

Good News!

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

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— 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. 9 For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, 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?

11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, 12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 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.

INTRODUCTION: Our message series is called “Lessons from a Growing Church,” and we are now half-way through the series together. We have looked at a number of lessons already – the importance of the gospel to the church and the importance of our response to the gospel. We have looked at a model for ministry and how to listen to a sermon. Last week we looked at the special relationship we have with one another as Christians. And this week we continue with that theme as we look at the importance of spiritual growth as believers in the church. (Read [1 Thessalonians 3:6-8](#) 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— 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. and pray.)

Have you ever been in a situation where you were waiting desperately for some news – news that would have a huge impact on your life one way or another? Perhaps you were waiting for test results from the hospital. Perhaps you were waiting to hear back from someone concerning a relationship. Perhaps your child had flown to Europe, and

you were waiting for that phone call to see if they had made it safely to their destination. Take a moment and think of a situation where you were waiting for some important news.

When you are waiting for news like that, it's hard to concentrate on anything else. It consumes your mind. You know the Bible tells you not to worry, but sometimes it's hard to just let go and let God. Have you ever been there? Do you know what that's like? You keep asking, "What if ... what if ... what if ...?" You try to turn it off, but all the crazy possibilities just keep crashing in on you.

That's when you are primed and ready to receive some good news. You get the test results back and there is no malignancy. Praise the Lord! You hear from your loved one and everything is okay. Praise God! **Proverbs 25:25** says: "Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country." (Proverbs 25:25) There are times when you are simply desperate for good news.

That had been Paul's situation before he wrote this letter. Paul had been wondering how the Thessalonians were doing. As we saw last week, he was so concerned that he sent Timothy to find out about them and bring him back a report. And now he had waited, waited, waited for Timothy to come back. You know how slowly time seems to move when you're waiting? Paul couldn't stand it any longer. He had to know how his friends were doing.

Paul knew they were young Christians who had started out well. News of their faith had spread quickly. The gospel had changed their lives, and they were enthusiastic about sharing the gospel with others. But he also knew that they were experiencing intense persecution for their faith. Their own friends and neighbors had turned against them.

And Paul knew then that they had a spiritual enemy. Paul knew about the reality of spiritual warfare. Satan had blocked him from returning to the Thessalonians to see them again. What if the enemy had also tempted some of these young believers to turn away from the faith? What if the persecution was just too much for them? What if they

blamed it all on Paul? After all, he was the one who had shared the gospel with them to begin with. “What if ... what if ... what if ...?”

And then Timothy had come back to Paul from the Thessalonians – and he brought good news! What a relief! Here in chapter 3, Paul continues sharing very personally with the Thessalonians as he shares with them his thoughts and emotions upon receiving this good news. Let’s look at Paul’s words together and see what lessons we can learn from his response.

I. We should be greatly encouraged when believers experience spiritual growth 6-8

First of all, we learn that we should be greatly encouraged when believers experience spiritual growth. Look at verses 6-8 with me now:

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— 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. 8 For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 3:6-8)

Up to this point Paul has been narrating past events, but now he speaks in the present tense. Timothy has just now arrived. Paul is just now writing this letter. He is telling them what he is feeling right now as he writes. That in itself should tell you something. Paul does not delay. He writes back immediately. This demonstrates how very excited he is about the news he has just received.

Paul also uses an unusual word for good news in verse 6. It is the word we usually use for sharing the gospel, to preach the good news. In fact, this is the only place in the entire New Testament where this word is used without reference to the gospel. Now if you know Paul, you know how important preaching the gospel was to him. Preaching

the gospel was his whole life. For him to use this special word to describe the good news Timothy has just brought him highlights even further how excited Paul was to hear this good report about the Thessalonians.

What was the good news? Timothy brought good news about the Thessalonians' faith and love. The Thessalonians were standing strong in their faith, and they were growing in love. Paul addresses the issue of love first, and then he goes back to discuss their faith.

A. Growing in love (6)

Now the Thessalonians were certainly growing in love for each other, but in the immediate context we see that Timothy was also talking about their love for Paul. We see that in verse 6 where Paul writes: "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)

The Thessalonians had pleasant memories of Paul – riot and all! Even with all the problems and persecution that followed in Paul's wake, they did not blame Paul or view him as a troublemaker. They had good memories. J.B. Phillips translates this verse: "You cherish happy memories of us."

Not only did the Thessalonians view Paul fondly in the past. They also longed to see him in the present. Paul writes: "You longed to see us, just as we long to see you." (1 Thessalonians 3:6) This is the same strong word for longing we looked at last week in 2:17 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,. Their longing to see Paul matched his longing to see them. Timothy brought back good news about the Thessalonians' love.

B. Growing in faith (7-8)

Timothy also brought good news about their faith. They were standing strong in the midst of persecution, and this brought Paul great encouragement. Remember, Paul was going through a difficult time himself. On this particular mission trip he had previously suffered in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and most recently at Athens. Now he was experiencing great difficulty in the city of Corinth.

We read in Acts 18 that the Corinthians Jews in particular opposed Paul and were abusive towards him. The persecution was so bad that God even spoke to Paul through a vision at night, encouraging him: “And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”” (Acts 18:9-10)

Paul was obedient to the vision and stayed in Corinth for a year and a half. He was slandered and abused, he was brought to court on false charges, but God continued to watch over and protect him. And yet in all his distress and persecution, Paul says he was encouraged by the Thessalonians because of their faith.

Paul had encouraged the Thessalonians by sending Timothy to them. Now the Thessalonians encouraged Paul through this good report about their faith. This is an example of mutual encouragement. Ministry is a two-way street and encouragement and blessing flows both ways when we minister in the body of Christ. The Thessalonians’ faith in the midst of trial was an encouragement to Paul in the midst of his trials.

But Paul goes even further with this. He says in verse 8: “For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 3:8) Paul’s emotions run deep as he writes. It is as if he could not go on living if the Thessalonians were not standing strong, so great is his love for them. This good news about their faith has rejuvenated Paul, given him new life. Proverbs 15:30 says that “The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones.” (Proverbs 15:30) Paul is greatly encouraged by their faith, and as a result he feels new life and health running through him. He has a

new lease on life. That's how important their faith was to him. "Now we really live because you are standing firm in your faith."

Notice his focus is on their faith here rather than their love. Sure, he was glad to hear about their love for him, but what really counted was their faith. How much stock do you put in people's opinions of you? Which matters more to you – that someone says nice things about you or that they are growing in their faith? Paul focused on their faith.

If someone is growing in Christ, that is good news! I get excited when I hear how various people from our church are growing in the Lord and growing in their faith. I have heard several good reports just in these past few weeks like that. It's good news! It's welcome news! It brings great joy to my heart. The first thing we can learn from Paul's attitude is that we should be greatly encouraged when believers experience spiritual growth.

II. We should be filled with thanksgiving and joy when believers experience spiritual growth (9-10)

Next, Paul moves onto thanksgiving and joy. Look at verses 9-10 For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, 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 3:9-10](#))

Not only should we be greatly encouraged when believers experience spiritual growth, we should be filled with thanksgiving and joy. This is now Paul's third thanksgiving in the letter ([see 1:2](#)) and [2:13](#)). Paul is positively overflowing with thankfulness for the Thessalonians.

A. We all owe God a debt of thanksgiving (9)

Who does Paul thank? Paul says, “We thank God for you.” Paul is encouraged by their faith, but he gives thanks to God. Testimonies should be God-focused and Christ-centered. We should share testimonies of thanksgiving to God especially with one another. Be Christ-centered in your testimony. We do not merely give thanks. We give thanks to God in Christ for all that he has done.

What is Paul thankful for? Paul says, “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) Earlier Paul shared about all the distress and persecution he was experiencing. Now he speaks of all the joy that he has in the presence of God. Timothy’s good news has brought him a fresh perspective in the midst of trial. He is thankful because he is filled with joy over the good news he has heard about the Thessalonians.

In fact, Paul says we all owe God a debt of thanksgiving. He asks: “How can we thank God enough?” or literally, “with what thanksgiving can we repay?” The word “repay” means to give something back as an equivalent. Paul is saying “what thanksgiving can we possibly give to God that matches the joy we have in his presence because of you?” It’s a rhetorical question. The assumed answer is this: “We can never give God enough thanksgiving.” You can’t outgive God. We all owe God a debt of thanksgiving we can never repay.

B. We should engage in constant, earnest prayer for continued ministry (10)

And it’s not as though Paul wasn’t trying. Look at verse 10 where he writes: “Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.” (1 Thessalonians 3:10) Thanksgiving leads naturally into prayer. Not only should we be thankful when believers experience spiritual growth, we should engage in constant, earnest prayer for continued ministry in their lives.

Paul prayed night and day for the Thessalonians. He does not mean morning and bedtime prayers, although those are good times to pray. Nor does he mean that he

always prays and does nothing else. Paul is speaking about the frequency of his prayers. Throughout the day and even at night he was praying for the Thessalonians.

Paul not only prayed for the Thessalonians frequently. He also prayed for them most earnestly. It's a word that means "super-abundantly, exceedingly, beyond all measure." These were no half-hearted, ritual prayers offered up out of habit. No, Paul prayed with intensity. He prayed frequently and earnestly. And yet this still was not enough to repay God for all the joy he had because of the Thessalonians' spiritual growth.

And what was Paul's constant prayer arising out of his thanksgiving and joy? He wanted to see the Thessalonians again and supply what was lacking in their faith. The word translated "supply" here is a word that means "to fit together, to restore, to repair, mend, or equip." It was a surgical term used for setting a bone. It was also used of repairing nets. The basic idea is "completing or improving the condition of something" – that is, not supplying something new, but rather shoring up what is already there.

Paul wanted to see the Thessalonians again so that he could help supply or complete what was lacking in their faith. Even though the Thessalonians were standing strong in their faith, apparently there were still some doctrinal or ethical gaps. In fact, starting with chapter four Paul will begin addressing some of these gaps. We'll start looking at that next week. Paul would have preferred to do this in person, but instead he writes these words of instruction to them.

Yet regardless of these gaps, Paul's comments about the Thessalonians have been overwhelmingly positive. The Thessalonians are already strong in their faith. Paul just wants to see them grow more. No matter how much you have grown spiritually, you always have more to go.

And so, Paul is filled with joy in God's presence because of Timothy's good news about the Thessalonians. This puts him in a position of obligation. He owes God a debt of thanksgiving he can never repay. This in turn leads him to constant, earnest prayer for continued ministry among the Thessalonians so that they may experience continued

spiritual growth. We all owe God a debt of thanksgiving. How do we seek to discharge that debt? We should engage in constant, earnest prayer for continued ministry in people's lives.

III. We should never stop praying for believers continued spiritual growth (11-13)

1) We should be greatly encouraged when believers experience spiritual growth. 2) We should be filled with thanksgiving and joy when believers experience spiritual growth. 3) And then thirdly, we should never stop praying for believers' spiritual growth. This is one of the first prayers I pray for our church every day – I pray for our people's spiritual growth. Look at verses 11-13 with me now where Paul prays:

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, 12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 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 3:11-13**)

In these last three verses Paul stops talking about prayer, and actually begins praying on behalf of the Thessalonians. Now that's not unusual for Paul. He often breaks into prayer in the middle of his letters. I guess that makes sense when you're already praying both day and night.

Paul makes three prayer requests. 1) He prays for further ministry opportunities with the Thessalonians. 2) He prays that God would increase their love. And 3) he prays that God would make them holy. How do you pray for the spiritual growth of others? You can follow the same three requests that Paul made for the Thessalonians.

A. Pray for new ministry opportunities (11)

First, pray for new ministry opportunities. Paul prayed that God would clear the way for him to return to Thessalonica. This phrase “clear the way” has to do with the leveling or removing of obstacles. Remember, Paul said earlier that Satan had blocked him from returning. Now he asks God to remove those blockages. When you are dealing with a spiritual roadblock, you need God’s power to remove the block for you.

Paul is so God-centered in his life. Someone else may have written, “Hope to see you soon!” Not Paul. He placed all things in God’s hands. And guess what? We know from Acts 20 that Paul did make it back to Thessalonica several years later. God did clear the way in answer to Paul’s prayers.

Notice that Paul addresses his prayer to “our God and Father and our Lord Jesus.” This is one of the earliest examples of Christians praying to Jesus as well as to the Father. It is also one of the many passages of Scripture which teach us the deity of Christ, because prayer is rightfully addressed only to God.

So that’s the first prayer request when you are praying for believers’ spiritual growth. Pray for new ministry opportunities where God can use you to help them grow spiritually.

B. Pray for increased love (12)

Secondly, pray for increased love. Paul has already commended the Thessalonians for their love in this letter. Now he prays that God would increase their love even more. Paul wants the Thessalonians to keep growing spiritually. And even though he longs to come to them himself, he knows that God is ultimately responsible for their spiritual growth, not him. And so, he prays for them. He prays that their love would increase and overflow, that they would grow in love for each other and everyone else, including their enemies who persecute them. Although we may have a special love for other Christians in the body of Christ, we are called to love all people, even our enemies, with the love of Christ.

C. Pray for holiness (13)

How can you pray for spiritual growth? 1) Pray for new ministry opportunities. 2) Pray for increased love. And then finally, 3) pray for holiness. Verse 13 expresses the purpose for verse 12. The reason Paul wants them to abound in love is so that they may grow in holiness. You cannot separate the two. You cannot grow in holiness without also growing in love.

True holiness is never divorced from genuine, authentic love. Why? Because true holiness is godliness, and God is love. Paul does not have a rigid, judgmental, ascetic holiness in mind. Paul envisions a healthy, robust holiness, brimming with love for God and others. Paul is about to give them instructions about holiness – we'll look at that next week – and so he wants to make sure that they understand this connection between holiness and love. Holiness and love go together.

Paul prays that God will strengthen their hearts so that they will be blameless and holy in the presence of God the Father when Jesus returns. Paul is thinking about the coming judgment day. He is praying that God will strengthen the Thessalonians both for the present and the future – that they will remain unshaken by their trials in the present, and they will stand unshaken on the day of judgment when Jesus comes. This part of Paul's prayer anticipates his teaching about Jesus' return that we will look at in the final two chapters of this letter.

Paul speaks of Jesus coming with his holy ones on that day. Who are the holy ones? Some think the angels; others think those believers who have already died in Christ; perhaps Paul means both. Either way, Christ will return to judge the earth, and Paul prays that God will strengthen the Thessalonians now, so they will be found holy and blameless in God's presence then.

CONCLUSION: So, in conclusion, what is good news for you? What excites you or motivates you? It has been said that you can tell a lot about a person by what makes

them laugh and by what makes them cry. I believe you can also tell a lot about a person by what they consider good news.

God will judge us one day according to what we have valued in life. The spiritual growth of others should rank high on our list of values. We should value this out of love for God and love for others. Love for God demands that we seek his glory, and God is most glorified when people grow in their faith in him. Love also seeks the best for others. The best thing for others is to grow in their faith. And so, spiritual growth is good for God, and it's good for believers too.

Timothy's report was good news for Paul. It was a lifeline of hope for him. He was encouraged. He was filled with thanksgiving and joy. He was motivated to pray even more for their growth. In the same way we should be greatly encouraged by believers' spiritual growth. We should be filled with thanksgiving and joy over believers' spiritual growth. We should never stop praying for believers' spiritual growth.