

Week 4

Day 1

Read **1 Thessalonians 3:1-13** below three times and then follow the instructions that follow:

Therefore, when we could no longer stand it, we thought it was better to be left alone in Athens. And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith, so that no one will be shaken by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. In fact, when we were with you, we told you in advance that we were going to experience affliction, and as you know, it happened. For this reason, when I could no longer stand it, I also sent him to find out about your faith, fearing that the tempter had tempted you and that our labor might be for nothing.

But now Timothy has come to us from you and brought us good news about your faith and love. He reported that you always have good memories of us and that you long to see us, as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and affliction, we were encouraged about you through your faith. For now we live, if you stand firm in the Lord. How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience before our God because of you, as we pray very earnestly night and day to see you face to face and to complete what is lacking in your faith?

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you. And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we do for you. May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen.

1. Circle any words that seem important to you in this passage.
2. Put squares around the verbs (action words) in this passage.
3. Write down three questions that you have after reading this passage:
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
4. What encourages you from this passage?
5. What challenges you from this passage?
6. What would you say is the main idea of this passage?
7. Choose a verse or group of verses that you will memorize this week. Write that verse or those verses below:

Day 2

Following his time in Thessalonica, Paul went to Berea and then to Athens, but he was concerned that he had not finished the task of ministry in Thessalonica and that the young church was not prepared to face the trials and tribulations coming their way. According to Paul's words, he struggled deeply with leaving the Thessalonian church. After having to leave Berea in a similar way, Paul left Timothy and Silas behind in that city to encourage the church there. Eventually Paul sent word back to Berea, instructing Silas and Timothy to come to him in Athens. Timothy rejoined Paul at Athens, but Paul could not bear it.

Read **1 Thessalonians 3:1-5**.

Paul sending Timothy back to this church was a profound sacrifice. This was not simply a wise leader making plans for Timothy to minister in Thessalonica. Paul was willing to be left alone in Athens. Athens was one of the world's oldest cities, a center for the arts, learning, and philosophy, home to Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum, perhaps the birthplace of democracy, and a place that was hostile to the gospel. This city full of idolatry provoked Paul's spirit and led to his confrontation with the philosophers on Mars Hill.

Read **Acts 17:16-34**.

1. If I had asked you before this study today to describe Athens from the time of Paul or ancient Greece, how would you have described it?

2. By the 1850s, Nashville had earned the nickname "Athens of the South" and eventually had a replica of the Parthenon built. Why would Nashville want to be associated with ancient Athens?

3. Why would Athens have been a strategic city for Paul in his desire to take the Gospel to the "ends of the earth?"

In addition to Paul's being left alone in Athens without Timothy, he was also giving up a coworker who could help in the evangelization of the city. Can you imagine the benefits of Paul and Timothy ministering together in Athens? Did you notice how he described Timothy in verse 2? He was giving up a "brother." I don't think Paul was simply using this term to describe Timothy as a brother in Christ. Paul's relationship with Timothy was deeper than that. The bond between them was more than coworkers for the gospel. Elsewhere Paul called Timothy "my true child in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2).

Paul consistently lived and did ministry by choosing what was best for the people to whom he had been called to minister. Often times, he ministered without regards to his own personal safety or benefit. For Paul, the people to whom he ministered, the message he was called to deliver, and the God he served was more important than anything else in his life.

4. Write down one truth you learned today.

Day 3

At the center of Paul's decision to send Timothy back to Thessalonica is a question of recognizing God's voice and following His will. Paul had several options to determine how he was going to minister to multiple churches at once. He could return to the Thessalonian church himself and postpone his ministry in Athens. He could decide not to send anyone to Thessalonica and hope for the best. Finally, he could send someone to check on the progress of the church.

1. When you are faced with a difficult decision, how do you determine God's will for that situation or decision?

2. Based on our study yesterday and to this point in the book of 1 Thessalonians, what do you think was the determining factor for Paul to send Timothy?

Determining the specific will of God in a particular situation is one of the most important and sometimes difficult aspects of living the Christian life.

Determining God's will in general for our lives should not be that difficult. God's Word makes it very clear for us that God has certain purposes for our lives:

- We were created first and foremost to worship God and enjoy His presence forever.
- We were created for relationships with other believers who encourage us in our walk with the Lord.
- We were created to grow more and more like Jesus through discipleship.

- We were created to serve one another within the church.
- We were created to share our faith and take the message of the Gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

The question that we must answer is how we are to individually carry out each of those purposes in our own lives. How can we tell if a thought or idea about the way to carry out God's general will in our lives is genuinely from God? How can we know that we are hearing from God?

While we may not have a formula that will answer that question every time. Here are some questions you can ask yourself when you are facing a decision or moment of discerning God's will:

- Does it agree with the Bible?
- Will it make me more like Christ?
- Is it affirmed by godly people in my life?
- Is it consistent with how God gifted and shaped me as a person?
- Does it glorify God and advance His Kingdom?

3. Would those questions and reflecting on your purposes have helped you make better decisions in the past? How or how not?

4. Think of a decision or choice you have before you right now. How do your choices line up with the questions above and the purposes to which God has called you?

5. Write down one truth you learned today.

Day 4

I believe that you can understand someone's spiritual life in large part by the victories that they celebrate and the prayers that they pray. We celebrate what we value. Those people closest to you can recognize rather quickly what it is that you think is important in life by the way that you compliment and encourage them. In the same way, when we are praying to God, we bring to him those things in our lives that matter most.

Read **1 Thessalonians 3:6-13**.

1. Based on what Paul celebrated and prayed in this section, make a list of what was important to Paul:

2. How do you understand 1 Thessalonians 3:8. What does Paul mean when he says that now they "truly live" because they were "standing firm?"

Paul expresses his absolute joy in the faithfulness and strength of the testimony of the believers in Thessalonica. He is overwhelmed with joy the they are standing firm in the faith. For Paul, he knew that the physical and emotional persecution that the Thessalonian church had suffered was driven by spiritual forces antagonistic to the people of God.

Read **Ephesians 6:10-20**.

3. According to Paul in those verses, what is required to stand firm in our faith? From all of our study, how had the Thessalonians demonstrated that they were standing firm?

Paul's prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3 can serve to model for us the method and content of our prayers. Notice here that Paul shows us three truths about the way that he was praying for the Thessalonians. First, Paul says that they prayed constantly and insistently for them ("night and day"). Secondly, Paul says they prayed intensely for the new believers ("very earnestly"). Thirdly, the word Paul uses for prayer in this section suggests that they were praying very specific prayers. He will reveal those prayers in the last section of this passage. Notice again that they prayed constantly, insistently, earnestly, and specifically.

4. Write down a time when you prayed constantly, insistently, earnestly, and specifically for a person or situation. What drove you to that type of prayer?

We can also learn about Paul's heart and ministry by the content of the prayer in this section. Paul prayed for them specifically in two ways: 1) that he would be able to see them again face to face and 2) that they would continue to grow strong in their faith, hope and love.

5. How does Paul's prayer in this passage compare with most prayers that are shared in churches and small groups? How are they similar? How are they different?

6. Who is someone in your life that you need to pray for constantly, insistently, earnestly, and specifically? Write their name down on an index card or sticky note and put it somewhere you will see it on a daily basis in order to pray.

7. Write down one truth you learned today.

Day 5

Read **1 Thessalonians 3:1-13**.

As we finish out our week together, I want us to focus on four ways that God's people can love each other as demonstrated by Paul in this passage:

**God's People Sacrifice
For One Another (vs.1-2)**

Paul was willing to adjust his plans to accomplish God's plans. That's what believers do. They recognize that God is working in a thousand ways that cannot be seen. You and I often become so wrapped up in our world that we miss out on what God is doing in His world. Paul, on the other hand, had a bigger picture in mind. He was able to balance his desire to advance the gospel with his understanding that the work of the gospel was much bigger than his personal ambitions. Because of that, sacrificing his coworker and companion for several weeks was a small price to pay for the sake of the Thessalonians.

1. How do the sacrifices that Paul made challenge you today?

2. What sacrifice would be the most difficult to make for the sake of the church?

God's People Encourage One Another (vs.2-7)

Persecution, hardship, and difficulty are expectations for the Christian; they were never meant to be exceptions for the Christians. So the real question is not, Will I face trouble? The real question is, How will I respond when I face trouble? We can't expect to avoid it, so we should prepare to stand firm through it. Paul gives two ways that God's people help each other in the midst of difficulty. First, we hold one another up. Secondly, we pick one another up.

The key to standing firm in the midst of persecution or difficulty is preparing to stand firm before difficulty or persecution comes. Paul had instructed them on the basics of following the Lord and standing firm. Paul knew that Satan would attack a new church in an attempt to derail it before it got established. He prepared the people for the coming difficulty by holding them to the standard established by God's Word.

We also see in this passage, the importance of picking one another up in the midst of difficulty. What is interesting in this passage is that Paul is the one who is encouraged by the Thessalonians. We understand from Paul's description that he had experienced disappointment and nervousness about the state of these new believers. By hearing the good words about their faith, he was lifted up and encouraged.

3. Describe a time when you were encouraged in a significant way during a time of difficulty by a member of your church?

4. How does Paul's love and concern for the Thessalonians challenge you?

**God's People Pray For
One Another (vs.8-13)**

The apostle Paul was very transparent. To read his letters is to see into his life. He willingly shares details about his doubts, hopes, concerns, joys, sorrows, and weaknesses. But of all the things that Paul shares about himself, perhaps the most profound is his prayer life. Through his prayers, you see Paul's heart for God and people. In this passage, Paul shows us a prayer that is passionate, persistent, and purposeful. Paul prays consistently with passion for the Thessalonians. Specifically he prays for their spiritual growth, open doors for the Gospel, increasing love, and a walk worthy of Christ.

Read **Ephesians 3:14-21**.

5. What similarities do you see between the prayers in 1 Thessalonians and Ephesians?

6. What differences do you see between the prayers in 1 Thessalonians and Ephesians?

7. How will you adjust your prayer life after studying this week's lesson?