

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Take a Stand 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 Part 4

Paul had become separated from the Thessalonian Church. He had been unable to return to them because of Satanic opposition. But he was still extremely concerned about how they were doing. He had seen them spiritually born, he had been involved in personally nurturing the church but he had not been privileged to see them successfully stand in the midst of tribulation and trial.

Paul wanted to know about how they were doing. Paul wanted to help them and assist them in standing strong in the Lord in the midst of difficult times. And being unable to get there himself he actively sought ways to assist them.

HE ASSISTED THEM BY SENDING A HELPER VV. 1-10. He sent Timothy to them even though this left him alone in Athens, yet he was willing to do this, not because it was best for him, but rather it was best for the Thessalonians.

What was the result of the visit? Timothy returned to give Paul an excellent report and Paul was ecstatic. Paul explained this ecstasy to the Thessalonians by saying in **V. 8** **“for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.”** There was no greater earthly joy for Paul than witnessing the spiritual progress of people. People that he had personally cared for.

Hopefully we ourselves see the wisdom of ministering in this way. Hopefully we see the wisdom of ministering to the spiritual welfare of people. For it is only in this ministry that our lives will count in respect to things which are eternal. And may the Lord bless us with the joy of seeing the fruit of our ministry even as Paul saw the fruit of his ministry with the Thessalonians.

How did Paul assist the Thessalonians? He sent to them a helper but Paul is not done ministering to the Thessalonians. There was more to be done.

HE ASSISTED THEM NOT ONLY BY SENDING A HELPER, BUT ALSO BY PRAYING FOR THEM.

He records his prayer for us in **VV. 11-13**. Let us read the passage. **“Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you.”** We cannot minimize the importance of prayer in our being able to stand against the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is foolhardy for us to battle sin without prayer. We need to commit ourselves to prayer. We need to commit ourselves to pray for ourselves, and we need to commit ourselves to pray for others. Paul understood the importance of prayer and models it for us in the passage we are examining.

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PAUL IN THIS PRAYER SHARED WITH THE THESSALONIANS THREE SPECIFIC AND PECISE PRAYERS.

(1) He prayed that they would be able to come to the Thessalonians. We saw this in **V. 11** **“Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you.”** We learned from this specific request that difficulty in establishing fellowship with the church should not be passively accepted but passionately prayed about. We have learned that we need to be turning our thoughts into prayer. We learned that our thoughts about people need to turn into prayers for people.

THE GOAL OF LAST WEEK'S MESSAGE WAS TO STIMULATE YOUR PRAYER LIFE!!

Hopefully we have each of us been seeking to do this. Hopefully we have each of us been exerting ourselves in this area. This discipline certainly is not easy. But it is extremely worthwhile. This discipline will help us establish unceasing communion between ourselves and the Lord. There will be an increasing sense of relationship between ourselves and God.

Let us assume that all of us this evening/morning have been disciplining ourselves to turn our thoughts into prayers. Let us assume this evening/morning that each of us have been disciplining ourselves to turn our thoughts about people into prayers for people. And hopefully you are practicing this discipline even as you are sitting here this morning.

BUT WE NOW WANT TO GO FURTHER. JUST AS THE LAST MESSAGE FROM 1 THESS. 3:11-13 HOPEFULLY WAS USED BY THE LORD TO STIMULATE YOUR PRAYER LIFE. THE LORD WILL USE THIS MESSAGE TO HELP US UNDERSTAND THAT WE DO NOT ONLY WANT A PRAYER LIFE THAT IS ACTIVE BUT WHICH ALSO REFLECTS A GROWING SPIRITUAL MATURITY. HOPEFULLY THE LORD WILL USE THIS MESSAGE TO HELP US TO UNDERSTAND THAT MATURE PRAYING FLOWS FROM AND IS CONSISTENT WITH GOD’S WORD.

Certainly this was true of Paul. As we examine this passage we should not only be impressed that he was turning his thoughts into prayers. But we should be impressed with kind the of thoughts he was thinking. **LET US LOOK AT THE SECOND REQUEST.**

(2) HE PRAYED THAT THEY WOULD INCREASE AND ABOUND IN LOVE

Let us read **V. 12** **“and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you.”**

Paul has already told the Thessalonians in **1 Thess. 1:3** **“that he was constantly bearing in mind their labor of love.”** These Thessalonians were not an unloving fellowship they were a very loving fellowship. They were even exemplary in this area. But Paul still prays for them that they might increase and abound in love.

This is an extraordinary thought. This is an extraordinary prayer. When was the last time that you prayed this prayer? Where do such thoughts come from? From our conversations with our next door neighbor? From the Los Angeles Times?

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From rebuilding a car engine? From watching Seinfeld? They come from the Lord.

It is the will and work of God that we **“increase and abound in love?”** What does the verse say? **“And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love.”** And if there is any doubt about this **1 Thess. 4:9** Paul makes this very clear by saying, **“for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.”** It is the will and work of God that we increase and abound in love. This is mature praying. We need to understand that there is a big difference in the way that Christians approach the Lord. Some approach the Lord in a very immature and childlike way. While others approach the Lord in a very mature or adult-like way. Paul was the latter.

WHICH CATEGORY DO WE FALL IN? LET US CONSIDER THIS FOR A MOMENT AND LET US LOOK AT OUR OWN FAMILY FOR HELP. WHAT ARE SOME BEHAVIORS THAT COULD BE IDENTIFIED AS CHILDLIKE THAT WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO SEE MANIFESTED IN OUR PRAYER LIFE.

Young children typically are not very complementary. They are not quick to see the qualities that others possess and commend them for those qualities (EXPAND). Hopefully this will not be true of us in respect to our relationship with the Lord. Hopefully our mind will be continually filled with thoughts about the Lord’s attributes and we would be continually coming into his presence expressing these thoughts with words of adoration.

Young children typically are not real quick to admit fault. They are not quick to see what they have done wrong. Hopefully this will not be true of us in respect to our relationship with the Lord. Hopefully we will be quick to see our shortcomings and take those thoughts about ourselves and continually be coming into His presence expressing these thoughts with words of confession.

Young children typically are not quick to give thanks. They are not quick to see all the blessings in their lives and to express appreciation for all that they have received. Hopefully this will not be true of us in respect to our relationship with the Lord. Hopefully we will be quick to see the blessings of the Lord and will take those thoughts of blessedness and continually be coming into His presence expressing these thoughts with words of thanksgiving.

Young children typically are asking for things that they want rather than asking for things that their parents want. Children typically are making requests that are being driven by their appetites and fleshly desires rather than based on the desires of their parents. Hopefully we will be not so concerned about what we want but rather what our heavenly Father wants for us. Hopefully we will take those thoughts of what he would have us to do and continually be coming into his presence expressing these thoughts in words of supplication.

Young children typically do not ask for things for others, they are asking for things for themselves, hopefully we would not do this. But hopefully we would be as concerned for others as for ourselves. Hopefully we would take these thoughts about the needs of others and come into the Lord’s presence expressing those words of intercession.

Certainly Paul was turning his thoughts into prayers. But his thoughts were not childish thoughts. And certainly we see that in the request that we have just considered.

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How does this happen? It is through our study and meditation on the Word of God? **Col. 3:16** “**Let the Word of Christ dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.**” Where did all this teaching and admonishing with Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs come from? From our thoughts. And where did these thoughts come from? They came from “**letting the Word of Christ dwell within them richly.**”

The Lord wants us to transform our thoughts into prayers. He wants us to do that no matter what our level of maturity might be. But he doesn't want us to forever to come him with a childlike mentality, but rather as an adult. He wants us to come to Him having grown in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

I will make a bold statement. Unless we are letting the Word of Christ richly dwell within us I believe it is impossible to pray in a mature way. We just simply will not be thinking clearly or maturely.

Certainly this was not true of Paul. He was a man who let the Word of Christ richly dwell within Him. He was looking at the world through the grid of the Word of God. He knew what he needed to pray. He prayed for the Thessalonians that they would “**increase and abound in love.**”

Did God answer this prayer? **2 Thess. 1:3** “**We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.**” The Thessalonian church was a strong church that was getting stronger.

As I look at our own fellowship I can say with Paul, I thank the Lord for your labor of love not only for one another but for all men. We have a fellowship that I really do believe evidences the Love of Christ, but there is more to be done. We can increase and abound still more. As I look on this fellowship there are things that I would like to see in greater abundance.

I would like to see a greater willingness to discipline our lifestyles that we might get to services earlier to reach out to greet the brethren especially those who are visiting our fellowship. I believe that we have much room to grow in this area. I believe that this would be a loving thing to do.

I would like to see a greater willingness to open our homes for ministry both for the church family and for the community. I believe that we have much room to grow in this area. I believe that this would be a loving thing to do.

I would like to see a greater and growing willingness to discipline our consumption of the things of this world in order to support the ministries and the mission of this church. I would like to see a greater and growing willingness to discipline our consumption to help and assist those who are in need. I believe we have much room to grow in this area.

I would like to see a greater willingness and ability on our part to come along people and sorrow with those who sorrow and to rejoice with those who rejoice. I believe that there is much room to grow in this area.

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The Thessalonian Church was a strong church. But Paul prayed that they would even be stronger. He prayed that they would increase and abound in love for another and for all men just as they; Paul, Silas, and Timothy were doing toward them. Let's follow Paul's example and let us pray. Let us pray for our fellowship that we might increase and abound in love. And if we will do this I believe based on the faithfulness of God that prayer will be answered.

But I am convinced of this, unless we are able to discipline our lives to stay in the Scriptures and to meditate of the word day and night, this prayer and other prayers like it will slip away. And if we are praying at all it will be a very childlike and immature praying, which is better than nothing, but far short of what it could be.