

## Introduction

In 1985 Karen and I bought our first house. We had outgrown the fifth wheel we had lived in, and we bought a 1,450-square-foot home on the east side of Orlando. It was a good starter home, but with interest rates at 12.25%, our monthly payments of \$800.00 seemed expensive. Everything we saw in Scripture about debt gave us a strong desire to be debt free. I saw that the borrower is slave to the lender (Pr 22:7). I saw that we were to owe no man anything but love (Rom 13:8). I saw that the longest debt in the Old Testament was seven years. The seventh year was a year of remission (Dt 15:9, 31:10). Any debts owed were forgiven in the seventh year. The fiftieth year was the year of Jubilee, where any lands that had been sold because of debt were given back to the family that had lost them because of debt (Lev 25:8-12). We had a strong desire to be debt free. Since we did not have the money to pay off the \$70,000.00 we owed, we had an intermediate plan. We paid an extra one to two hundred dollars a month towards the principal. We significantly reduced or eliminated any unnecessary expenses, but we gave generously. We gave our tithes, and we also gave offerings for various causes, especially to help poor families. We also prayed to be debt free. We prayed to pay off our debt within seven years. One day in 1986, the Lord spoke to me about our debt, and told me to pray for it to be paid off in three years, so we changed our prayers to be debt free in three years. With my income as a club professional at the time, there was no way possible to do it, so if it was going to be paid off, it would have to be from God. One of our prayers was out of Proverbs, where God says that house and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord (Pr 19:14). We prayed that our fathers, which included grandfathers, would help us pay off our house. We never mentioned that to any of them; we simply prayed. Almost three years to the day that the Lord said to pray to be debt free in three years, Karen received a phone call from her grandfather, and he asked how much we owed on the house. She told him we owed \$67,000, and he sent her a check for that amount. God had heard and answered our specific prayers.

In our text, Paul's team, which included Silas and Timothy, had a great desire to see the Thessalonians. They wanted to go to them, but had been hindered from going. While they were waiting for the opportunity to return to Thessalonica, they came up with an intermediate plan of action. They sent Timothy to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage them, and to find out about their faith. Third, they prayed. They prayed earnestly that they could return to Thessalonica to see everyone.

## Longing for the Thessalonians

1. Their Desire (1 Th 2:17-20)
2. Their Plan (1 Th 3:1-8)
3. Their Prayer (1 Th 3:9-13)

(1 Th 2:17–3:13) “But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. {18} For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and *yet* Satan hindered us. {19} For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? {20} For you are our glory and joy. {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. {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? {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.”

### 1. **Their Desire** (1 Th 2:17-20)

Paul, Silas, and Timothy quickly took to the Thessalonians. They preached the gospel to them, and then a few weeks later they had to leave Thessalonica. In the brief time together, they grew to love and appreciate the Thessalonians.

(1 Th 2:17) “But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.”

Earlier, in verse eight, they wrote, “Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our lives, because you had become very dear to us.” The Greek word that is translated as dear is *agapetos* (Strong’s G27), and is most often translated as beloved. In fact, in fifty-nine of the sixty-two uses, it is translated as beloved, dearly beloved, or well beloved. The root word is *agapao*, which means love. Paul and his team had a fond affection for the Thessalonians and developed a love for them very quickly.

(1 Th 2:8) “Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.”

In verse nineteen, they asked, “For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus as His coming?” It was a lead-in question to state, “For you are our glory and joy.” Paul, Silas, and Timothy had a fond affection and a love for the Thessalonians, and were a joy and the crown of exultation. It was only natural for them to have a strong desire to see the Thessalonians.

(1 Th 2:19-20) “For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? {20} For you are our glory and joy.”

Why did Paul, Silas, and Timothy have to leave the Thessalonians? It would seem that they had a new church, and lots of work to do to strengthen and establish the church. In Acts 17, Luke gives the account of why they had to leave. It appears that Jason was housing Paul, Silas, and Timothy. It also appears that the new church plant was meeting in his home. When a mob formed and dragged Jason and some of the other new believers to the chief magistrate, Paul, Silas, and Timothy had to leave Thessalonica. They wrote, “But we brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while – in person, not in spirit – were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.” Though they physically left, the Thessalonians were still in their hearts and minds. They said that they were with the Thessalonians in spirit.

(1 Th 2:17) “But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.”

(Ac 17:5–9) “But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. {6} When they did not find them, they *began* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the world have come here also; {7} and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” {8} They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. {9} And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.”

Paul, Silas, and Timothy did not think that they would be gone long; they believed they were taken away for a short while. The Greek word is *kairos* (Strong’s G2540), which is one of two Greek words for time. We are familiar with *chronos*, which refers more to a specific time. *Kairos* refers more to a season of time. If we know that the leaves are turning yellow and brown and falling off the trees, we know we are in the fall season, and *kairos* would be used to describe the season. They felt like they were taken away for a season. A season may not mean a literal three-month period like fall, but a season of time would have some distinct characteristics of that period of time. A season in your life may be a period of time where you were going through some things, and it could be weeks or it could be years. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were taken away for a season of time, but fully expected to return to Thessalonica.

The translators probably translated it as a short while because of what they said next, that they were all the more eager with great desire to see them. Their eagerness and desire implied that it would be a short season. The Greek word for eagerness that is used is *spoudazo* (Strong’s G4704), which comes from *spoude* (Strong’s G4710), which means with speed. It is to make a prompt or earnest effort to do something. They had an earnest desire, or prompt desire to go visit the Thessalonians.

They did not just have a desire; they were passionate about going to see the Thessalonians. The Greek word for desire is *epithumia*, which is a compound word. *Epi* (Strong’s G1909) means on or upon, and *thumos* (Strong’s G2372) literally means to breathe hard. It is most often translated as wrath, which is a strong negative passion of someone who is all worked up or breathing hard about something. It can be used in a positive way also. When Peter exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock, he tells them not to do it for sordid gain, but with eagerness. That word is *prothumos*, which is signifying a passion to shepherd and feed the flock. When I was a teenager, I practiced when it was freezing outside. In the summertime in Iran when it was ninety degrees for a low and a hundred and twenty-five for a high, I practiced at 4:30 in the morning. I was passionate about playing golf. Pastors need to be passionate about studying the word and teaching. In this case, it is also a positive passion to see the Thessalonians. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had great desire or great passion to be with the Thessalonians.

They not only had a passion, they tried to go to Thessalonica on more than one occasion, but were hindered. We do not know what the hindrance was, but they said that Satan hindered them. It could have been a sickness. We do not know what Satan did, but they were hindered in going to see the Thessalonians on more than one occasion.

(1 Th 2:18) “For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and *yet* Satan hindered us.”

## 2. **Their Plan** (1 Th 3:1-8)

Paul, Silas, and Timothy had a strong desire to be with the Thessalonians, but had been hindered more than once. So, they came up with an intermediate plan to take care of some of their concerns. This was not a long-term solution, but a stop-gap solution. Their plan was to send Timothy to them. Paul was the team leader, and an open target for the Jews who had stirred up the mob. Timothy was a young man, and could come in without much attention. He had a great reputation, and Paul and Silas were confident that he could strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians.

(1 Th 3:1-2) “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,”

A number of years ago, Karen and I decided to visit another church on a week-night. As we were driving down I-40, we heard a loud bang. Then, my front left tire started losing air fast. I pulled over as far as I could off the busy highway, and put my spare tire on. The loud bang was caused by a bolt in our tire being shot out into the wheel guard. Apparently, I had run over a bolt and it had lodged in the tire for a while. While we were driving it came out with a bang, and then the tire started losing air very quickly. A spare tire is not a permanent solution, it is a temporary solution, especially with the donut spare tires that most cars now have. You can travel about fifty miles on them. They are not a permanent solution, but they do get you down the road until you can get the tire fixed. (We never made it to that church service that night.) Sending Timothy was not their permanent solution; it was a temporary solution to address some immediate concerns they had for the Thessalonians.

What were the concerns that they had for the Thessalonians? First, these were new believers and they needed to be strengthened. When I first went to visit a man in jail, the Holy Spirit came upon him mightily, and he received Christ. The presence of the Lord was so strong that he wept like a baby. He was a baby, a baby Christian, and now he needed to be fed and nurtured. I began to go weekly to the jail to disciple Steve. I gave him some basics, like how to grow as a believer. I got him a Bible and encouraged him to read it every day so that he could grow in respect to salvation. I taught him how to pray. The second week that I went, his bunkmate, John, received Christ. Nearly every week another one or two men gave their lives to Christ. I had a number of people to disciple in L4 pod. The Thessalonians were like Steve, baby Christians, and they needed to be taught the word and strengthened in their faith. That was Timothy’s first job.

(1 Th 3:2) “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,”

Their second concern was that the Thessalonians needed encouragement. They thought that they might be disturbed by all the afflictions that they saw Paul and his team experiencing. They had told them in advance that they were going to suffer affliction, and it came to pass just as they had said it would. They said that they had been destined for this. When Paul was saved, the Lord told him through Ananias that he was going to suffer greatly for His name’s sake.

(1 Th 3:3-4) “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.”

(Ac 9:15–16) “But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; {16} for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

Their concern came from the parable that Jesus taught on the different soils. Some seed fell on rocky places and it was received with joy. Yet, because of the rocky soil, it had no firm root and when affliction and persecution arises because of the word, it falls away. The Thessalonians had received the word with great joy, but now there was much affliction and persecution. Were they going to fall away or were they going to stand strong. Paul and the team wanted to help them get their roots down deep and get established in the faith. They wanted to encourage and strengthen them.

(Mt 13:20–21) “The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; {21} yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.”

All believers need regular encouragement, not just new believers. In Hebrews we are exhorted to encourage one another day by day. In this particular verse, it is so that we do not fall away, but remain faithful to Christ. Sin is deceitful and we need encouragement to stay strong.

(Heb 3:12–13) “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. {13} But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

In Hebrews 10, we are exhorted to give some consideration and thought about how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. We have to take some time to think about how to encourage others. Many people do not assemble with other believers; they forsake their church meetings. We need to prioritize our assembling together and not forsake it. And when we assemble, we need to come prepared to encourage others. Our gatherings should be a place where we are encouraged, strengthened, and built up in Christ. Why Paul, Silas, and Timothy could not endure it any longer, they sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage them.

(Heb 10:24–25) “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, {25} not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

There was a third reason that they sent Timothy. It was not just to strengthen and encourage, but to find out about their faith. They were genuinely concerned about how the Thessalonians were doing. Paul had a genuine concern for all the brethren in every city. After Barnabas and Paul had finished their first apostolic journey they returned to Antioch. After they had been there a while, Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” Paul also cared about the brethren in Thessalonica.

(1 Th 3:5) “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.”

(Ac 15:36) “After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are.”

They mentioned that they were afraid that their labor would be in vain. Earlier, they had told them that they knew their labor was not in vain. They heard lots of reports from Achaia and Macedonia about the Thessalonians, and how they had turned from idols to serve a living God. I do not believe that Paul thought they had fallen and their labor was in vain; I believe it was a use of contrast to bring up his next point.

Timothy has now gone and returned from Thessalonica, and he brought back a glowing report of how well they were doing. They wrote, Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love. Furthermore, Timothy reported that the Thessalonians also thought kindly of them, and longed to see them. The love for one another, and the desire to see one another was mutual. Even though Paul, Silas, and Timothy were in a great deal of distress and affliction, they were comforted by the report that Timothy brought about the faith of the Thessalonians.

(1 Th 3:6-8) “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.”

Their word about being afraid that the tempter had come and their labor would be in vain was also a prelude to Paul’s encouragement to them to stand firm in the Lord. He said, “for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.” The apostle, John, wrote that there is no greater joy than to hear that your children are walking in truth. Paul is full of joy that the Thessalonians are walking in truth, and he is encouraging them to continue to stand firm in the Lord.

(3 Jn 4) “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.”

### 3. **Their Prayer** (1 Th 3:9-13)

Paul, Silas, and Timothy longed to go back to spend time with the Thessalonians. They had attempted to go on more than one occasion, but had been hindered. They made an intermediate plan and sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage them, and to find out how they were doing. That was just a temporary solution; their real desire was to return to Thessalonica to see them face to face. Next, they pray about returning, and there are five parts to their prayer.

They begin their prayer with thanksgiving, saying, “For what thanks can we render to God for you for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account.” They were full of joy and thanksgiving to God on account of the Thessalonians. That is a wonderful way to begin your prayers. In Psalm 100:4, we are taught to “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise.” When Jesus taught the disciples to prayer, He began with, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.” We call it the Lord’s prayer, but it is really an outline for prayer. Before we begin praying for His kingdom to come, we honor the King with thanksgivings and praises. We begin our prayers with thanksgivings and praises to God. Many people immediately begin telling God what they want Him to do. We should come before God reverently and honor Him with praises and thanksgivings.

(1 Th 3:9-10) “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,”

(Ps 100:4) “Enter His gates with thanksgiving *And* His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name.”

(Mt 6:9) “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.’”

The second part of their prayer is a petition to see their face. That is their desire, and now it is their prayer. One of the ways that the Holy Spirit leads us is through the desires of our heart. We need to make sure our desires line up with His desires. The second part of the Lord’s prayer is for His kingdom to come and His will to be done. We need to make sure that we are praying His will, and not our own fleshly desires. When we delight ourselves in the Lord, He gives us the desires of our heart, and He can do this because our delight is in Him.

(1 Th 3:10) “as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?”

(Mt 6:10) “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

(Ps 37:4) “Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart.”

I want to take a minute to talk about the fervency of their prayers. Paul, Silas, and Timothy did not offer up a quick morning prayer and go about their business. They prayed night and day. They were laboring in prayer about this matter. They were serious about their request. They were fervent in their prayers about coming to the Thessalonians. The NASB says that they prayed most earnestly. The KJV says, “Night and day praying exceedingly...” The Greek word is *perissos* (Strong’s G4057), which means an abundant, or exceeding amount. They offered up an exceeding amount of prayers both night and day.

(1 Th 3:10 KJV) “Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?”

When we are fervent and earnest and pray exceedingly about a matter, it avails or accomplishes much. James wrote that the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. The KJV says, “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Paul, Silas, and Timothy were righteous men and they were praying effectively and fervently.

(Jas 5:16) “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

(Jas 5:16b KJV) “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

The third part of their prayer was a petition to complete what was lacking in their faith. They did not specifically say what was lacking in their faith, but that was why they wanted to come. Their motive for wanting to go to the Thessalonians was not about money. It was not selfishly motivated, but was for the benefit of the Thessalonians. These are new believers, so there are many things that come to my mind. As a teacher, I think in terms of giving them a strong biblical foundation. As a young church, they most definitely needed instructions about elders and deacons. They needed understanding about spiritual gifts. They probably had many gaps in their understanding, just as the church does today. Good spiritual leaders are seeking ways to build up and strengthen the faith of their flock, and to complete whatever is lacking. In chapters four and five, they wrote about the will of God in our lives. Many people struggle with knowing God’s

will, so this is relevant for everyone. They also spoke about what happens when we die, and I have always had a lot of questions about that. There were many things for Paul to teach them.

(1 Th 3:10) “as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?”

The fourth part of their prayer is for the Lord to cause the Thessalonians to increase and abound in love for one another and for all people, just as also do for you. They had already spoken of the report that Timothy brought back, “the good news of your faith and love...” The Thessalonians had the love of God and were walking in love. They prayed that they would increase and abound in love for one another and for all people. That is a great prayer for everyone. If you are never sure what to pray for someone, pray that they will increase and abound in love. Paul’s prayers for the churches are great examples for us to use in our prayers for people.

(1 Th 3:11-12) “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;”

(1 Th 3:6) “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,”

Their fifth petition is that God would establish their hearts without blame in holiness before God. Again, that is an appropriate prayer for anyone. It is a very relevant prayer for the church today. We do not know when the Lord is coming back; some think it is very soon. Whenever He comes, He is coming for a pure and spotless bride. He is coming back for a bride that has made herself ready and is without blame in holiness. They are praying for holiness, and in the next chapter, they are going to talk about God’s will is for sanctification, which means to make holy. Our Lord is coming back for a pure and spotless bride, living without blame in holiness.

(1 Th 3:13) “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.”

## Conclusion and Applications

Paul, Silas, and Timothy loved the Thessalonians and they had a strong desire to return and strengthen their faith. They had attempted to go there on more than one occasion, but had been hindered. Sometimes a delay does not mean that it is not God’s will or a “no” answer; sometimes we just need to be persistent and pray. Sometimes there are delays and hindrances caused by Satan and demonic forces. They did not give up, but persevered in their longing to go back to Thessalonica.

They came up with an intermediate plan to send Timothy to strengthen their faith, to encourage them, and to find out how they were doing. They cared about the Thessalonians. Timothy went and came back with a glowing report of their faith and love, and their mutual desire to see Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

Third, they prayed. They prayed fervently day and night. They prayed earnestly. They prayed exceedingly and abundantly. When we sense that God wants something done, we need to do everything we can, and then pray fervently for God to bring it to pass. They began their prayers



with thanksgivings. They prayed that they could go to Thessalonica and see them face to face. Their prayers were not selfishly motivated; they wanted to complete what was lacking in their faith. They prayed for the Thessalonians to increase and abound in love for one another and all people. They prayed for them to be established without blame in holiness before God.

### **Closing Prayer**

Father God, thank You for this passage. As a pastor, help me to have the same concern and care for the flock that Paul, Silas, and Timothy had. Help me to pray for the flock day and night. Help me to strengthen and encourage the brethren. Help me to complete what is lacking in the faith of our congregation. Help me to be a wise shepherd. When hindered in doing God's work, give me perseverance, persistence, and patience. When there are obstacles, help me to find other ways to take care of the needs of the congregation.

As a congregation, help us to care for one another. Help us to encourage and strengthen one another. Help us to come prepared, having considered how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Help us a longing for fellowship, and to see each other, face to face. May we never forsake the assembling of ourselves, but may it always be a priority. Help us to abound and increase in our love for one another, and for all people. May our hearts be established without blame in holiness before You.

## **Longing for the Thessalonians**

### **Introduction (1 Th 2:17–3:13)**

1. **Their Desire** (1 Th 2:17-20, 1 Th 2:8, Ac 17:5–9)
2. **Their Plan** (1 Th 3:1-8, Ac 9:15–16, 15:36, Mt 13:20-21, Heb 3:12–13, 10:24-25, 3 Jn 4)
3. **Their Prayer** (1 Th 3:9-13, Ps 100:4, Mt 6:9-10, Ps 37:4, Jas 5:16)

### **Conclusion and Applications**