



## 1 THESSALONIANS

# UNSHAKEN BY AFFLICTION

1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-13

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### MAIN IDEA

Paul loved the church in Thessalonica and desired to encourage them to remain unshaken through the afflictions they faced.

### INTRODUCTION

*As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.*

Graduating classes have reunions periodically so classmates can get together and catch up on each other's lives. Sororities and fraternities also have regular reunions and homecomings. Many families have certain times of the year they try to meet face to face. And military units commonly reunite after their service days are over. No matter what you call it, gatherings for people with shared experiences and values are common. When you have something in common with a group and you care about what is happening in their lives, you want to connect with them.

- **What is a favorite reunion you've been part of?**
- **What do you think draws groups together in these types of reunions?**

**UNDERSTANDING**

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5.

Though Paul was separated from the body of believers in Thessalonica, he expressed his intense desire to be reunited with them. He knew that they were facing great persecution and affliction and wanted to encourage them in their faith so they could stand firm through whatever came against them. Since Paul couldn't be with them himself, he sent the next best thing: Timothy.

- **How had Timothy's discipleship under Paul prepared him to go and encourage this church?**
- **How can our discipleship prepare us to encourage and support others?**

Remaining in Athens without his helper was not necessarily an easy decision because Timothy was a companion and fellow worker with Paul. They had traveled together, and he had mentored Timothy, so sending him to Thessalonica cost Paul something. But Paul deemed it worth the price because of his love for the believers in Thessalonica. Timothy's goal was to strengthen and encourage these believers that they would not be shaken by the afflictions they experienced.

- **How might affliction or persecution threaten a believer's resolve? When have you experienced these kinds of threatening moments?**
- **How do these afflictions deepen your dependence on God and faith in His promises?**

Paul had warned these believers affliction would come their way as it is part of following Jesus. Paul stressed that they could rest assured that God was in control, even in the hard things. Paul desired that they stand firm so their faith that had been built up was not in vain.

- **Paul desired assurance of the Thessalonians firm faith. How does strong faith among believers encourage and strengthen one another?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10.

Timothy had returned and given Paul a good report of the church in Thessalonica. He mentioned the great love and faith of the Thessalonians. Paul was encouraged that those he so dearly loved felt the same way about him and had not believed the false rumors Paul's enemies had stirred up against him.

- **How have you been spurred on by seeing or hearing about the faith of others?**
- **How is this a reminder that we are not meant to follow Jesus in isolation?**

Hearing about these believers also fed Paul's desire to see them in person. He prayed night and day for the Lord to make a way for this reunion to happen. Along with his prayer to see them, Paul mentioned his desire to be with them again and continue the work of discipleship. Even though they were living in a godly manner, they still had more to learn about faithful, godly living. None of us ever "arrive" as believers until we make it to heaven.

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- **Why is it important to recognize we always have room for further spiritual growth?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13.

Paul petitioned the Lord to continue blessing these believers and to be reunited with them in person. We can learn from this powerful love that Paul had for his fellow believers. We should desire similar love for those in the church and dedication to mutual growth and godliness.

- **How might we adopt Paul's prayer to pray for other believers today?**

Paul had a great love for this church and knew they also deeply loved him, yet he prayed for their love to continue growing and developing. This is another reminder that none of us have arrived spiritually and always have room to be more like Jesus.

- **Why is it impossible for us to love God as we should but not love His people? What tempts us to believe this is optional?**

God wants the hearts of His people to be blameless in holiness. We are to follow the example of Paul and strive for holiness in our own lives. The term holiness is all about being set apart from the world and for the Lord. Many today have neglected the need for holiness and chosen to pursue the things of the world. Paul reinforced the need for holiness among God's people. The certainty of Jesus's return should motivate us to live each day prepared and ready for Him to come back.

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- **How should the reality that Jesus could come at any time affect the choices you make each day?**

### **APPLICATION**

- **Who can you encourage this week that may be struggling in their faith? Reach out to them.**
- **How can we use Paul's prayer to regularly pray for believers in our lives and around the world?**

### **PRAY**

Ask the Lord to strengthen you to face any hardships that come your way. Pray for a sensitivity to see who you can love for the sake of the gospel and commit to living as a holy witness instead of like the world.

## INTRODUCTION TO 1 THESSALONIANS

Paul spent a very short time in the city of Thessalonica, but he was able to establish a church during his stay. He may have had little time to instruct the new converts, so it is not surprising that Paul wrote a letter to address some questions.

### Author

No serious objections have been made to dispute that Paul was the author of 1 Thessalonians (1:1). The greeting also mentions Silvanus and Timothy. Sometimes Paul wrote from the team perspective, but he was the primary author (2:18; 3:2).

### Background

About AD 50 the missionary team led by Paul and Silas (“Silvanus”) left Philippi and traveled westward on the Roman road known as the Via Egnatia. They proceeded toward Thessalonica—the strategic capital city of the Roman Province of Macedonia. Thessalonica was a large port city on the Aegean Sea in modern-day Greece, with a population of about two hundred thousand. The city was filled with pagan worshipers of idols, the full pantheon of Greek and Roman gods, and was well known for its emperor worship. Thessalonica was loyal to Caesar, who had granted its citizens many privileges.

### Message and Purpose

Timothy reported to Paul that although the church at Thessalonica was suffering affliction, they were holding fast to the faith. And though they had some doctrinal misunderstandings, they were laboring for the Lord out of love and patiently hoping for the return of Christ. Paul wrote to encourage the church in their faith, to remind them that sanctification was God’s will for them, and to correct misunderstandings about end-time events.

## 1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-13

**3:1–2.** Sent from Athens to help the Thessalonian church, Timothy could help these believers grow in the faith but would not be as conspicuous as Paul or Silas. They were the prominent members of the missionary team and were well known by the hostile Jews and city officials.

**Notes:**

**3:3–4.** Christians should not be shaken by persecution, because Paul stated we are appointed to this in God's plan. Jesus taught his disciples that if people persecuted him, they as his followers would be persecuted as well (Jn 15:20). In Paul's case the persecution kept him moving from city to city. As a result many cities were able to hear the gospel from Paul's mouth. This would not have happened had Paul been warmly received among the Jews. Hence God allowed persecution to serve as a means of accomplishing his will.

**3:5.** For this reason refers back to the persecution of the Thessalonians mentioned in v. 4. Tempter is another reference to Satan as one who entices people to sin (Mt 4:1–11).

**3:6–9.** While v. 8 is hyperbole, it expresses strongly the nature of Paul's emotional connection to his converts. His very life depends on their perseverance in the faith.

**3:10–13.** Paul was praying to see the Thessalonian believers in person in order to complete what was lacking in their faith. Since the missionaries had to leave so suddenly (2:17–18), they did not complete their instruction of the Thessalonians in their new faith. Thus some elements and teaching were lacking—especially concerning Jesus's resurrection and the second coming (4:13–18). Since Paul was not able to personally return, he used this letter to address those matters (4:1–5:22). The prayer's request that the church overflow with love for one another and be blameless in holiness is addressed in detail in the following two paragraphs (4:1–8, 9–12).