

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

**SERMON TITLE:** Hope; A Study of the Letters to the Thessalonians (Part 5) “Thessalonians; When I could stand it no longer: spiritual Parenting”

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Paul’s missionary journeys were about sharing the gospel with people, whom he invested his life into. As we read his letters, we are reminded of the calling to all of us, “go and make disciples” from Matthew 28:16-19. Discipleship making is about relationships over time. Paul is committed to people and it is evident in the emotional nature of his words: When I could stand it no longer!

Read this section together:

*1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13*

*But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our **intense longing** we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.*

*3 So **when we could stand it no longer**, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God’s service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could **stand it no longer**, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.*

*But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.*

*Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as*

*ours does for you. 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.*

### Discussion Questions:

- What emotional tone do you sense from Paul? How would you describe him and his concerns to someone else not reading this letter in your own words?
- Have you ever had a deep longing to see someone? What do you think drives that longing?

In this chapter we can sense that Paul was a bit anxious about the outcome in Thessaloniki after leaving this town quickly (read ACTS 17 for context) and he needed assurance that they were doing OK. His likely concerns were that they had abandoned the faith, been killed or scattered, or were living in fear and despair. This is making him anxious, so much so that he can't stand it any longer! So, **he sends Timothy**, not a note or letter, but a person whom he loves and trusts, to encourage them and bring word.

Q: Have you ever experienced the effect of someone coming in person to “be with you or check on you?” What does that feel like? How does it differ from a letter/email or text?

Q: What makes it difficult for us to “go in person” and be with others?

Paul ends this chapter with a concise reminder to the Thessalonians of what he wants for their lives:

- Time and attention in person with them—a relationship
- Increase in love for God and people
- Strength to walk rightly before God

Paul's example is also for us: Christ followers. Who are the people that you know God is calling you to be a Spiritual Parent to? A person who you are to invest in with time, prayer and mutual encouragement? If you can name them, do so and if not, pray that God would speak to you about this assignment. We are all called to “make disciples” and it is not because we are holier than others, but because God calls his followers to complete the work of bringing his kingdom to this earth.

Matthew 28:16-20

*<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*