

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

⁶But 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 – ⁷for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. ⁸For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. ⁹For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? ¹¹Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹²and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³so 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.

Have you ever carried great concern over a person or situation - the kind of concern that keeps you up at night and your stomach in knots? The kind of circumstance in which you might murmur, “*all I can do is pray,*” as if prayer was the last resort and held zero power? The kind of concerns where the heaviness of it could turn into serious anxiety or worry if not kept at the feet of Jesus – the only place where we can actually cast the thing and receive peace that passes any understanding (Phil. 4:6-7).

When you feel as if the weight of it all is taking you to an absolute crushing point:

And then - good news arrives.

News that a loved one has been saved from disaster or near death, that the diagnosis was wrong and everything is clear, that the verdict was given and justice prevailed, or the words you heard turned out to just be a big misunderstanding. The many facets of life make for a list that could go on.

Good news has a way of bringing relief and when relief sets in, we feel as if we could nearly collapse. Maybe we actually do. Tears often come as concern flows out and solace floods in.

So was the case with Paul.

In all his *distress* and *affliction* he was relieved by the good news Timothy reported back concerning the Thessalonians. They longed to see Paul and his companions again too, and most importantly; they were remaining steadfast in the faith (1 Thess. 3:6-7). This news caused Paul to write, *for now we really live (1 Thess.3:8 NIV)*. Paul “really lives;” that is, *joy in living was enhanced by the knowledge that his converts persevered in the faith. Here, near the end of the section expressing his thankfulness and his hopes for his spiritual children, is an appropriate place for such a grandiose statement by the church’s spiritual father.*¹

Although Paul was given relief and comfort over his concerns for the Thessalonians – the arrival of the good news did not mean Paul received *all* that he had hoped for. The fact remained, he still longed to see them and they longed for the same. **The Lord can provide comfort in our most distressing situations even when it is not in the way we ached for. When we deviate from being only about *our plan* and look instead for *His plan*, we’ll find that the relief He brings, although perhaps not the kind we wanted, can still give way to a thankful, restful heart.**

It’s hard to imagine why the Lord would allow the obstacles that hindered him; it’s not as if Paul’s desires were ungodly. Can anybody relate? For the life of us, we can’t figure out why we’d be hindered from something that was good, godly even. For crying out loud, Paul’s desire to see the Thessalonians was so he could *supply what was lacking in their faith (1 Thess. 3:10)!* Is there anything more God honoring than that? When this is the path we find ourselves on, **our faith must encompass our doubt.**

What were the Thessalonians lacking? Hasn’t Paul thus far in his letter been affirming them for their godliness and faith? To “*supply*” generally connotes completing or improving the condition of something (Gal. 6:1). *If that is true here, the word implies not providing something new, but rather strengthening and or enhancing a faith already in existence.*² Paul recorded similar words to the Romans in Romans 1:11,

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you –

He actually goes further in Romans 1:12 to say that he believes they would be *mutually encouraged* by each other’s faith. We are **all** in need of spiritual growth and encouragement (1 Peter 2:2-3, 2 Peter 3:18a).

¹ Martin, Michael D. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, B&H Publishing Group, 1995. The New ~~American~~ Commentary.

² Ibid.

³ Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel & the End of Time*. Edited by Motyer, J.A. (OT)

The moment of our salvation is only the beginning of the journey in holiness and it lasts until He calls us Home. Staying connected to a local body of believers, being surrounded by biblical teaching and accountability is critical in *supplying what is lacking* in our faith. This is what Paul hoped for when he spoke of these things.

Paul could have encouraged them with letter after letter but his desire was for more. He wanted to lay eyes on them and again dwell amongst them for a while. Certainly we can identify with the difference between written admonition and tangible interaction. It is one thing when someone says, “*I care*” and something altogether different when they actually show up at your front door. Even though Timothy was able to make the trip and deliver the news that brought great joy, Paul still prayed *earnestly* that he would see them face-to-face.

Stott points out that after Paul mentioned his continuous prayers in 3:10, he actually begins to break out into prayer in the following verses within the letter.³ In 3:11, he begins that prayer by asking that Jesus would *clear the way*⁴ for them to come to the Thessalonians. Fascinatingly enough, *Paul’s prayer was answered, although only (so far as we know) about five years later when he visited Macedonia twice towards the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1-3).*⁵

Here, Paul demonstrates something incredibly important in the life of a believer - the importance and necessity of prayer. Paul didn’t just pray – he prayed earnestly and continuously. When what he sought in prayer didn’t come swiftly, it appeared he labored in prayer still.

Is there any greater challenge to the Christian in their walk with God than maintaining an intimacy with God through prayer? We don’t know how to pray, we get distracted, we’d rather do something more seeable - like read our bibles, we don’t feel like we get what we pray for - so we give up. However, Scripture shows us there must be something to this prayer thing.

Isaac prayed (Gen. 25:21), Hannah prayed (1 Samuel 2:1), David prayed (2 Samuel 7:18), Solomon prayed (1 Kings 8), Elijah prayed (James 5:17), Elisha prayed (2 Kings 6:18), Nehemiah prayed (Nehemiah 1), Daniel prayed (Daniel 9) ...

Jesus prayed (Mark 1:35).

³ Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel & the End of Time*. Edited by Motyer, J.A. (OT) and Stott, John R.W. (NT), 1991. Inter-Varsity Press. The Bible Speaks Today Series.

⁴ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (1 Th 3:11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel & the End of Time*. Edited by Motyer, J.A. (OT) and Stott, John R.W. (NT), 1991. Inter-Varsity Press. The Bible Speaks Today Series.

*It is evident from St. Paul's Epistles that a very large part of his private life was occupied in prayer and thanksgiving to God.⁶ What about us? If we don't know where to begin when it comes to building and maintaining a powerful prayer life, perhaps we should just begin in a desolate place telling the Father *that* very thing. Maybe we should start by opening the Scriptures and praying *those* words. Could we make gratitude lists and form them into prayers of thanksgiving? Wherever you are on your praying journey, the important thing is to just keep moving. Stay devoted to a pursuit for more intimacy with God through prayer.*

¹²May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³so 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.
1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

Paul's prayer closes the chapter with two desires:

(1) the Thessalonians would abound in love for one another and for all, and (2) that they would be blameless before God. *The Thessalonians were already noted for their **love**, but Paul prayed that it might abound—**increase and overflow**—even more. "Genuine Christian love ... is the one thing in the Christian life which cannot be carried to excess" (Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, p. 155).⁷ When we think we've loved enough, it's time to keep on with the love. We never reach maximum capacity when it comes to this command from Jesus. We are meant to overflow with love in this world stricken with so much hate.*

Notice the words, *for one another and for all*. The constant reminder that our love isn't for pickin' and choosin' those we deem valuable enough to receive it is prevalent here. Can you fathom the consequence if Christ held us to that standard? Who could be found worthy? Just as *God so loved the world*, we, the recipients of His grace should seek to love the people in the world. Yet, the inclusion of *one another* serves as a reminder to equally extend that love to the people we are elbow-to-elbow with within the Church.

Paul's last request within his prayer was that the Thessalonians would seek to live holy, blameless lives before God until His coming. The wording in the NIV helps us to see Paul's request a bit more clearly.

⁶ Garrod, G. W. (1899). *The second epistle to the Thessalonians*. London: Macmillan.

⁷ Constable, T. L. (1985). [1 Thessalonians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 699–700). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. ⁸ (1 Thess. 3:13)

The phrase, *may He strengthen your hearts*, should stand out to us like a flashing neon sign. It is the reminder of not only the need for strengthening if we are going to live holy lives, but also *Who* is able to do the strengthening. **We are not going to achieve a sinless life this side of Heaven, but through the strengthening of our hearts the Lord Jesus can help us live blameless ones.**

May we cry out to God as David did in Psalm 19, that when the Lord Jesus returns with his saints, the holy ones that have gone before us, we would be found to be living blamelessly.

***⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
⁹ the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.
¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
¹¹ Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there
is great reward. ¹² Who can discern his errors?
Declare me innocent from hidden faults. ¹³ Keep back your
servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion
over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great
transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of
my heart be acceptable in your sight,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.
Psalm 19:7-14***

⁸ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (1 Th 3:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.