

“To Strengthen and Encourage”  
1 Thessalonians 3:1-2  
(Preached at Trinity, July 21, 2019)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Paul knew the Thessalonians were under great pressure from their neighbors who hated the Gospel. Just as Paul had suffered from their vicious hatred, the Thessalonian Christians were also suffering. It was the common experience of every believer—different in degree, but the same experience.  
**1 Thessalonians 2:14 NAU** - "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews"
2. Paul knew it was happening, but how were they holding up? Were they enduring well? Finally, when Paul could no longer bear not knowing he determined to send Timothy to them. Once again, we witness Paul’s pastoral heart. Timothy was a wonderful asset to Paul’s ministry. Timothy was of one heart with Paul. Paul refers to him here as a “fellow-worker.” Paul described him in Philippians:  
**Philippians 2:19-20 NAU** - "But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. <sup>20</sup> For I have no one *e/lse* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare."
3. It was a great sacrifice for Paul to be left alone without Timothy, but Paul was willing to sacrifice the labors of Timothy for the benefit of these brothers and sisters in Thessalonica. By the time Paul wrote this letter Timothy had returned bringing good news about the spiritual condition of the Thessalonians. Timothy had been used as a great source of edification for the church.
4. Paul writes, "we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,"  
This is the great pastoral hope and joy – to see the body of Christ strengthened in their faith. It must also be your great joy—that we would all grow in our faith.
  - A. By faith, we mean assurance and confidence in the promises of God. It is resting upon the comfort of knowing that Jesus is mine and I am His.
  - B. John Brown describes faith in “The Marrow of Modern Divinity” –  
“A particular persuasion of my heart that Christ Jesus is mine, and that I shall have life and salvation by his means; that whatsoever Christ did for the redemption of mankind, he did it for me.”<sup>1</sup>
  - C. This unshakable persuasion of our position in Christ enables us to endure whatever affliction this world has to offer.
5. The obvious question before us is how this was accomplished. How was Timothy used to strengthen and encourage the faith of the Thessalonians?  
The same question could be asked of us. How can we be strengthened in our faith?

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, (Geanies House, Fearn, Tain Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), 362.

- I. Timothy was sent to strengthen them through the systematic application of God's Word
- A. The same means God uses to create faith within us is the same means He uses to strengthen our faith.
- 1 Thessalonians 2:13 NAU** - "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not as the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."
- Romans 10:17 NAU** - "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."
- This is the pattern for the church
1. Paul instructed Titus:
 

**Titus 1:5 NAU** - "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,"

**Titus 2:1 NAU** - "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine."

Paul was stressing the importance of elders who would systematically preach and teach sound doctrine.
  2. This is the pattern of the Great Commission - make disciples for Christ and then teach them.
 

**Matthew 28:19-20 NAU** - "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
  3. We see it again in **Acts 11** - After the Church of Jerusalem heard that many had believed in Antioch they sent Barnabas to investigate. Upon finding the large group of believers Barnabas enlisted Paul and the two of them spent a year teaching God's Word to this new church.
 

**Acts 11:25-26 NAU** - "And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; <sup>26</sup> and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers;"
  4. Paul was sending Timothy with words of instruction, words under the authority of Christ. He was being sent with Biblical instruction.
 

**1 Thessalonians 4:1 NAU** - "Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us *instruction* as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more."
- B. The Word of God is the food by which the believer grows
1. It is referred to as our meat
 

**Hebrews 5:13-14 NAU** - "or everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."
  2. As a believer is fed a consistent diet of God's Word he grows and matures in the Christian faith

3. This had been Paul's pattern - Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders  
**Acts 20:20 NAU** - "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house"  
**Acts 20:32 NAU** - "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."
4. This was the method and pattern Paul had taught to Timothy  
**2 Timothy 3:16-4:1 NAU** - "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. "  
**1 Timothy 4:13 NAU** - "Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching."
5. Now Paul is sending Timothy to Thessalonica to apply this pattern to the Thessalonian believers.

C. This should speak volumes to us

1. Do you want to grow as a Christian?  
 Do you want to be more victorious in your battle against sin and Satan?  
 Do you want to grow in a sweeter fellowship with Christ?  
 Do you want to have a more sure knowledge of the will of God?  
 Do you want your faith to increase? For your love of Christ to increase?
2. How much time do you spend in the Word of God?
  - a. We have so much advantage over these early believers  
 The Word of God is so available to us – none of these brethren would have had their own copy of the Scriptures.
  - b. Each of our homes has several copies of God's Word  
 The Bible's availability is greatly increased through digital formats
3. Are you growing and being strengthened by the Word of God?

II. The second thing Timothy did was to encourage them to press on in the faith

- A. He encouraged them to look to the example of Paul and his companions  
**1 Thessalonians 3:3 NAU** - "so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions"
1. Paul was always mindful of the importance of the example of his life  
 His frequent exhortation was, "Follow my example."
    - a. He wrote to the Philippians:  
**Philippians 3:17 NAU** - "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us."  
**Philippians 4:9 NAU** - "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."
    - b. Paul wrote in his second epistle to the Thessalonians  
**2 Thessalonians 3:7 NAU** - "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you"

2. He wrote to Timothy  
**2 Timothy 3:10-12 NAU** - "Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, <sup>11</sup> persecutions, *and* sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium *and* at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! <sup>12</sup> Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."
- B. The Christian life demands perseverance through every trial.
1. We should encourage one another as we face the trials  
 Again, this is the pattern. After making disciples we must encourage them to press on in the faith. One way we do this is by the encouragement of our own example as we go through trials.
  2. Richard Phillips – “Whenever you are helped by a more seasoned believer whose presence has been a vital aid in your need, the gracious character and wisdom of that Christian have likely been forged in the furnace of affliction, without which you would not have been helped.”<sup>2</sup>
  3. As the body of Christ we must encourage one another as we go through our various trials.
- III. By our words of encouragement
- A. Words are powerful—they can serve to strengthen and encourage, or they can tear down and discourage
1. Paul understood the power of his words.  
 During his lengthy imprisonment at Rome he used his words to encourage the brethren. They always left him encouraged to press on.  
**Philippians 1:14 NAU** - "most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear."
  2. He charged the church in Ephesus:  
**Ephesians 4:29 NAU** - "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a *word* as is good for edification according to the need of *the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear."
  3. Timothy learned this under Paul’s careful instruction. This had been Paul’s pattern when he arrived at Thessalonica. Timothy was being sent to continue this work.  
**1 Thessalonians 2:10-12 NAU** - "You are witnesses, and *so is* God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; <sup>11</sup> just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children, <sup>12</sup> so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."

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<sup>2</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, eds. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 90.

4. Timothy was being sent forth to speak encouraging words to them. William Hendriksen – “Timothy, then, must tell these recent converts to the Christian faith, “You’re doing fine. Continue to do so. But do so more and more.”<sup>3</sup>
- B. Are your words a sweet savor to your brothers and sisters at this church?
1. Do you encourage one another with gracious words?
  2. Do you express words of appreciation? Are you careful to express gratitude for the labors of others?
  3. Negative words spread like a contagion. Like a plague they infect others. How do you use your tongue?  
**James 3:6 NAU** - "And the tongue is a fire, the *very* world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of *our* life, and is set on fire by hell."

#### Conclusion:

1. God has saved us and yet our journey of grace has not come to an end. We must continually press on. Thus, we need to be continually strengthened by His grace.
  - a. This was Paul’s continual work:  
**Acts 14:21-22 NAU** - "After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
  - b. Paul wrote to the Ephesians:  
**Ephesians 3:14-16 NAU** - "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,"
2. This is ultimately God’s work, but the work is not without God’s means of grace. Leon Morris stresses the importance of this strengthening: “The verb *strengthen* seems to have been a technical term in the early church. It occurs often in the New Testament and brings home to us that it is not sufficient to have had a spectacular conversion. We must go on and be established and strengthened in the faith.”<sup>4</sup>
3. This is especially true during times of opposition when we have to choose whether to compromise to avoid the conflict or remain steadfast and resolved to remain true to Christ. This conflict is often before us as we interact with lost family members.
4. Paul was concerned to know whether or not they were pressing on. What a sweet savor to hear of their steadfast faith. May they serve as an example to us.

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<sup>3</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of I-II Thessalonians*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 3:84.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 13:70.