

Extending Ministry
1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Introduction

There are four reasons to get other people to do something you would like to do yourself. The first is that you would like to do it, but you do know how to do it. That is more prevalent today than it used to be since A) technology has made some things more complex, and B) young people are not being trained with the breadth of skills that used to be fairly common. That is partially the result of schools placing more emphasis on academics than the trades and practical skills, but it is also a result of widespread family breakdown in our society resulting in a loss of practical skills being passed down from the parents. A single parent's life is hectic enough without trying to also train the children in skills that the other parent would normally teach.

A second reason is very pragmatic. You may know how to do it and would enjoy doing it, but other responsibilities leave you without the time to do it. This reason promotes economic and time efficiency since you will end up concentrating on what makes the best use of your time and finances unless the task is something you will do anyway simply because you enjoy it.

The third reason is also very pragmatic. You may know how to do it and would like to do it, but something is keeping you from being able to do it. It could be a physical hindrance such as a handicap that has developed or physical distance. It could even be something like what Paul experienced in his desire to go see the Thessalonians and minister to them as we have been talking about the last couple of weeks as we have studied 1 Thessalonians 2. Paul had very strong desires about wanting to go see them, but he was blocked from doing so at that time. Paul describes this in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18 stating they were *eager with great desire* to see them, but "*Satan hindered.*" Paul does not reveal the specific obstacle that was blocking him.

The fourth reason to have someone else do something on your behalf is that it is part of their training. That is an additional unstated reason that Paul will send Timothy to the Thessalonians. Paul had been training Timothy for quite sometime, and Paul believed Timothy was ready to take on such a very important task for him as we shall see in our study of 1 Thessalonians 3 today.

Paul Sends Timothy to the Thessalonians - 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Paul explains in the first five verses the two major reasons why they had sent Timothy to the Thessalonians. ¹ *Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone,* ² *and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,* ³ *so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.* ⁴ *For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.* ⁵ *For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.*

Recall from the record in Acts 17 that Paul and Silas had been forced out of Thessalonica, but when the unbelieving Jews found out that Paul and Silas were in Berea preaching the gospel, they went there and also stirred up trouble causing the brethren in Berea to conduct Paul to Athens. Acts 17:14-15 is specific that Silas and Timothy initially stayed in Berea while Paul went to Athens, but Paul gave instructions for them to "*come to him as soon as possible.*"

As Paul recounts the story here in 1 Thessalonians 3:1, it is obvious that Silas and Timothy had joined Paul in Athens otherwise Timothy could not have been sent from there to Thessalonica. That also

explains that the “we” here refers to Paul and Silas even if some commentators want to insist the “we” only refers to Paul. The fact that there is a contrast between “we could endure it no longer” in vs. 1 and “I could endure it no longer” in vs. 5 also indicates this is referring to Paul and Silas. Luke does not appear to be with them since the use of plural pronouns which would include Luke are not included in the Acts narrative from Acts 16:16 when he was in Philippi until Acts 20:6 when Paul returns through Philippi on his third missionary journey.

The Greek here is an interesting phrase expressing their desire and emotional state. A more literal translation would be something like, “*Therefore, no longer bearing it,*” with the word translated as “bear” or “endure” (στέγω / stegō) having a wide range of meanings tracing to a root meaning of “to cover.” This expresses one of two possible ideas. The first is related to the idea of holding a roof - a cover - up. The idea would then be something along the idea of “when it felt like the roof was collapsing because of our great desire to help and not being able to be there. A second possibility is that a cover conceals, so this could be in the sense that they could no longer hide their desire to do something to help. Either way, it matches well what Paul had said at the end of chapter 2 about their sense of bereavement in being forcibly separated from them and their great desire to see them again.

The result was that they considered it better to send Timothy and be left behind in Athens alone than in not finding a way to help and to know how they were doing. Though it appears Silas was with Paul when this decision was made, the record in Acts makes it clear that Silas was also soon sent away for Paul was all alone in Athens when he begins reasoning in the synagogue and market place there and eventually speaking to the philosophers on Mars Hill. Silas and Timothy eventually rejoin Paul when he is in Corinth (Acts 18:5).

Paul commends Timothy highly calling him both “our brother” and either “minister” or “fellow worker” of God in the gospel of Christ. There is divergence in the very early manuscripts (IV century - Sinaiticus & Alexandrius vs. Vaticanus) about whether Paul is calling Timothy a minister or fellow worker of God in the gospel of Christ with the manuscripts often including both designations as occurs in the textual basis for the KJV translation. I will let the textual critics argue about which is the best reading. It is very encouraging to see that in the rest of the Scriptures that both are very fitting for Timothy.

If the proper word here is “minister” or “servant” of God, which is the Greek word also transliterated as “deacon” (διακονον), that term is applied to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:6. It was a term Paul often used of himself and it puts Timothy in the same class as Apollos, Tychicus, and Epaphras. If the proper word is fellow worker or co-laborer (συνεργός / sunergos), that term is applied to Timothy in Romans 16:21 and Philemon 1. Timothy is in the same class as of people as Prisca, Aquila, Titus, Epaphroditus, Mark, and Luke whom Paul also describes in the same way.

For Paul to call Timothy “our brother” and also a deacon and fellow worker is very significant for remember that Timothy is young, perhaps just in his teens, at this point in time. He is a young man who is already proving his character and value in ministry. While older folks tend to dismiss such young adults as too immature to handle any significant responsibilities, and while in our own society such young adults too often act like children in big bodies and incapable of handling anything of true importance, the truth can be and should be the opposite with Timothy as a good example.

Timothy was trained well as a child in the things of the Lord (1 Timothy 1:5) and also as obvious here, in handling great responsibility. My challenge to you parents is to train your children so that they will be responsible young adults by the time they are in their mid to late teens and leaders of others by their early twenties. My challenge to you young adults is to follow what Paul states in 1 Corinthians 13:11, “*When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.*” Let the encouragement by Paul to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12 also apply to you, “*Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.*” While humility is to be

a key character trait of a Christian, so is using whatever spiritual gifts God has given to you to the best of your ability in any ministry God challenges you to take on according to His own empowerment of you.

Timothy had already proven himself in working alongside Paul, Silas and Luke in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ as they traveled throughout Asia Minor and Macedonia. Now they are sending this young man on a very important but dangerous mission. Timothy was being sent for the purpose of strengthening and exhorting the Thessalonians in their faith so they would not be disturbed by the afflictions they were facing.

The idea of to strengthen / establish (στηρίζω / stārizō) is to “*cause someone to become stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in attitude and belief*” (Louw-Nida). The word translated as encourage / exhort here is παρακαλέω / parakaleō which literally means “*alongside to call*” and so has a wide range of meaning and can also be translated as console and comfort. You can get the idea if you picture a coach keeping alongside an athlete and saying the right words in the right way to keep the athlete pressing forward.

Timothy was the right man for the job for several reasons. The focal point of the anger of the unbelieving Jews was on Paul and Silas, so Timothy would not be attracting unnecessary attention in going back to Thessalonica. Second, Timothy had been trained well as a child in the things of God and had been with Paul long enough to know the gospel and its application well hearing him teach and undoubtedly discussing theology as they traveled together. Third, Timothy had already experienced persecution from even when first saved. Timothy was from Lystra which is where Paul had been stoned and left for dead before getting back up and going back into the city before going to Derbe the next day (Acts 14). Timothy would by knowledge and experience know how to both strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in the midst of the afflictions they were experiencing so that they would not be disturbed. The word used here, σαίνομαι / sainomai, means to “*wag the tail,*” and so metaphorically in this context it refers to being shaken in their beliefs by their afflictions.

The Thessalonians would have been well aware that in believing the gospel and walking with Christ that they would be persecuted and suffer because Paul had been telling them this while he had been with them. It would also not come as a surprise theologically since Paul had also pointed out that they were destined or appointed (κείμεαι / keimai) for this. This is not the idea of fatalism, but rather a statement about the purpose of existence. The same word is used in Luke 2:24 when Simeon said of the infant Jesus “*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed.*” The idea that part of the Christian life includes persecution and affliction is usually not part of the gospel presented by most American evangelists. In fact, I would say that it is usually purposefully avoided as marketing techniques and persuasive skills are used to get people to profess belief in Jesus who loved them enough to die in their place to take away their sins so that they could avoid Hell and instead live in Heaven forever. That is all true, but the gospel also includes the warning that the world loves its own, but it hates Jesus and those whom He has called out of the world (John 15:18-19). Those that believe in Jesus will have tribulation in this world, but they can be of good courage and have His peace because He has overcome the world (John 16:33). Those who strive to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12), but we are blessed when people insult, persecute, or lie about us because of Christ for so the prophets were persecuted before us and great is our reward in heaven (Matthew 5:11-12). The idea of being persecuted is not something anyone anticipates with joy for it is much preferable to live tranquil and quiet lives in all godliness and dignity, and so we pray accordingly for governing authorities (1 Timothy 2:1-2), but affliction is a normal part of the Christian life for several reasons.

Ultimately it is in within God’s sovereign plans that He allows us to suffer persecution that He might be glorified in us as His attributes such as patience, longsuffering, mercy, grace, and forgiveness are displayed in and through us, but He has also given us some specific reasons. First, we share in the sufferings of Christ. In Acts 5:41 the apostles rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer shame

for Christ's name. 1 Peter 4:12-14 states this, ¹² *"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³ but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. ¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."*

Second, as James 1:2-4 points out, the trials we encounter that test our faith produce in us endurance and maturity so that we are lacking in nothing. Paul points out in Romans 5:3-8 that our tribulations bring about perseverance, proven character, and hope grounded in God's love proven when Jesus died for us while we were yet sinners.

Third, afflictions force us to have an eternal perspective so that our hope is not bound up in the things of this world. Paul put it this way in Romans 8:18, *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us,"* and this way in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, ¹⁷ *"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*

What Paul had warned them about came to pass for they had now experienced it and were apparently still suffering. That brought up Paul's second reason for sending Timothy which he states in a very personal manner. ⁵ *"For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain."* Paul wanted to know if they were standing firm in their faith. Paul was well aware of the activities of "the tempter," a title for Satan, the adversary who had hindered Paul. There was no doubt in Paul's mind that the devil had tempted them, a reference to either a test of faith or an enticement to sin, but he did not know the result. Jesus explained in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:20-21 that the seed that was sown on the rocky place represented those that heard the word and immediately received it with joy, but having no firm root they were only temporary, for when affliction or persecution arose because of the world they would immediately fall away. Jesus further explained in Matthew 13:22 that the seed sown among the thorns was the man who heard the word but the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of riches had choked it out so that there was no fruit. If either of these had happened among the Thessalonians, then the effort of the missionaries among them would have been in vain - without result, without effect. This is the reason that Paul was comforted and had such joy when Timothy returned with good news about them.

Timothy's Report about the Thessalonians - 1 Thess. 3:6-10

⁶ *But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, ⁷ for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; ⁸ for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord. ⁹ For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, ¹⁰ as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?*

Timothy's return with such good news about the Thessalonians brought comfort to them and prompted them to give thanks and rejoice. A lot of commentators like the idea of a "literary plural" in which a plural pronoun refers to a single person, in this case, Paul, but since Acts 18:5 states that Silas was also present when Timothy came from Macedonia, the "us" includes at least him, and since Paul had already been working for sometime with Aquila and Priscilla, I am sure he had told them about his concern for the Thessalonians and they had prayed together concerning them. It is more reasonable to me that all those with Paul were comforted, rejoiced and gave thanks at the good news Timothy brought to them that the faith and love of the Thessalonians remained steadfast. Good news multiplies blessing as more people hear about it, and this news still has a positive effect on us nearly 2,000 years later. It is

encouraging to our own hearts to hear about the Thessalonians withstanding affliction and Satan's temptations since it inspires us to do the same.

Perhaps Paul thought of Proverbs 25:25 when he heard Timothy's report, *"Like cold water to a weary soul, So is good news from a distant land."* It was comforting to Paul to hear about their faith and love, and even more so that they also remembered them kindly at all times and that they desired to see Paul again just as Paul wanted to see them. Paul could put aside his concerns that they might think badly of him because he was not able to stay there with them or come himself.

All of this was comforting to Paul to the point that he even comments, *"for now we live if you stand firm in the Lord."* Their work was not in vain for it was being carried out by the Thessalonians and would continue to be as long as they remained in such a state of faithfulness and love.

Paul also responded with great thankfulness to God for what He had done among them. By putting his statement in the form of a rhetorical question, Paul demonstrates that their thankfulness could not be fully expressed. With joy they rejoiced before God on their account. He adds the idea that it is unceasing by coupling it with their praying night and day. And what was the focus of their prayer? The very strong desire Paul had expressed in the previous chapter. They wanted to see them again face to face and also to finish the ministry that they had started with them. By their response to the afflictions they faced it was obvious that the Thessalonians were not lacking in their faith in terms of holding fast to what they believed. Paul is referring here to what was lacking in the breadth of their faith because their time with the Thessalonians had been cut short before they had taught them all they had planned to teach. We gain some understanding of what was still lacking by the doctrine Paul includes in his two letters to them. This was a prayer they prayed "earnestly," "exceedingly," "beyond measure."

Paul's Benediction for the Thessalonians - 1 Thess. 3:11-13

After telling the Thessalonians what they were praying concerning them, Paul then offers a benediction for them in verses 11-13. It is relatively short, but it is a powerful and significant expression of the blessings they desired for the Thessalonians

¹¹ *"Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; ¹² and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; ¹³ so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints."*

A benediction is a formal expression of the good things you would like God to do on behalf of others. A prayer addresses God directly in the second person with a request for the third person whereas this addresses Him in the third person with a wish to do something for the second person. The difference is in who is being directly addressed as illustrated in these two examples. "I ask you God to do this for them," and "I wish God to do this for you." It is a formal style of reverence.

The flow of thought is this. In verse 9 Paul expressed the thanks they gave to God and their rejoicing before God. In verse 10 Paul recounted their prayers made to God on their behalf. Here in verses 11 and 12 Paul expresses their wish of what God would do for them.

Paul begins verse 11 with a pronoun intensifier with the sense better translated in a more wooden manner as *"He now, the God and Father of us and the Lord of us, Jesus, may He direct our way to you."* Why does Paul do this? He certainly could have just said something like, "Now may God direct our way to you." He does this because it brings out a little more clearly that he equates God our Father and Jesus our Lord by addressing both with the singular "He" that begins the sentence and the singular "He" as the subject of the verb. Paul is placing an emphasis here that Jesus is deity.

The particular identifications used are also significant. It is the *God and Father of us* and to *the Lord of us, Jesus*. Anyone can refer to Him as God, for He is, but only those who have been adopted by Him into His family through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:12) can call God their Father. God speaks of being the sovereign creator while Father denotes the intimacy of a parent-child relationship which

gives us the right to approach Him as a child would their dad. That is the term Jesus taught His disciples to use in addressing God in Matthew 6:9.

Paul identifies Him with the title and name of the second person of the triune godhead. His position and title is the Lord in every sense of that word including God and master, and His name is Jesus, that precious name given to Joseph to name Mary's son miraculously conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit because *"He would save His people from their sins"* (Matthew 1:21)

The first blessing that Paul expresses a wish for is that our God and Father and the Lord Jesus might direct, lead, guide their way to the Thessalonians which was something all concerned desired as already expressed. The sense is they wanted God to so influence them that it would cause them to follow the course of action God desired which they hoped would be back to the Thessalonians.

The second blessing for which they wished is related to their desire to minister among them to complete the teaching and training they felt they were not able to finish before being forced to leave. They desired that the Lord would cause the Thessalonians to increase and abound in their love for one another and all men. The meanings of increase and abound are very similar with increase referring to a greater amount or degree and abound referring to being more than enough or overflowing. They are used together to heighten the idea to a superabundance, and in this case specifically of love for one another and also for all men.

Jesus said that people would know who were His true disciples by their love for one another (John 13:35). An increasing superabundance of such love among the Thessalonian believers would be such a witness. It is still such a witness to this day and is to be so among us as well, so it is a fitting prayer for this church too. Love for all men is a hallmark of the mature believer since Jesus commands us to not only love our neighbor, but also even our enemies and to pray for those that persecute us (Matthew 5:44-48). That is not something you can do on your own which is why it is a characteristic that distinguishes someone that has the Holy Spirit indwelling and empowering them. This depth and breadth of love was a realistic wish for Paul and his companions to make because it already existed in them for the Thessalonians - *"just as we also do for you."*

Paul concludes with the reason for this particular benediction, *"so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father."* Establish here (στηρίζω / stārizō) is the same word used back in verse 2 and translated as "strengthen." It is the idea of causing to be stronger, more firm in attitude and belief. Paul wanted to see their hearts, the seat of their being and will, without blame (ἀμέμπτos / amemptos - guiltless) with the quality of holiness (ἀγιωσύνη / agiōsunā - sanctification). The particular words used here signifying these qualities and not just positional state. In other words, Paul wants them to be set to live from their hearts lives characterized by being set apart to God so that there is no sin by which they could be justly charged. Such lives are clear demonstrations of God at work because they are contrary to man's natural sinful bent.

Paul then concludes with the timing and incentive for when this maturity should be developed. *"At the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints."* This is the third reference Paul makes to the coming of Jesus with the word used here (παρουσία / parousia) referring to Jesus' arrival or appearing at His return. Context indicates if it is the second advent or the rapture, and the mention of His coming with His saints - the holy ones - indicates this is the Second Coming corresponding to Revelation 19.

It is common to find that references to the events of the last days including Jesus' return are coupled with calls to holiness since the reminder brings back a proper perspective of the purpose of our lives. As the apostle John expressed it in 1 John 3:2-3, ² *"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."* ³ *And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."* Or as the apostle Peter states in 2 Peter 3:12, *"Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, (the events that will happen in the last days), be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless."*

Conclusions

Paul extended his ministry through his young co-worker Timothy going to do what he could not. Timothy is an excellent example of what God can do with any young adult Christian willing to trust the Lord to do hard things in His service.

Timothy's return and good report was a cause of giving of thanks to God and rejoicing for Paul and all of his companions because the Thessalonians remained faithful despite the afflictions they suffered and the temptations of the adversary. They are a good example of what church can be like, should be like, and will be like if the people will trust and follow the Lord. Because their faith was genuine, ministry was extended through them.

Paul's benediction points to a couple of important elements that should be included in our prayers for one another. We desire the Lord to cause us to increase and abound in our love for one another and others and so demonstrate that we are indeed His disciples and that the Holy Spirit leads and empowers us. We also want to be firm in our faith so that we will be characterized by holiness when the Lord returns.

Praise the Lord if these are already characteristics of your life. Be diligent to proclaim and teach others the gospel so that ministry will be even further extended through them. However, if you lack in any of these areas, then identify what needs to change and then follow the examples of Timothy, the Thessalonians and Paul and his companions.

Sermon Notes - December 13, 2020
Extending Ministry - 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Introduction

Reasons to have others do something you would like to do yourself

Paul Sends Timothy to the Thessalonians - 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Sequence of events - Acts 17

The “we”

No longer “bearing” it

Paul’s Commendation of Timothy

Strengthen / establish and encourage / exhort

Persecution of believers

Sharing in the sufferings of Christ

The Effects of Trials

Keeping an Eternal Perspective

Fear about the tempter, and temptation

Timothy’s Report about the Thessalonians - 1 Thess. 3:6-10

Cause of Comfort

Cause of Thankfulness and Joy

Paul's Benediction for the Thessalonians - 1 Thess. 3:11-13

Benedictions & Prayers

Identification

First blessing wish

Second blessing wish

Established Hearts

The Incentive of Jesus' Return

Conclusions

Timothy's Example

The Thessalonians' Example

Elements for Prayer

KIDS KORNER – Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help. Young Children – draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. Older Children – Do one or more of the following: 1) Count how many times Timothy is mentioned. 2) Talk with your parents about who Timothy was and what he did that make him a good example.

THINK ABOUT IT – Questions to consider in understanding the sermon and its application. What are some good reasons you should get someone else to do something you would like to do yourself? How did Timothy extend Paul's ministry. Where was Paul and who was with him when Timothy was sent to Thessalonica? What could they "not endure" any longer"? Describe Paul's commendations of Timothy. Why are they so significant and especially so for Timothy? What do you think young adults (16-24) are capable of accomplishing? Why do so many young adults now still act like children? What did Paul want Timothy to do in Thessalonica? What is the danger of affliction for a new Christian? What are some of the positive reasons God allows believers to suffer affliction? What is the danger of the tempter and temptation? How are they overcome? What good news did Timothy bring about the Thessalonians? How did that bring Paul comfort? How did that cause Paul to give thanks to God and to rejoice? What is the difference between a benediction and a prayer? What is the significance of who / how Paul identifies those in his benediction? What were his wishes for the Thessalonians? What is the significance of each? Why is love a mark of a disciple of Jesus? Why is holiness a characteristic of a disciple of Jesus? Why is the return of Christ and the other events of the last days a practical incentive to live in holiness?