

## Missing You

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5

But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, 18 because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. 19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

3:1 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, 3 that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. 4 For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

INTRODUCTION: Our message series is called “Lessons from a Growing Church,” and we are seeing what lessons we can learn from this letter that Paul wrote to a new and growing church. In chapter one we looked at the beginnings of the Thessalonian church. In chapter two we learned some lessons about ministry in the church. And today we learn about relationships in the church. Christian love is like family love, and, as we will see, ministry love goes even deeper. (Read **1 Thessalonians 2:17-20** But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, 18 because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. 19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20 For you are our glory and joy. and pray.)

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Christian love is like family love. Christian relationships involve a deep love and longing similar to family relationships. Even Christians who have never met each other before experiencing this deep bond through the Holy Spirit.

I remember visiting someone at the hospital, and a nurse came into the room singing, "To God be the glory great things he hath done." So, I joined with her in singing the second line: "So loved he the world that he gave us his Son." And then we joined together in the chorus: "Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth his voice, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice!" Here we had never met each other, we didn't even know each other's names, and yet we were singing praise to God together in the hospital room!

As Christians we belong to the family of God, and we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We experience family love for each other. But when we minister to others in the body of Christ, that strengthens these ties of family love even more.

If Christian love is like family love, then ministry love is like parental love. Brother and sister love in a family is wonderful, but parental love goes even deeper. Brother and sister love comes from sharing a common life together. But parental love stems from giving and nurturing life in another person. Just as the parent imparts life and nurtures life in a child, when you minister to someone in the body of Christ, you impart spiritual life and nurture spiritual life in the other person. That's why you develop this special love for them.

This is what happened with Paul and the Thessalonians. Paul shared the gospel with them, and he disciplined them in their faith. As a result, he loved them more than simply as brothers and sisters. He loved them as a parent loves a child.

Paul often speaks of his ministry relationships as that of a parent to his children. We saw this earlier in chapter two where he compared himself to a mother and a father when he was with the Thessalonians ([1 Thessalonians 2:7,11](#)). In 1 Corinthians 4 he calls the Corinthians his dear children and claims a special place as their father in Christ through the gospel ([1 Corinthians 4:14-17](#)). In Galatians 4 he calls the Galatians his dear children and compares himself to going through the pains of childbirth with them all over again ([Galatians 4:19](#)). In his letters to Timothy and Titus he addresses both of them as his true sons ([1 Timothy 1:2](#); [2 Timothy 1:2](#); [Titus 1:4](#)). In the book of Philemon he calls Onesimus his own son and his very heart ([Philemon 10-12](#)).

And Paul is not the only one who talks this way. Read through the letters of John in the New Testament. John addresses his readers as his dear children. He says that nothing brings him greater joy than knowing that his children are walking in the truth. (3 John 4) Christian love is like family love, and ministry love is like parental love. If you want to experience the deepest level of love in the body of Christ, I encourage you to get involved in ministry.

In our text today Paul gets intensely personal with the Thessalonians. He opens his life wide to them and lets them look directly into his heart. If the Thessalonians had any doubt of Paul's love for them, those doubts are forever removed when they read these words. He basically tells them, "Hey, I'm missing you! I'm missing you like a parent misses a child." And in sharing his deepest feelings with the Thessalonians, Paul also teaches us about Christian love and ministry.

## **I. Christians have a deep family love for each other (2:17-18)**

First, Paul teaches us that Christians have a deep family love for each other. Look at verses 17-18:

But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, 18 because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.. (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18)

### **A. We are brothers and sisters in Christ**

As Christians, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. Notice how Paul addresses them as family. He calls them "brothers." This is a family term of affection and also signifies equality. Paul was an apostle, but here he relates to them as dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Together they share a common life in Christ. This is a common term for fellow believers throughout Scripture and speaks of our close family ties within the body of Christ.

## **B. It hurts when we are separated**

As Christians, it also hurts when we are separated. Remember how hard it was being separated from each other during the covid lockdowns? That's how Paul felt with the Thessalonians. He even describes his separation from them in family terms. He speaks of being "torn away" from them.

The word translated "torn away" in this verse is an emotionally charged word. It is literally the word for someone who has been bereaved or orphaned. It was used most commonly of children who had lost their parents but is also used of parents who had lost a child. The word combines the idea of a forced, unnatural separation along with the accompanying grief or distress of bereavement. Paul is saying, "I didn't choose to leave you, Thessalonians. I was forced out. I feel like a parent who has lost his children." Paul's separation from the Thessalonians was involuntary and distressful. He felt powerful emotions for the Thessalonians even though he had only been separated from them for a short time.

He also tells them that although he was separated from them physically, he was never separated from them emotionally. He says, "**We were torn away from you in person, not in thought.**" The Thessalonians may have been out of sight, but never out of mind. Paul thought of them continually and carried them with him in his heart.

And so, Paul's separation from the Thessalonians was involuntary. He had been torn away. It was distressful to him, even though it had only been a short time. And he reassures them that it was only a physical separation, never a separation of the heart. He speaks as a parent who has been torn away from his children. It hurts when we are separated as Christians.

## **C. We long to see each other again**

Finally, when we are separated from each other as Christians, we long to see each other again. Paul longed to see the Thessalonians again. He says, "out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you." Paul didn't just make a half-hearted, token attempt to get back to the Thessalonians. He made every effort. He exerted himself.

The word carries the idea of eagerness and haste. Paul made no delays and left no stone unturned in his efforts to see the Thessalonians.

This driven effort to see them was motivated by an intense longing. He missed them as a parent misses a child. He says, **“We wanted to come to you again and again.”** Paul even emphasizes himself here – “certainly, I Paul, did.” Paul made multiple efforts to return to them, but nothing worked out.

So, what was stopping him then? Paul says, “Satan stopped us.” Satan is the personal name for the devil. The name Satan means “adversary” or “one who opposes.” Satan is a personal being who stands in opposition to God and God’s people. The word Paul uses for “stopped” here means “blocked or cut off.” It was used of military operations breaking up a road to make it impassable.

So, how did Satan stop Paul from returning to the Thessalonians? We don’t really know. Some believe it may have had something to do with Paul’s thorn in the flesh that he speaks about in ([2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#)). Others think Paul may be referring to the legal ban placed upon Jason and the other believers when Paul was driven out of Thessalonica. If Paul returned it may have placed his friends’ welfare in jeopardy. Either way Paul was blocked from returning, and he attributes this blocking to Satan.

Of course, this raises an interesting question. How do you know when Satan is stopping you or God is stopping you? Paul had both experiences in his life. Here Satan was stopping him from returning to the Thessalonians. But in Acts 16 we read that the Holy Spirit stopped him from entering Bithynia.

So, when you encounter a roadblock in your life, how do you know if it is God or if it’s Satan? It takes a combination of prayer, discernment, and looking at the surrounding circumstances. For example, if there is division or confusion, you know that is not of the Lord. Sometimes you won’t find out until later and it only becomes clear in hindsight. And then other times you may never know in this life.

However, this passage does teach us the reality of Satanic opposition. Sometimes Satan prevents Christian workers from doing the good they want to do. It doesn't mean that God is no longer in control. Satan can only do what God permits, and God can still turn everything to good. But it does mean that spiritual warfare is real and has actual effects on our life and ministry. Paul says, "We wanted to come to you, but Satan stopped us."

And so, in verses 17-18 Paul speaks in family terms and especially uses the language of a parent separated from a child. He tells the Thessalonians, "I'm missing you!" Why? Because Christian love is family love. Christians have a deep family love for each other.

## **II. Christians take family joy in each other.**

Secondly, Christians take family joy in each other. Look at verses 19-20 with me now where Paul writes:

19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20 For you are our glory and joy. ([1Thessalonians 2:19-20](#))

As Christians, we not only have a deep love for each other. We also take great joy in each other. Once again, it is a family joy. And just as with Christian love, this joy is only deepened by ministry.

### **A. We will rejoice in those we have served when Christ returns.**

The Bible tells us we will rejoice in those we have served when Christ returns. Notice how Paul describes the Thessalonians as his hope, his joy and his crown.

They are his hope because Paul is looking forward to the day when Christ returns and will reward him for his labors. The Thessalonians are the fruit of his labors for the kingdom of God. He has invested his life in them. They are his hope because they represent all that he has worked for.

They are also his joy. The Thessalonians' faith in Christ brings Paul great joy. This echoes the apostle John's words again: "Nothing brings me greater joy than knowing my children are walking in the truth." (3 John 4)

And then, they are also his crown in which he will glory. The crown here refers to the victor's wreath which was given to the winning athlete in a contest or race. It is similar to the gold medal we give out at the Olympics today. Paul tells the Thessalonians, "You are the gold medal in which we glory." The word glory means to boast or take pride in something, but in a good sense here. Paul's cause for boasting and pride in life comes from the results of his ministry in the lives of others. We will rejoice in those we have served when Christ returns.

### **B. Those we serve are also our pride and joy in the present.**

But not only will we rejoice when Christ returns. Those we serve are also our pride and joy in the present. Paul goes on to say the Thessalonians are his glory and joy even now. Once again, this is the language of a parent for their child. As parents, we have great hopes for our children. We take great joy in their lives and great pride in their accomplishments. My children are my pride and joy. I am full of so many hopes for them. I love them in the present, and I dream about their future.

Christians take family joy in each other. Christian ministry deepens that joy to the joy that a parent takes in their child.

### **III. Christians show family concern for each other.**

1) Christians have family love for each other. 2) Christians take family joy in each other. And finally, 3) Christians show family concern for each other. Look at chapter **1 Thessalonians 3:1-5** where Paul writes: Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker[a] in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, 3 that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. 4 For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we

were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

Christians naturally show family concern for each other's well-being. And once again, when you get involved in ministry, you begin to develop the concern of a parent for a child.

### **A. We sacrifice our own interests for the sake of those we serve**

Just like parents do for their children, we sacrifice our own interests for the sake of those we serve. Paul showed his concern for the Thessalonians in very clear and concrete ways. First of all, he sent Timothy to them. That may not seem like much, but you need to understand Paul's situation. Paul was in Athens struggling to share the gospel in an extremely hostile environment. We read in Acts 17 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ([Acts 17:16](#)).

Timothy provided Paul with spiritual, emotional and financial support. When Timothy was around, Paul could devote more time to the preaching of the gospel. Without Timothy there, Paul had to work full-time to support his needs while he preached.

Paul was so concerned for the Thessalonians that he was willing to be left alone in Athens at great personal cost. The word Paul uses for being left alone here literally means "to be abandoned or forsaken." Paul could not stand to be left alone, but neither could he stand not knowing how the Thessalonians were doing. He decided it was more important to send Timothy than to take care of his own needs. Just like parents do for their children, as Christians we sacrifice our own interests for the sake of those we serve.

### **B. We give our very best to serve each other.**

And just like parents do for their children, as Christians we give our very best for each other. In sending Timothy to the Thessalonians, Paul was not only making a great sacrifice. He was sending them someone who could truly help them. Timothy was a brother in Christ and God's fellow-worker in spreading the gospel of Christ. Paul often



called other people his “own fellow workers in the gospel.” But this is the only time Paul calls someone “God’s fellow worker in the gospel.” Timothy was not just an errand boy. He was a fully qualified minister of Jesus Christ who was invaluable to Paul in his ministry. And Paul sent him back to Thessalonica. When you care enough, you send the very best! Just like parents do for their children, as Christians we give our very best for each other.

### **C. We encourage each other through the hard times.**

And then, just like parents do for their children, as Christians we encourage each other through the hard times. Paul sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith. The Thessalonians were undergoing severe and constant persecution. Paul knew that they needed someone to come alongside and encourage them and help them stay strong in their faith. The purpose of this strengthening and encouraging was so that no one would become unsettled by these trials. Paul had a shepherd’s heart, and he did not want to see even one of the sheep get lost. And so, he sent Timothy to them.

Not only did he send Timothy to them prior to sending this letter, but he also sent words of encouragement himself now through the letter. He does this by setting their trials in context. He tells them that as Christians we are destined for trials. The word translated destined here literally means “appointed.” We were appointed to suffer for Christ. The servant is not above the master. If Jesus suffered, then so shall we.

In other words, these trials and persecution should not be a surprise. Paul had forewarned them. “I hate to say I told you so, but ... I told you so.” Paul says, “When we were with you we kept telling you that we would be persecuted.” This was part of Paul’s basic Christian instruction to the Thessalonians. Instead of trials catching us off guard and causing us to doubt our faith, trials really serve as a confirmation of our faith. This is what happens when you are a Christian. And so, Paul encourages them with these words.

And then finally, just like parents do with their children, we long to know how our fellow Christians are doing. We see in verse five that Paul sent Timothy for his own reassurance as well. He couldn’t stand it any longer. He had to see how his “kids” were

doing. And so, this was actually another reason he sent Timothy – to find out about their faith. Paul's fear was that the same tempter who had blocked his path to return might somehow have tempted them to doubt and made all his earlier successes with them useless.

Once again, all of this shows a parent's concern for their child. The parent sacrifices their own interest for the well-being of the child. They send the very best to meet their child's needs. They encourage their children through the hard times. They have a burning desire to know how their children are doing. Christians show family concern for each other. Christian ministry takes it a step deeper to the level of a parent's concern for their child.

**CONCLUSION:** God is love, and God created us so that he could love us, and so that we could love him and love each other. He gives us the precious gift of family where we experience the deepest bonds of love. He has placed us in the church where we experience similar bonds of love. Christians have family love for each other, they take family joy in each other, and they show family concern for each other.

God has also given us the joy and privilege of Christian ministry where we may experience the wonderful, deep love of a parent for a child. Love is the greatest thing. If you want to experience the greatest love for others in your life, I encourage you to get involved in ministry. It doesn't matter how young or old you are or what your skills or talents are. When you get involved with ministry in the church, you will begin to love others on a whole different level.

Christian love is like family love. Ministry love is like the love of a parent for a child. There's nothing quite like it in the world. So, I encourage you to get involved in ministry and serving others. Don't miss out on the greatest love in the body of Christ!