

In the previous verses we saw that the Apostle Paul was willing to give up his helper Timothy to see that the church in Thessalonica was standing firm in the faith. His example speaks to a very important issue in the believer's life. If we have died with Christ and become new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17ⁱ), we will exercise the Holy Spirit's power to set aside our own desires and what would benefit us to put God's desires above our own. As Jesus said before the cross, "*Not my will but Yours be done*" (Luke 22:42ⁱⁱ). That is contrary to our old nature. In our pride and selfishness, we manipulate situations to get our way. When someone else does the same, we quarrel and fight because both parties are in the flesh, our old nature. It is the common cause of divorce. Paul tells men in Ephesians five to love their wives like Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25ⁱⁱⁱ). It does not mean being a doormat, but in many cases it does mean to sacrifice our will for her desire while at the same time being the head of the home in spiritual decisions.

James addresses the quarrels and fights that arise between people in the church.

¹ What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

James 4:1-4 The word passions here can be translated desires. Believers find their desires at war within them. We know what we want, and we meet others who want something different. Or we find that God is showing us His desire which is contrary to our own. Jesus' answer is to crucify the old nature, which in His words is to take up our cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23^{iv}). It takes the power of the Holy Spirit within us to put others first and to put God first. The person who does so is a spiritual person. He or she is a free man or woman. They will not let their old nature dominate them (2 Corinthians 4:10,11^v). They find joy in serving God and others. They can put themselves last and find a different kind of pleasure doing so. It is the pleasure that comes from God's approval.

New believers find this to be extremely difficult. They are not experienced in putting to death their selfishness and pride (Colossians 3:5^{vi}). A life of living to please yourself is hard to change. We make excuses for our behavior as if we had no choice and blame our behavior on others' actions. What we are declaring when we justify our selfishness is that we are spiritually weak and are incapable of rising above situations we face even with the Spirit's help. But if we are in Christ, that is a lie. We can do all things through Him who loved us and gave us His Spirit to empower us (Philippians 4:13^{vii}).

I am pointing out Paul's ability to put others first. Jesus said, "*The greatest among you will be your servant.*" Matthew 23:11 Paul was Jesus' servant and willing to let Timothy go so that the church in Thessalonica could thrive. He was more concerned about them than he was about himself. And look at the fruit he personally reaped when Timothy returned.

⁶ 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— 1 Thessalonians 3:6 Timothy brought great joy to Paul's heart with the news of their faith and love. They did not abandon the faith in the face of persecution. Their faith was solid enough to suffer loss and yet stay strong. Their love for one another and the Lord was intact. Since love is the first fruit of the Spirit, it is a spiritual barometer of how we are doing spiritually. **Do you love others in the church even if they are different or do not behave according to your expectations? Do you want to get to know them?** In a church this size it is hard to get to know everyone, but we should be building strong relationships with as many as we can. We do come to worship Jesus together, but in all the biblical expressions of the church we are described as being together, a flock, parts of a building, a crop in field, and the body of Christ. Do we need persecution to drive us together? Or will we do as Jesus commanded and love one another (John 15:12^{viii}, 17^{ix})?

Timothy also reported how they kindly remembered Paul and longed for his return. I think perhaps Paul was worried that the Jews in that town would poison the people's minds to turn against Paul. Hearing that was not the case was a great relief, not simply because they viewed him favorably and wanted to see him return, but because they were clinging to Jesus as their Savior.

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. 1 Thessalonians 3:7,8 Guzik comments on this. *Paul wrote this letter from Corinth, and his coming to that city was marked by difficulty. He said of his coming to Corinth, I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling (1 Corinthians 2:3^x). Yet since Timothy came back with good news, Paul had a renewed strength and freshness of life (for now we live).*^{xi} The concern for the church in Thessalonica added to the difficulty he was facing in Corinth. Timothy's report comforted their hearts. It had been so heavy a burden of concern that Paul describes the report of them standing firm in their faith to be life giving.

Some of us are familiar with this feeling. We have shared our heart and our faith with someone who was in crisis. They depart from us without any contact information or do not answer our texts or emails. Or if we have a way to contact them we keep sowing the Word despite their lack of response. We wake in the middle of the night, and they are on our hearts, and we pray for them. And then we get some news. If they are in the same sad condition we continue to pray, but our hearts are heavy. If they have turned the corner or have found a good fellowship we are overjoyed.

John the Beloved said that he had no greater joy than to know that his children walk in truth (3 John 1:5). Do you hear that? "No greater joy!" What is your greatest joy? John let go of his personal desires and allowed his heart to be filled with God's desires. Listen to Psalm 37:4 *⁴ Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.* Some people read that as getting what you want if you delight yourself in God. I believe the intention of the verse is that when we make God our main delight in life, we want His desires in our hearts, and He will answer our petitions. When we want what He wants, then we are truly free. It is the place of deep, abiding joy and fruitfulness in His service. *G. K. Chesterton once remarked, "How much larger your life would be if your self could become smaller in it."*^{xii}

⁹ For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, 1 Thessalonians 3:9 We get a glimpse into the pastoral heart of Paul in this verse. The source of his great joy is knowing they have persevered in the faith. Paul was kept from returning, so while he had planted the seed there, it was all God, the Great Shepherd, who made it grow and nurtured it. Spurgeon wrote of the pastoral heart. *Never is the servant of God so full of delight as when he sees that the Holy Spirit is visiting his hearers, making them to know the Lord, and confirming them in that heavenly knowledge. On the other hand, if God does not bless the word of his servants it is like death to them. To be preaching and to have no blessing makes them heavy of heart: the chariot-wheels are taken off, and they drag heavily along: they seem to have no power nor liberty.*” (Spurgeon).^{xiii} I think this is one reason so many pastors leave the ministry. They pour their heart into people only to see them resist the power of God’s Word. It is a heavy burden. At times they can feel that they must have failed when it is simply the choice people make to love the world more than God. Pastors must learn to trust that the Great Shepherd will continue to draw them to Himself, which is a comfort to their heart, but does not mitigate the present pain.

What thanks can we render unto God when He helps the lambs mature and stand firm in the faith? Ceaseless thanks! We will be thanking God forever. Even that is insufficient because the results are eternal. The joy that we experience knowing they can stand in the face of persecution fills our hearts with overflowing gratitude to God. He is indebted to give thanks before God, or as some translate it, in the presence of our God. The context implies praising God continually for their eternal salvation; but when Jesus appears we will realize to an even greater extent the magnitude of blessing in what God has done (Matthew 25:34^{xiv})!

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? 1 Thessalonians 3:10 Paul gave thanks before God night and day in prayer. He used an intense word to describe their abundant prayer. ESV translates it as abundantly. Another translation is exceedingly. The Greek original is very emphatic. They were doing a lot of praying about a chance to see this church again and supply what was lacking in their faith. By that I believe he meant to give them more teaching in areas of faith in which they had not yet been taught. Poole notes that Paul’s letters to them would certainly help to do this, but “*there is a peculiar blessing that attends oral preaching more than reading.*” Paul and his team’s presence would add the example they needed to see.

Your elders intercede for you in prayer, especially when they see an area where you are weak in faith. They do so in love, wanting to be sure you endure to the end. They follow the example of the great Shepherd of the sheep who ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25^{xv}). Paul follows this with an example of how they prayed.

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, 1 Thessalonians 3:11 Paul prays to our God and Father and the Lord Jesus, as he does in almost all of his letters. Together they are a compound subject of a single verb. Translators have a hard time wording this verse in English. Himself begins the sentence in Greek and refers to both the Father and the Son, further emphasizing their oneness (John 10:30). Literally it reads, “*Himself our God the Father and our Lord Jesus...*”

Since this may be the first letter Paul wrote, we see the concept of the oneness of the Father and Son was understood early on and not later as some suggest.

Father speaks of relationship, whereas Lord speaks of rulership. We often think of God as the ruler and Jesus as our brother relationally. Both are true. By addressing God as *our* Father and *our* Lord Jesus, Paul is including the Thessalonians for he has heard from Timothy the good news that they are continuing in the faith.

People sometimes ask me to whom should we address our prayers? Jesus prayed, “*Our Father, who is in heaven,*” Matthew 6:9 But Jesus is the one mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5^{xvi}). If you are in Christ and address your prayer to the Father, Jesus intercedes and presents that prayer to Him. If you pray to Jesus, He still takes all prayers within God’s will to the Father. What matters most is your heart condition (Romans 8:27^{xvii}). Whether you address the Father or the Son, God will answer all prayers that are according to His will in His way and at the best time (1 John 5:14^{xviii}). If He does not answer, the answer was either “no” or “not now.”

Paul’s first request is that God direct their way to the Thessalonians. He had just mentioned the reason in verse ten, to supply what was lacking in their faith. The word translated supply can mean to restore, complete, or perfect. He longed to shore up any insufficiencies in their faith. That is the goal of every godly elder. Where the flock has unbiblical ideas or behaviors, elders desire to correct and instruct according to God’s Word that the church might become godlier. That is a blessing in this life and the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8^{xix}). MacArthur wrote, *That growth is evident when (1) their knowledge of God’s Word is increasing (cf. Col. 3:16^{xx}); (2) their confidence in God is greater than before (cf. Eph. 3:12^{xxi}); (3) their trust in His sovereignty is stronger than before (cf. Job 42:2^{xxii}); (4) their obedience to Him is consistent (cf. Deut. 17:19–20^{xxiii}); and (5) they are finding joy in their trials (cf. James 1:2–3^{xxiv}).*^{xxv}

¹² *and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you,* 1 Thessalonians 3:12 Paul’s prayer goes on to ask the Lord to cause their love for one another and for all to abound. Love is the first fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22^{xxvi}). In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he tells them love is the supreme law.

⁸ *Owe no one anything, except to love each other; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.* ⁹ *For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* ¹⁰ *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* Romans 13:8-10 This is in line with Jesus’ declaration that the greatest law is to love God with your all and your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37^{xxvii}). *Paul made it clear that this love is not just for the family of God but for all people. Other New Testament injunctions concerning all people include pursuing peace (Rom. 12:18^{xxviii}), doing good (Gal. 6:10^{xxix}), being patient (Eph. 4:2^{xxx}), praying (1 Tim. 2:1^{xxxi}), showing consideration (Titus 3:2^{xxxii}), and honoring (1 Peter 2:17^{xxxiii}).*^{xxxiv} That is being Christlike. Jesus corrected people, but even His correction was done out of love for their souls and for the people they affect. We hate the evil but love the sinner who was made in the image of God. John goes so far as to say that if we do not love our brother whom we have seen, we cannot love God whom we have not seen (1 John 4:20^{xxxv}). Now stop for a moment and **think of those whom you**

refuse to love for whatever reason. Who comes to mind? May the Lord make us increase and abound in love for one another and for all.

We need this prayer. The church that loves one another, forgiving one another, being gracious, not expecting to be served but to serve invites those seeking the truth. But if we are constantly harping on things we do not agree with, putting individuals down, being unforgiving, demanding our way, then we are just like the world. We have nothing to offer. That is why there are church splits and people who are wounded by churches. If you are thinking of someone this applies to other than yourself, you are missing the point. *I must change. I need this prayer. I want the love of Christ to abound in me to the extent that I put myself last and in love serve others without expecting anything in return. And when I don't, I am falling short of the glory of God and that is sin (Romans 3:23^{xxxvi}).* Paul says that it should be like their love for the Thessalonians. That love was manifested in praying for them night and day.

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.* 1 Thessalonians 3:13 Most translators have decided to translate “holy ones” who come with God as “saints.” But all other references to Jesus’ return refers to angels accompanying Him (2 Thessalonians 1:7^{xxxvii}; Zechariah 14:5^{xxxviii}; Jude 14^{xxxix}; Mark 8:38^{xl}; except 1 Thessalonians 4:14^{xli}). It is possible that “all His holy ones” indicates that the Lord will return with the angels and the spirits of departed saints as well.

Paul prays for a supernatural work in them, that the Lord would establish their hearts in holiness and be blameless when Jesus returns. In other words that we might be ready to meet Jesus and be as much like Him as possible in this life. The bar is as high as it can be set, but remember, it is the Lord’s work. Falling short of that is due to our lack of willingness to cooperate when we are convicted of sin. How much do you want this prayer to be answered in you? Your desire for the Lord’s return tells you your spiritual temperature. Is He truly what you desire more than anything else? What is holding you back from a full surrender to the life of Jesus in you? *Increasing in love results in an increase in holiness which leads to a blameless condition.*^{xlii} We are blameless in God’s eyes because we are in Christ. But the more we increase in love the more blameless we become in this life. That is God’s desire for our earthly lives (4:3^{xliii}). Is it yours as well? The more blameless we are, the freer and the more joy in the Lord we experience. Are you willing to die daily? Will you let His desires fill your heart?

Questions:

- 1 What is the believer’s big struggle on the road to maturity?
- 2 How did Paul exemplify this?
- 3 How did Paul describe his reaction to Timothy’s news?
- 4 What is your greatest joy?
- 5 Review the Chesterton quote.
- 6 Where do we see the oneness of the Father and Son?
- 7 What was Paul’s first prayer wish?
- 8 How do we know early Christians saw God and Jesus as one?
- 9 How important is it that we increase in love?
- 10 What are the results of an increase in love?

ⁱ **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

ⁱⁱ **Luke 22:42 (ESV)**

⁴² saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

ⁱⁱⁱ **Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

^{iv} **Luke 9:23 (ESV)**

²³ And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

^v **2 Corinthians 4:10-11 (ESV)**

¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

^{vi} **Colossians 3:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

^{vii} **Philippians 4:13 (ESV)**

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

^{viii} **John 15:12 (ESV)**

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

^{ix} **John 15:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

^x **1 Corinthians 2:3 (ESV)**

³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,

^{xi} David Guzik, *1 Thessalonians*, David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), 1 Th 3:7–9

^{xii} James H. Grant Jr., *1 & 2 Thessalonians: The Hope of Salvation*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 86

^{xiii} David Guzik, *1 Thessalonians*, David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), 1 Th 3:7–9

^{xiv} **Matthew 25:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

^{xv} **Hebrews 7:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ 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.

^{xvi} **1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)**

⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

^{xvii} **Romans 8:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

^{xviii} **1 John 5:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

^{xix} **1 Timothy 4:8 (ESV)**

⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

^{xx} **Colossians 3:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

^{xxi} **Ephesians 3:12 (ESV)**

¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

^{xxii} **Job 42:2 (ESV)**

² "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

^{xxiii} **Deuteronomy 17:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them,

²⁰ that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

^{xxiv} **James 1:2-3 (ESV)**

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

^{xxv} John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), 89

^{xxvi} **Galatians 5:22 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

^{xxvii} **Matthew 22:37 (ESV)**

³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

^{xxviii} **Romans 12:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

^{xxix} **Galatians 6:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

^{xxx} **Ephesians 4:2 (ESV)**

² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,

^{xxxi} **1 Timothy 2:1 (ESV)**

¹ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,

^{xxxii} **Titus 3:2 (ESV)**

² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

^{xxxiii} **1 Peter 2:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

^{xxxiv} John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002)

^{xxxv} **1 John 4:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

^{xxxvi} **Romans 3:23 (ESV)**

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

^{xxxvii} **2 Thessalonians 1:7 (ESV)**

⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels

^{xxxviii} **Zechariah 14:5 (ESV)**

⁵ And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

^{xxxix} **Jude 1:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones,

^{xl} **Mark 8:38 (ESV)**

³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

^{xli} **1 Thessalonians 4:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

^{xlii} Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, pp. 101–2

^{xliii} **1 Thessalonians 4:3 (ESV)**

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;