

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Out of Sight, Not Out of Mind

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

Part 1

People are continually passing in and out of our lives. When I was preparing this introduction it was 11:00 am on Tuesday, and I began to think of all the people that I had already encountered, because of a coolant leak in my van I had already stopped at Corky's Auto repair and talked to a mechanic who said they did not work on Toyota Van's. So that mechanic went in and out of my life. Then I called Foreign Car specialists and asked them if they would take a look at my van. And they said they would be glad to if it were any other car than a Toyota Van. So that particular service manager went in and out of my life. He gave me the number of Atwood and Sons and said, "Try them." So I called, but they said they were too busy to look at it. So another individual went in and out of my life. Finally I was able to talk to some woman at the Toyota Dealer who said they were busy but bring the car down and they would try and look at it. So this woman passed in and out of my life. When I got down to the Toyota dealer there were 6 or 7 people in a line waiting to talk to the service manager. We all stood in line together and they went in and out of my life. I could keep going but I think you get the point.

People are continually going in and out of our lives and as soon as they pass out of our lives we soon forget them. The old adage "Out of sight out of mind" for the most part is very true. But is this true of all the people that have come and gone from our lives? And of course the answer is, No!!

There are people who I have not seen in many years that I frequently think about. Close friends and family members. Isn't this common? Why would this be so? There may be different reasons why we might think of people even after they have been gone from our lives for a while. But a very significant reason why we might think of certain persons is because we have a very fond affection for them. We care about them.

For Spirit-filled Christians, the group of people who will be most difficult to separate from would be other Spirit-filled Christians. Why? Because they are the ones who we are the closest to!! This is Christ's point in **Matt. 12:46-50** **"While He was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. (47) And someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to you." (48) But He answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" (49) And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold, My mother and My brothers! (50) "For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."** Isn't this so! This has been and continues to be my experience. How can I feel close to someone who doesn't love the Lord? How can I be close to someone who isn't trying to serve the Lord? How can I feel close to someone who isn't concerned about the Lord's church? How can I feel close to someone who isn't concerned about reaching the lost of the world for Christ? I can't! I can feel a sense of responsibility toward them. I can seek to minister to them. I can feel a sense of compassion for them. But I cannot feel a close intimacy or the deep affection that I can for those who share my same goals, aspirations, hopes, desires and affections.

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Paul had become separated from the Thessalonian Church. And though he has become separated it doesn't mean that he has ceased to care for them. In Paul's case it was "out of sight not out of mind." Paul had a deep affection for them because they were to him his family.

Let us read **VV. 17-20** **"But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while--in person, not in spirit - were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. (18) For we wanted to come to you - I, Paul, more than once - and yet Satan thwarted us. (19) For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? (20) For you are our glory and joy."**

Paul wants to make sure that the Thessalonians know how truly special they are to them. Why does Paul want to do this? Though his relationship with the church of Thessalonica was a very good one there were detractors. There were various Thessalonians, who were not a part of the church, but who were opposing the church, and who had begun to challenge Paul. Not only in respect to his motives and personal character which Paul addressed in **VV. 1-12** but also for his apparent lack of interest in the Thessalonians. These adversaries of Paul were saying this to the Thessalonians because Paul had not returned to visit them. They were saying, "See, isn't it obvious, if Paul really cared about you wouldn't he have visited you?"

Paul felt compelled to reassure the Thessalonians that these accusations were without foundation. He wanted to forcefully communicate the very special place they held in his life both in time and eternity.

THE SPECIAL PLACE IN RESPECT TO TIME

Paul's accusers were saying, "Paul has no interest in you." They were saying, Paul could care less about you." They were probably saying, Paul is down in Corinth indulging himself at the expense of the Corinthian Christians just like he had amongst you. He has no concern for you at all." Paul wants them to know that this certainly is not how he presently feels.

Let us read **V. 17** **"But we."** Paul begins his defense by presenting a contrast. Paul is saying, "Contrary to the Jews who are hostile toward Jesus and hostile to all men in that they are actively seeking to hinder you and other from receiving the gospel this is not true of us. Rather than being hostile toward you like our accusers we truly only have great affection for you.

He will now begin to build the case. He begins by attacking the argument of his accusers. His accusers are apparently saying, "Paul and his companions do not care. You know this because they are not with you. They are not even visiting you." And what these accusers were saying was true but their interpretation of what the Thessalonians were seeing was all wrong.

Let me ask you a question. Are there people that genuinely care about you that you have not recently heard from? Are there people that genuinely care about you that you may not have heard from for quite a while? And I would have to believe the answer would be yes. Just because you have not heard from someone for a period of time does not mean that they do not care for you or have a great affection for you.

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This is very easily proven. Let me ask you a question. Are there people that you truly care about that you have not contacted recently? Are there people that you truly care about that you have not contacted in quite a long while? I rest my case.

Though this is obvious if we were to think about it a while. Once this thought is lodged in our mind that someone does not care because if they cared I would have heard from them. It can be very destructive to a relationship. Paul obviously feels that he must address this attack upon his credibility and any future effectiveness in respect to ministry amongst the Thessalonians. How does he do this?

Notice the next phrase, **“But we, brethren, having been bereft of you.”** The word **“bereft”** (**APORPHANIZO**) speaks of someone being torn away and expresses a parents loss of a child. Thessalonians had been orphaned because Paul and his companions who had **“proved gentle among them as a nursing mother”** and who had **“exhorted, encouraged and implored”** them as a father had been forcefully removed from them. It was not the apostles choice to leave the Thessalonians.

Hopefully you remember that **Acts 17** records in detail exactly what led to Paul’s departure. They had been in the city only a short while but Paul’s ministry had been so successful that certain Jews stirred up the city and they went to Jason’s house in order to turn him and his friends over to the mob. But when they didn’t find Paul they drug Jason and other church members before the city authorities. And apparently the city authorities got a pledge from these members of the Thessalonian church that Paul and his companions would be permitted to leave town if they left immediately and these church members gave to these authorities their pledge. It was not Paul’s decision to leave town it was the decision of the Thessalonian church.

How did this decision by the Thessalonian church affect Paul? It had ripped his heart out. He felt like a parent being torn away from their own children. He is calling the Thessalonians to remember.

Paul says that he had been **“bereft”** or **“torn away”** from them for a **“short while.”** At the point of this writing it would appear that he had only been gone a matter of months. But this short while turned into what appears to be approximately 5 years according to **Acts 20:2-6.**

But Paul is not satisfied to recount the facts of his departure but assures them that the feelings he had for them then had not at all diminished.

He assures them that though he may not be with them presently **“physically”** he is with them in **“spirit.”** Yes, Paul may be out of sight, but the Thessalonians were not out of his “mind.” Paul was continuously thinking of them. In fact the word translated **“spirit”** literally means “heart.”

Paul, though he had left, was continuing to think about the Thessalonians. They had not been forgotten, in fact, he very much wanted to visit them. Let us read the remaining part of **V. 17.** **“were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.”** Paul doesn’t just simply say **“they were all the more eager with great desire to see them.”**

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Rather he says **“they were all the more eager with great desire to see their face.”** Paul wanted to look into their faces, he wanted to look into their eyes. When we really do want to communicate with someone don't we want to communicate to them in person if that is at all possible? Haven't you ever been in a position that you chose not to write a letter or even make a phone call but have rather chosen to meet face to face with a person for the simple reason that you wanted to be in a position that you would experience that very best possible setting for communication?

How strongly did Paul feel about this face to face meeting? Look at the words that Paul uses. Paul says they were all the **“more eager.”** The word **“more”** literally means “more abundantly” and immediately following the use of this word Paul follows up on that word by with the word **“eager.”** This word combines the idea of speed and diligence. Paul was not in way dragging his feet. He is clearly communicating with these words a sense of urgency he feels for meeting with them. But Paul is not done yet, not only does he say that he is **“more abundantly eager to see their face.”** But he says that they are **“more abundantly eager with great passion to see your face.”** The word translated **“passion”** is the word EPITHYMIA which often speaks of passion in the sense of lust. It is a very strong word but Paul does not say simply that they were **“More abundantly eager with passion to see their face”** rather he says, **“More abundantly eager with great passion to see their face.”**

Paul is reassuring the Thessalonians that his feelings for the Thessalonians had not diminished at all. He cared for them when he was with them with the heart of a nursing mother and the strength and determination of a concerned father. Nothing had at all changed except his geographical position.

He did not want to go back to them just simply to throw horseshoes or enjoy an outdoor barbecue. I am not saying that socializing with people you care about is not an enjoyable thing to do. Quite to the contrary it is a very enjoyable thing to do. But this is not the primary purpose for Christians to get together. We are to be coming together according to **Heb. 10:24** to **“stimulate one another to love and good works.”** This certainly is true here. Paul wanted to go to them to assist them, support them, and encourage them in the faith, because this is what we are to be about doing.

If you are presently attending Valley Bible Church I would exhort you, I would encourage you, I would implore you to strive to become more involved. Why should I? Because the Lord has called you to do this. That's why. The Lord has called us to become involved with our Christian family.

If you need an example to pattern your life after then follow the example of Paul. It would have been very easy for him to emotionally abandon the Thessalonian Church. He was now in another city in the process of establishing and equipping another church. He could have said, “I am just too busy to be actively concerned about you.” Obviously Paul did not consider himself too busy. Paul could have said, “It is too dangerous for me to be involved with the Thessalonians, there is a very hostile Jewish community in Thessalonica and if I return there I can only expect trouble.” The thought was correct certainly. He could expect trouble but he didn't allow that to dissuade him from wanting to return to them.

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CONCLUSION

Are we as committed to our church family as Paul? Are we actively seeking to be involved in the life of this local fellowship? Are we doing this even in the midst of busy schedules and even in spite of the possibility that we might experience some form of hardship?

Hopefully the answer to these questions is yes. And if it is then we are in truth following in the footsteps of Paul in respect to love and concern for the Church of Christ.