



HG3: 1 Thessalonians (3/6) 'Helping Others To Stand'

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Home Group Sermon Notes

12th October 2008 - Pauline Woolnough

Introduction

Paul had sent Timothy to find out how the new church plant at Thessalonica was progressing and to be an encouragement to them. He knew that in order for the young Christians to be able to stand firm in the face of troubles and for their faith to grow to maturity they would need the love and support of one another and also further guidance and teaching from Paul himself. But its not only new Christians who need help, none of can stand alone, we all need guidance from more experienced and mature Christians and the support of Christian friends, and at Emmanuel a lot of this is met in our Home Group network.

Paul the Pastor

Although Paul himself urges us not to worry when he says in Philippians (4.6) "*don't worry about anything, instead pray about everything.*" here, we see him clearly concerned about the young Christians in Thessalonica. He tells us in v1 "*Finally when we could stand it no longer*" and in v5 he says "*That is why, when I could bear it no longer I sent Timothy,*" and although there is that kind of fear and worry that fails to trust God at all, there is also the legitimate sense of concern we have for those that we love and feel responsible for. This is what we see here in Paul in 1 Thess 3.

Paul had planted a church in Thessalonica and the Christians were still young in their faith, he was as concerned for this young church as a mother is for her child. We saw his heart for the young Christians earlier where he told them "*We were as gentle among you as a mother, feeding and caring for her own children. We loved you so much that we gave you not only God's good News but our own lives too.*" (1 Thess 2:7). Paul's feminine side, or simply the honest and loving attitude of a pastor concerned about those in his care? Unfortunately for Paul he could not pick up phone, write an email or send a text, a journey had to be made and as he could not go himself he had sent Timothy. This letter is Paul's response to the news that Timothy brings from the Thessalonians.

Timothy: Timothy's story can be found in Acts starting at Chapter 16, he was a young man said to have struggled with a reserved and timid nature yet Paul saw the potential in Timothy and demonstrated his confidence in him by entrusting him with such responsibility as going to visit this new church. Timothy probably knew Paul better than anyone else and had become like a son to him. In his letters to Timothy he begins them with the words "*to Timothy my true child in the faith,* (1 Timothy 1 2) and "*to Timothy, my dear son.*" (2 Timothy 1:2). Although Timothy was young Paul had faith in him and as a result Timothy grew in maturity and became a key person in the early church's growth.

One of the most important things for anyone in ministry to be engaged in is encouraging the gifts of others and helping them to grow in faith. Leaders need to be looking for their successor. So often it seems that the most gifted and able folk are chosen to carry out the most important tasks, Timothy doesn't appear to be either, rather he was someone who was willing to stay with Paul when he needed a companion and someone who would carry out Paul's work when asked to. Paul did not choose the best or most gifted, he chose someone who was young, available to him and who was willing.

Faith: Paul had only been able to spend a short time with the Thessalonians, about 3 weeks in all, hardly long enough for the word to be planted, never mind rooted, in their lives. He was desperate to know how the new believers and church were getting on. Paul knew that it was not enough just to tell someone about Jesus, its not even enough to help them come to faith in Him and commit their lives to Him. He knew that young believers needed help and guidance in order for them to grow into maturity. He was genuinely concerned and wanted the new believers to get all the help they needed in order for them to grow up into all aspects into Christ. He wasn't prepared to let their young faith die and he knew that if the believers weren't cared for and nurtured at this early stage in their Christian life then they would fall away and return to old pagan ways. What he was most concerned about was their **faith**. Had their faith survived, had they remained faithful...or had they fallen away? Had their faith been strong enough to withstand any trials temptations and sufferings.

For Paul, faith was about 3 things

- Personal belief and trust in God and the gospel
- Belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus - the central core of the gospel,
- Continuing faithfulness to God as revealed through Jesus Christ

He needed to know whether the Thessalonians faith had survived, he had already warned them that they would face persecution, trouble would come their way, if was not an if.... but *when* it came, but of course he did not know how they would react when it happened.

We have no experience of living in the persecuted church, we do not suffer for our faith, most people outside are indifferent to us, bemused, unable to understand why anyone would give up precious time to go church... voluntarily. Although many of us here have suffered great personal tragedy and loss of loved ones our faith, and the love and support of those around us, serves as comfort and help, but there are many Christians in the world today facing persecution, their faith is sorely tried and tested as they live through situations that cause them to listen to the voice within that whispers, "can you really trust a God who can let such awful things happen..... can you really believe that God cares about you." Paul knew they would hear these voices and he knew also that behind the voices is Satan trying to undermine their faith.

At the very heart of the gospel message is the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We commit ourselves to a crucified suffering Saviour, so suffering should come as no surprise, but it often does and the question... "why me?"... is one that many of us may have asked.... but suffering is part of the gospel message. That is why we are uneasy about some versions of Christianity that promise prosperity and good health, Jesus never promised us this and Paul didn't expect it for himself or for those he led to faith. He shared with all his churches the statement that "*through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*" (Acts 14.22). The fact is that for those ready to stand up and remain loyal to Christ ... suffering is inevitable.

Timothy's feedback: Timothy returns and all's well, he returns with good news that their faith and love is as strong as ever. Paul is so relieved and the tone of the letter changes from worry and anxiety to joyful relief. Timothy's report is better than he had ever expected and exceeded his highest expectations, his delight is clear, (v6-10).

Timothy had been sent to see if their faith still stood and he came back reporting that not only is their faith in Christ strong and alive but so is their love towards each other ... and towards Paul. These Christians in Thessalonica were from different cultures, races and backgrounds and for Timothy to report that they were committed to one another and in loving relationships proved to Paul that God's spirit was indeed at work in the Thessalonian church. It was something new and something the world had not seen before. Paul appears to be genuinely touched by the news that they also fondly remembered him, and looked forward to seeing him again, perhaps a reminder to us not to regard our leaders as without need, as the ones who always "give out" and to be an encouragement to those who invest their time and prayers into our spiritual growth and walk with the Lord.

Knowing that their faith remained strong gives Paul great encouragement and delight, he says in v8 "*Therefore brothers in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.*" Helping people to come to know the Saviour and helping them grow was what made Paul's life worth living, it was the reason he lived.

Paul the pray-er

Paul does not take the credit for their faithfulness, he thanks God for it, (v9), he turns spontaneously to his life's central task and his greatest joy, thanking and praising God for what he is doing and what he will do in the future. Paul says that he "*prays earnestly for them*" he prays, "*night and day,*" (v10), but while he is delighted that they stand firm he knows the pressures they are under, he knows that their faith is young, it needs to grow, they need more teaching and more encouragement and so he prays that God may allow him to return to help them come to maturity in faith.

Paul's prayer is grounded in God the Father as revealed through Jesus Christ, and he prays confidently. If God is truly God we don't pray just hoping that God is listening, perhaps interested and maybe something will happen, we pray to the God "*who is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope*" (Eph 3.20)

Paul prays that the Lord would perfect the love that they have for each other and make it overflow out and into the Jewish and pagan communities and to all those who persecuted them, he knew that only a supernatural God doing a supernatural work in their hearts could achieve this. This love would be the a sign that the church was being prepared for the day when its Saviour would return and gather all believers to himself. As we love God and love our neighbour we turn away from our selfish concerns and this leads to a radical transformation of our character. Paul wants his young converts to be able to look forward to the day when Christ returns without fear and shame but blameless and holy which of course is what he wants for all believers.

Paul's Love: To pray as Paul prays we need to love the people we pray for, surely we can only pray for the well being, spiritual growth, etc for people that we love, people that we want to engage with, spend time with, want the very best for, and this is at the heart of Paul's ministry. Paul, you can tell, actually loves these people; he talks about loving them as a mother. He cannot wait to have news of them, he wants to go back and spend more of his time with them. He wants them to grow and develop and to help them in this; he wants to "help them to stand".

Paul prays earnestly, night and day for people that he has spent weeks with, not years, people unrelated to him, not family members. His concern and love for them is such that he cannot bear to be without news for them and is forced to send his trusted companion. His heart has been totally softened by the Spirit of God, and the example of the sacrificial giving of his Saviour Jesus Christ, God had done a supernatural work in Paul's heart and gives him a heart for the lost, that same God can do the same in our hearts, and for our mission and outreach work to have any effect at all, we need to pray that He does.



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Home Group Study Sheet

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COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.

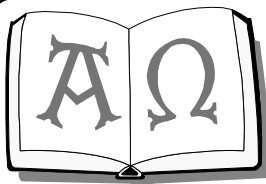
Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins)

'The suspense' must have been killing Paul - he couldn't wait to hear news of the Thessalonian church. Think of an occasion when you couldn't wait to hear the outcome of something: when was 'the suspense killing you?'



Looking Upwards - Worship (10 mins)

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



Looking Upwards - Bible Study (40 mins)

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

1: Paul spent 3 weeks planting a church at Thessalonica.... 3 WEEKS! Alpha runs for 10 weeks, excluding all the planning and preparation, we believe that the best way to encourage new believers is to make friends which can take months if not years. What made Paul's methods of evangelism and church planting so successful and what, if anything, can we do to improve ours?

2: Paul trusted the young Timothy with visiting and encouraging the church at Thessalonica. How do we encourage young people? How do we receive the young peoples ministry? Do we support youth events and services? Do we see it as our responsibility to encourage the young people (*and others*), in our fellowship?

3: To see people come to Christ is what made Paul's life worth living, its what made him tick. What is it that makes your life worth living? Looking forward to the next holiday; retirement; family? Do we come anywhere near close to Paul's level of commitment to disciple new believers.?

4: Paul prays night and day for the new believers. Is that how we pray, personally ... in our groups? At First Priority, "earnestly" for people to come to know Christ? Do we pray, as Paul prays, confidently, spontaneously, continuously? If not, why not? What is it about our vision of God and the gospel that allows us to be satisfied with less?

5: Think about the people you pray most for, who do you give up time to pray for? (*I expect, like me it would be a family member, a husband or wife, a child, a parent, these are the people that we are most likely to pray earnestly for ... perhaps because we love them.*)

6: How do we find that same love and concern for people that Paul so clearly had and for people that he had only spent weeks with?

7: If we are full of God's love it will overflow to others, its not enough just to be polite and friendly, we are to love people. Has your capacity to love people remained unchanged for a long time, if so what do you need to do?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).

