
 - b) But, though all of this is true, it is really encouraging when we see the seed that we have planted bear fruit for the glory of God. This was the reason for Paul and the others to rejoice...the Thessalonians responded!
 3. Because of this, it is right that we should pray that God would bless our efforts to let the whole world know who Jesus is, and what he's done for us!
- II. **"For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord."** When Timothy brought word of the Thessalonians endurance, Paul and the others were able to breathe a sigh of relief. **Proverbs 25:25 ESV** *Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.* But think about what he's saying he ultimately wanted for them.
- A. Whether many or few, Paul wanted to see people "stand fast" in the Lord. This was more than decisions made, or membership in a club, it was discipleship. It wasn't enough that they believed Paul, or were meeting together. Paul's hope was that they would become obedient followers of Christ. He lived for this!
1. What an incredible heart this Pastor had for the flocks in his care! **Galatians 4:19 ESV** "my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" The desire to see the church shaped into the image of Christ felt like labor pains to him! He hurt until they were made new.
 2. May we never be guilty of being satisfied with the people we love being led through a prayer, or coming to church, or making a few moral alterations. I pray that God lays a heavy burden on us all to see each other transformed in holiness, and our thinking, and in greater worshipfulness of Jesus Christ!
- B. **"For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God...?"** The persistence of the Thessalonians' faith inspired worship in Paul and the others. When he considered what was taking

place so far away from him, he offered thanksgiving to God. He was filled with joy because the kingdom was advancing as people were growing up into Jesus.

1. Are you and I even aware of when our brothers and sisters in Christ are thriving, or “breaking through”? Are they on our radar enough for us to even notice when they are scaling the mountains before them? When we hear of them growing in grace, does it elicit more than an apathetic yawn from us?
 - a) In American churches we tend to focus on how many people show up, and how many dollars they potentially bring with them. Peter Lord says we only concern ourselves with counting “noses and nickels”.
 - b) But the only real metric that we should concern ourselves with is the same one Paul considered. Are people growing? Are they becoming more like Jesus? Do they love the Bible more, and surrender to what it says? Is the sacrificial love of the saints for each other increasing?
 2. To be this kind of church, it’s important that we not merely focus on the “weep with those who weep” command of Romans 12:15 (which is very important!), but also the “rejoice with those who are rejoicing” part!
- C. We should daily offer thanksgiving as we see God save, sustain, deliver, infill, and mature those who share with us in our fellowship and community; even if we are enduring our own trials, and waiting for our own deliverance.
- III. **“we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith”** This joy of Paul’s that I am describing drove him to his knees as he prayed two specific things for the Thessalonians...
- A. First, Paul prayed earnestly that they would be reunited. It is wonderful to hear of good news; but there is no comparison to sharing in it!
1. When your grandchildren were born, would you have preferred to get a phone call announcing the baby’s arrival; or would you rather be there with the new mom and baby on delivery day, holding him or her in your arms?
 2. When people genuinely love each other, presence always trumps distant communication! How can people want the church to be well thought of in the community, or successful in its mission, but rarely show up?
- B. I can’t function that way, and I hope you can’t either! My love for you and the hope I have for the gospel to constantly impact our lives compels me to want to be with you whenever possible. It is life giving for me to be waking close to you.
- C. But Paul wanted to be with the Thessalonians, not merely because he missed hanging out with them, but because he says he wanted to “supply what was lacking” in their faith.
1. He is not saying that they weren’t “saved enough” when he speaks of what is lacking. Their eternal spirits are as “saved” as his was. **Hebrews 7:25 ESV** **Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.**
 2. He is saying that they are not complete. They don’t understand everything yet. They haven’t grasped the ramifications of their faith. In chapters 4 & 5 we’ll see that they had some real misunderstanding about the Lord’s coming.
- D. On some level, this describes all of us, with no exceptions. We are all lacking in one area or another. Some people are wounded and need healing. Many of us don’t understand the full message of the Bible, while others struggle to

comprehend specific doctrines. Others need to mature; to learn how to stop acting like spiritual babies, and grow up into Christ. But we all need something.

1. That is why Jesus built the church. He planned a faithful community confessing the same central truths, but with different strengths and weaknesses so that we would help each other in 1,000 different ways.
2. There are two ways you should never participate in church...
 - a) The first is to come thinking that you have plenty to give, but have nothing you can receive from your brothers and sisters. It's wrong to think so arrogantly! If you get frustrated because no one is listening to you, or recognizing your awesome gifts, it may be the Holy Spirit telling you to be quiet and receive what the other members of the body are offering.
 - b) The second mistake is to imagine that you have nothing to give. I have been blessed equally by youngest babes in Christ every bit as much as I have been by the most faithful, experienced saints. The perspective of more recent believers can be very refreshing. Don't withhold it!

IV. **“Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”**

A. Paul concludes chapter 3 with a pastoral prayer that, whether or not they are ever reunited face to face, God would cause them to grow in their love in a couple of different ways.

1. First, Paul prays that the Lord would make them **“increase and abound in love for one another”**. The church is first and foremost a place where believers are to be built up, trained, encouraged and corrected. This is done much more effectively with a deep heart of real love for each other!
2. Second, he prays that they would love **“all”**. The love for one another that we are cultivating should be our best outreach offer. We should love and serve each other so beautifully, that those on the outside are drawn to share in it.

B. But none of us should imagine that we can accomplish this kind of love based on mutual affinities, or sheer will power; so we should do what Paul did - pray that this kind of love would be present and ever-increasing among us.

C. In an environment where this kind of love is evident and increasing, Paul says God will **“establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”**

1. This means that our holiness will increase as our love increases. It harder to sin against God if I am growing in love for him every day.
2. Similarly, it becomes much more difficult to sin against the brother or sister in Christ who I am daily asking God to help me love, and moving toward with accompanying actions of affection and sacrifice. Paul says that growing in this kind of love prepares us for the coming of the Lord, which he will discuss in the next chapter.

V. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper,

saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Visitor Info, Offering

Youth Camp Meeting after church

Sunday September 29th, we will be meeting at Cooke Park (6302 18th St. Lubbock TX) at 5:30pm for a time of fun, fellowship, and food. BUY TICKETS TODAY \$5 for age 13 and up, on sale after service in the foyer.

October 6th: Quarterly Missions offering. We have a commitment of \$6,000 quarterly to fund our missionaries, we still need \$3,070.

Benediction: **1 Thessalonians 3:11 ESV** Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, **12** and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, **13** so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.