

1 Thessalonians 3

Good morning Church, it is wonderful to be here with you all.

Let us open up our Bibles to the 3rd Chapter of 1 Thessalonians please.

If you need a Bible, you can grab one from the pew in front of you, and if you do not own a Bible, please take one of those home and make it your own.

Let us pray before we begin in the Word.

Now you know that before a baby can begin to walk, they must first learn to stand.

For each of our babies, Jess and I had been so anxious to see them get mobile, and we worked diligently to help them learn to stand, so they could eventually walk.

And once they learned to balance on their own, you know that first time to you let go of their little hands and they stand on their own, it is such a proud moment.

But over the days, as they begin to balance on their own, the day finally comes where they put one foot in front of the other, and they try to move ahead.

And through great trial and error, and many falls and tears, before too long, they are off.

Then you are chasing them all over the house, wondering why you were in such a hurry to teach them to walk.

But, nonetheless, with each new child, we still work diligently to teach them to stand first on their own, so they can begin their walk.

Well the Apostle Paul, as we have previously seen in this letter to the young believer's in Thessalonica, he is has spoken of himself as their spiritual mother and father, their spiritual parents.

But Paul was forced to leave the city there in haste, and he was worried that in his short time there, that the new believers were not taught how to stand fast in their faith.

He was unable to teach them, and equip them fully; they were still very wobbly and clumsy in their stance.

Paul longed to help these young believers to learn to stand in and through the trials of the life of a believer, so they could eventually walk in the faith.

Remember the local enemies of Paul's ministry quickly rose up against the believers.

And after bond was posted for Paul and his associates, we see in **Acts 17:10 Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea.**

Remember Paul worked his way south, and ended up in Corinth where he wrote this letter.

Paul's opponents were hurling false accusations against him and his fellow workers back in Thessalonica.

These accusations were perhaps stumbling the young believers there and causing doubt and even questions about Paul's motives while he was with them.

Remember last time, in Chapter 2 Paul reassured them about the truth of what had really taken place.

1 Thess. 2:17-18 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. 18 Therefore we wanted to come to you — even I, Paul, time and again — but Satan hindered us.

This phrase ‘been taken away’ is a translation of the Greek word ‘orphaned.’

The phrase really speaking of bereavement in this separation.

Paul truly loved the Thessalonian believers, and longed to be with them, he experienced the same heartbreak as that of an orphaned child.

But remember Satan had hindered his return, and made it impossible.

Maybe some of you have lost a parent, and felt this terrible kind of longing to be with someone.

My wife has laid many tears upon her pillow this last year, because of the separation that death has put between her and her father.

It is a deep sorrow and Paul was longing for the church that Satan has hindered him from returning too.

This gives you a little insight to the pastoral heart of Paul here.

He not only was a gospel preacher but a shepherd and had the heart of a caring pastor.

He desired to return to Thessalonica to see how these young Christians were doing, after all, they were his hope, joy and crown of rejoicing.

And he explains now in verses 1-5 of Chapter 3...

Concern for Their Faith

3:1 Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, 2 and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, 3 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. 4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened,

and you know. 5 For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

Paul says because he was taken away from them, and wanted to see them again, and because Satan hindered him from personally coming, when he could no longer endure it, he decided to be left alone in Athens with possibly just Luke by his side.

He then sent Timothy back to Thessalonica.

Remember while Paul was alone in Athens, his spirit was provoked within himself by the idolatry, and he gave his great gospel declaration to the philosophers there on the Areopagus.

It bore little fruit, and he then headed Corinth to wait for the news of the Thessalonian believers.

Paul entrusted his young protégé Timothy to go and finish the work in the suffering church of Thessalonica. These new believers had to be taught and established in the Word, so their faith could stand.

Since Paul was not able to go, we see Timothy was entrusted with this work.

We see here in Timothy, the kind of person that is entrusted with the work of helping younger believers grow in the Lord.

We see Timothy was a brother, a fellow Christian.

You would think this is common sense, that a church builder should in fact be a part of the church of Jesus Christ.

But know this, that many ministries today, are going to the world to help build their ministry.

They are seeking the council of secular businessmen, and looking to build their church upon the business models of the corporate America.

A pastor told me a couple nights ago, that a church near him pays their children's ministry workers, and even worship team has salaries, and that some of those workers were not even Christians but only hirelings brought on for their talent.

They were hiring professionals to teach their children Sunday school and to even lead the worship part of the service.

That is just bizarre to me. How can a degenerate , an unbelieving person lead others in a ministry that is supposed to lead people to Jesus?

We see here, Paul didn't send the brilliant businessman who was able to get his brand of religion to flourish in the busy trade routes of the Roman Empire.

He sends this young man, who has the Spirit of the Living God within him, and is of the brethren.

And we see here Timothy is a minister of God.

This is simply the Greek word for servant.

Timothy was not afraid to work, and he served God faithfully.

He modeled his mentor, Paul, at this point in Timothy's life he has served with Paul in many cities and traveled with Paul well over 1000 miles on foot and by boat.

Timothy learned through Paul's own example.

Timothy understood too the difficulties that would come from establishing new believers in the Lord.

Perhaps from Paul's own patience toward himself, Timothy would love patiently through all the problems and let downs from instructing young believers.

If you have ever led someone to the Lord, and gone through the discipleship process with them, you know the hardships that come with this.

It requires patience and love that does not come naturally, as you work to help them stand in their faith, and ultimately walk in their faith.

You watch the new believer grab ahold of the gospel and even respond to it, and God begins to change their lives, and then the trials come to test their faith.

And it is difficult in the beginning, because you feel like you are constantly watching them fall on their face, and you help them back up, and it seems you get to that place where you can let go of their hands and let them stand on their own, and bam they fall again.

And in this kind of ministry it is important not to get frustrated or shortsighted, it takes time for the new believer to get to that place of standing on their own. Really, we are not called just too soul winning, but discipleship, we were commanded to “Go, and make disciples of the Nations.”

And the Evangelist who comes into town to win souls, and then leaves to the next place in a hurry, is only doing a very small part in the work of the ministry.

You see this is where the church comes in, the church is a discipleship center.

And you older Christians who have been walking with the Lord for decades, you are called to teach the younger believers and bear with them through the trials.

Christianity is more than worshipping while holding your spouse's hand during a church service, and then leaving quickly.

Our faith is one of giving our lives away.

I would encourage you who are not already serving, in this ministering, giving your life away, to sign up for Children's ministry, grab an application.

And labor in this discipleship.

Do so understanding it is a ministry of longsuffering.

My wife, still to this day, has many little disciplettes in the house throughout the week.

And you know they are heartbreakers, as many of them titter in their faith, but Jess just keeps on keeping on, through many tears.

But she has never expected quick results.

Many get overwhelmed, and even frustrated in their Ministry because results are not coming quickly, and they want to give up.

But it is those who understand the big picture, and remain faithful, who actually see the lasting fruit.

We are an anxious people in our culture, and we like microwave results, but you know my own experience is

sometimes it takes years for us to even begin to understand all that God is doing.

Know too, God does not let you even see all that He is doing at times.

I remember one time, on a mission's trip to Mexico, we spent a morning going door to door in Rosarito witnessing to people.

We came to a house that seemed no one was home.

We knocked and no one came to the door, as we were walking away, we heard the door creak open, and a woman peaked her head out.

She asked if we were Christians, we replied, "Yes we are."

At that moment, a man came storming out of the house and left in anger.

We found out later he was a Muslim and did not want his mother-in-law to answer the door.

So I asked the woman if she needed prayer, she got emotional and even anxious, as though she was expecting us.

Well, turns out she had been pleading with God to send someone to help her son.

She asked us to come inside and pray over her son Samuel.

Now nothing could prepare us for what we were walking into that day.

I thought she had a little guy with a cold we were going to go pray over.

But we entered the room, and I will never forget the image of suffering I saw that day.

Her son Samuel was around 35 years old, and was so sick and disabled, by what looked like Muscular Dystrophy that his body was shriveled up into a little ball no bigger than a 5-year-old boy.

He had on top of his crippling disability, contracted black lung, and the suffering and agony we saw in our

fellow human being was as sight none of us were ready for as he gasped for each breath with panic in his eyes.

We all walked into the room, and stopped in silence, as we were overwhelmed and wondered if prayers could even help at this point.

The mother had taken care of her son his whole life, and that day her hope was coming to end, when she told us she prayed to God, she had no more money to pay medical bills.

Now, understand in a moment like this, your faith is tested.

The hope the mother had in her eyes, and faith knowing that God had sent us to her was really troubling.

Because honestly I am framer, what can a normal man, with no medical experience offer a woman in need of a miracle?

In fact, the whole team was full of very unwitting normal people, there were no doctors among us.

So I remembered thinking, “God this woman is expecting something we cannot offer, but Lord I believe You can help her.”

I remember my brother in law Andrew was there with us, and he looked at me like “What are we going to do?”

And I gathered the team around to pray for this suffering boy.

And we prayed, and I don’t know if you have ever seen someone suffering from a pain that cannot be remedied, but they can’t stop moving, and they are grasping and reaching for something to help, and their misery is painful to just behold.

But you know as we prayed over Samuel, rest came over his body, and the shaking and squirming stopped, as we prayed for God to touch his body.

I’ll never forget, after we said amen, Samuel looked at everyone of us in the eye, and peace had come over him.

He was not able to speak, but we could tell by his eyes, he was grateful.

We told him Jesus touched him.

It was a moving experience, but I will be honest, I was disappointed.

I was expecting God to completely stretch out his body, and heal his bones, and I was hoping the man would stand and testify.

And I remember Andrew and I left, a little bewildered at what took place.

We all gave the mother a little money that we had to help with the ongoing medical bills, but for her that was little compared to God sending these Christians to her after she pled with Him to help.

She knew God had set this up.

Turns out after we left in the days to come, the Lord healed that young man of the black lung, the Lord eased Samuel's suffering after we left, he still was crippled but he had a different Spirit within him, as

though he had given his heart to the Lord through that experience.

And after we left, the mother opened up her home to a local ministry for Bible Studies, and every week people were meeting in her home to study God's Word, with a Muslim living in the house.

It was a fantastic story, but I remember Andrew asking me later, why didn't God just heal Samuel when we were there, and let us share in the miracle.

I told Andrew, because God knows us, had He healed him immediately and fully, you and I would have taken too much glory upon ourselves.

We probably would have set up one of those revival tents, and put a sign up, come and be healed by the amazing miracle brothers from California.

We would have started going town to town with our tent, putting on a healing crusade.

But the way God did, without allowing us to see the full picture, well He got the glory for the amazing work He did there.

And for a time, the Word of God was taught in that house, and we would have just gotten in the way of all of that.

God does not allow us to see the full picture in ministry, we just stay faithful.

And you know when you are in Children's Ministry, and you feel like those kids are not hearing you, they are rowdy and distracted, well just be faithful, you have no idea the impact you are having in their lives.

God doesn't allow you to see it fully, because He knows our hearts, and we will take too much credit for the work He is doing.

Just be faithful, that is the work of a minister, a servant, and that is the kind of man Timothy was.

We also see in Paul's description of Timothy here in verse 2 that Timothy was a fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ.

We see this ministry of building up new believers is a team effort.

Timothy was not a man who tried to run the show, to take center stage, no, Timothy was a fellow worker.

Timothy submitted to Paul, and went from Athens to Thessalonica, which was over a 300-mile journey, and endured through the work of church building.

You see a church builder will lift others up, and equip them for the ministry.

Timothy could be entrusted with this mission, and even entrusted with bringing back word to Paul.

We see Timothy's mission was to establish and encourage the young Christians in their faith.

Notice he wasn't sent to this suffering church to convince them to flee to Texas, where there were better gun laws, and a culture that shares their values.

I was talking to a local pastor last night, who says he is losing so many Christians, who want to leave the state, because of fear of losing personal freedoms.

I marvel at how cowardice our cultures Christianity is, we are not to fear the gates of hell, but to storm the gates of hell with this gospel.

If California is growing dark, then this is the very place Christians should be.

We should be standing firm, not fleeing in fear. I marvel at how people's emotions and fears dictate their faith, instead of the Word of God and prayer.

Timothy was sent not to lead a mass exodus from Thessalonica to a safer province.

That word establish means to shore up, to support the believers.

And 'comfort' here means more than just pat someone on the shoulder and tell them a comforting word.

Comfort actually means to "strengthen alongside of."

You know when I was framing houses; every now and again, the truss delivery man would drop the trusses down too hard onto the ground.

And we would go to lift a truss, and the bottom would break in half.

We didn't have time to send to the truss yard to have them make another one.

So we would nail a 2x4 or 2x6 alongside of that broken piece, and it would strengthen the truss.

This idea of comforting, is coming along side and helping, strengthening.

One of the Names of the Holy Spirit is Comforter, it's the same idea, He is a Strengthenener.

Timothy was sent to come alongside.

You see he wasn't coming to baby them in their faith, or to console them. "Oh, you poor Thessalonian believers, I know you are suffering so much."

No, he wasn't coming to pamper them, but to strengthen them to bolster them in the strength of the Lord.

He was coming to shore up their wobbly spirits with the assurance of God's Word.

His message would be more of a "Gird up your loins" kind of message.

It is the same message we need to hear today.

Paul explains in verse three that Timothy was sent to remind them that they were warned about the many afflictions that they were appointed too.

In verse 4, Paul mentions how they were told that they would suffer tribulation, and indeed, it was happening as Paul warned it would.

You see many young believers are given the impression when they come to Christ, their lives are now going to be feather beds and candy canes.

But you see the moment you put your faith in the Risen Son of God, and become Born again, you are immediately thrust into a fierce battle.

My Father-in-law when he was alive he was a brilliant storyteller.

One time he told me about his experience in Vietnam.

You see he was raised in Ohio, he had a simple innocent childhood, was never raised around guns or violence.

He said when he was 18 years old; the United States Government drafted him into their Army.

Now he had heard of this war going on across the ocean, but never paid much attention to it.

He was enlisted and he did not really understand for what exactly.

Even all throughout his training, he said they tried to warn him of the battle conditions, and mentally prepare him for what lay ahead.

He said even on the flight over to Vietnam, he and many of his friends had no idea of what was waiting for them.

He said this innocence and even ignorance stayed with him until the moment they landed.

And his first hike through the jungle he retells the terror and the fear of the first time gun shots rang out, and the panic and tears that overwhelmed him, as almost out of nowhere and too quickly to even register what was taking place, carnage and blood was all around him.

And his life changed dramatically in the moment of those first shots.

He said the training, the stories, the warnings had little impact on him, but once the reality of the battle came upon him, he said he wanted to go back home immediately.

But that was not an option for him, so another reality came over him as he saw his friends dying next to him, he said he knew he had to fight to stay alive, and keep moving, and he said the fear did not go away, but all that training and teaching kicked in as he learned the art of war, and staying alive.

My father in law became a warrior, and a hero on the battlefield.

But you see although he had been warned of the realities of battle, he said the experience of battle is nothing anybody could have put into words, to really help him understand truly what it was like.

And you know, when we lead someone to Christ, we can try to help them understand what opposition and hardships lay ahead for them.

But our words and warning come up short to the reality of what the battle is like over their souls.

And many, once the gun shots start sounding forth, and the enemies fiery darts start flying, they look for a way out, some fail to stand in their faith.

And others learn to stand and even how to survive in this intense spiritual battle.

Paul warned them of the trials that lay ahead for them, but Paul knew the experience of these afflictions and tribulations might be all too much for their young faith.

And now that they were in the heat of the battle, young Timothy was sent as a commanding officer to come alongside of them to entrench them in their faith, so that they could stand in the battle on their own.

Paul so concerned about them, he repeats his anguish and earnest desire to help the struggling converts in Thessalonica.

In verse 5 he says...when they could endure it no longer, he sent Timothy to find out if indeed the

tempter, or Satan had tempted them, and Paul's efforts be in vain.

You see our gospel is not to be sold deceptively as another self-help way to successful living.

It needs to be presented accurately, and truthfully, there will be an enemy, that from the very beginning of man's history has tried to tempt men and women away from God.

We must accurately present the trials and sufferings that lay ahead, and teach them that their faith will be tested.

But, these realities are coupled with the promises of the Word of God.

Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

God will see us through each and every affliction that comes before us.

For those of you who are younger in the faith, you can ask anyone in this sanctuary this morning who has

walked with the Lord for seasons of adversity, and you will hear of stories of time after time God carrying the Saint through and working every hardship for Good.

This is why fellowship and gathering together is so vital in our Christian walk.

You see whatever hardship you are going through this morning, you can be certain that there is someone here who has been through it and seen God's faithfulness.

There are those here who can comfort you with the same comfort they have received from the Lord.

We all have victory stories to share with one another, to assure one another when that tempter comes to shake our faith.

You know the fellowship time after church is so important.

Now I am an introvert, and I have social problems, and it would be very natural for me to go through that back tunnel after I preach, and head to my office and shut the door to isolate myself.

And believe me, I would be perfectly content doing so. But I know that Christianity is not an isolation faith, we were made to live and be with others, to be a part of this Body of believers.

And each week, know that there is value in fellowshiping and talking with people.

And this coming alongside one another is so important in our conflict with the tempter.

Jess and I early on in our church experience, I remember one evening, we told each other, "This is our last time coming to church."

"No one talks to us, we are not connecting with anyone in this church."

I remember we prayed that night, that God would confirm this decision.

You know that night, after we prayed, a man, named John came up to us, and invited us over for dinner, it seemed every one that night was talking to us, sharing with us, and it was amazing.

You know we left that night realizing it was not the church that was not connecting with us, but we were not connecting with them.

We would split right after service and hurry out the doors, and then we would get upset that the church was not friendly.

Maybe you are here this morning, and perhaps you feel the same way, that you are not connecting, try opening yourself up to us, and I guarantee things will be different.

Trying to stand against the tempter of our faith alone is arduous and painful.

God has given us one another, and if you are like me, a social introvert, step out in faith, and open yourself up to God's people.

Every week I am energized by the conversations I have, Jess and I get home and just talk about all that God is doing, and it is wonderful.

Utilize the fellowship time to open your life up, today go eat pancakes and sit with someone and open up your heart to them.

So Paul here is worried that the tempter has snatched their young faith from them, sends Timothy to get first hand news and bring encouragement.

Remember their faith is already being talked about all over the Roman Empire, and Paul wants to confirm the reports.

And next we see the news Timothy brought back to Paul...

Encouraged by Timothy

6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you — 7

therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. 8 For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

And young Timothy made the long journey south to Paul in Corinth, and brought back word to Paul's anxious heart.

And we see it was a gospel to Paul, Good News, that their faith and love was steadfast.

They even thought of Paul, and hoped to see him again.

Paul found great comfort in knowing that their faith was strong so much so, he declares there in verse 8 that his very life is bolstered by knowing, that in fact, they are standing fast in the Lord.

They are holding their ground in the battle.

You know, I will be real with you this morning, being a pastor comes with much emotion and turmoil.

You see ministry is full of ups and downs, highs and lows.

You see my week consists of thinking, praying, and pondering the faith of those of you who call this church your home.

There is heartbreak often and at the same time much rejoicing.

It is a bizarre combination, you get mountain peaks of joy, and valley lows of sadness, and often they are happening at the same exact time.

There have been weeks, where I have led someone to the Lord, and just full of extreme bliss off the experience, to being called to an elderly woman's home where her husband just passed away.

And there are these constant ups and downs in ministry.

And too top it all off, Satan is constantly in your head as a minister.

I feel Paul's anguish here, wondering if what he taught was enough for them to stand on their own.

Wanting to know if the Word he preached sunk deep into their hearts, if it is enough for them to fight against the wiles of the devil.

And at the news of their victory and their enduring faith, Paul's very soul is lifted up above even his own sufferings.

There is nothing greater than for a minister of God's Word to hear of the changed lives of the hearers of God's Word.

The life of the minister is really bound up, tied up with the success and failure of those he is ministering too.

When I hear of one of those young people from past ministries just walking away from the Lord, oh, how it just knots up my stomach, knowing that they were not able to stand against the devil.

But when I see Pastor Josh up here leading us in worship each week, it gives me such a joy, that through it all he was able to stand fast in his faith, and now God is using him greatly.

Or when Pastor Jacob visits and teaches or leads worship, to know that God is using his life, it overwhelms me with such a joy.

Or when I hear a story from one of you, of what God is doing in your life, how God is speaking to you, it fills me with such an energy and brings life to my soul.

You know we had an Elders meeting on Thursday, and we just went around the table and joyfully talked of all that God is doing in His people here.

It was such a wonderful time just sharing of the victories.

You know Paul was uncertain, and Satan was in his ear telling him they had failed, the pressure was too much, and they were not taught enough to stand.

Yet the truth was so far from that forked tongue serpent's whispers.

And this is the reality of ministry, the negative assessment of Satan is always being whispered in our ears, but God's reality and truth is so far from Satan's lies.

Again we do not see the whole picture of all that God is doing, we just have to stay faithful.

God is moving among His people, and God's Spirit is able to make us stand, and our faith is indeed growing week by week.

Paul says next...

9 For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, 10 night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?

These verses here present another insight to Paul's amazing heart.

The words "pray most earnestly" (*deomenoi*) mean literally "to beg or ask a favor." Walvoord

Paul is very dependent on God here, as he is compassionately concerned for their young faith.

We see here a continual heart of prayer, night and day.

Many limit their prayer time to a certain time, and they designate a moment of the day or even the week to the Lord.

But be encouraged to learn to dialogue all throughout the day with the Lord, when someone comes to mind, mention them in a prayer to the Lord, as you drive into work talk with the Lord about the day and the tasks before you.

Mention the people you will come in contact with.

Learn to cultivate a heart of prayer as modeled by Paul here.

Now we see his prayer was that he would return to see the Thessalonian Church once again.

Night and day he is praying to see them face to face to strengthen them himself.

And Paul's prayer here was not answered immediately.

It wouldn't be until another 6-7 years later would Paul make it back to Northern Greece, but God was faithful to grant Paul this request.

Again patience is required in a minister, God's timeline is usually much different than our own.

Paul mentions his praying to see them, and again this is not to teach them to run from their persecutors, but to perfect or repair, or mend their faith so they could stand against the wiles of the devil.

And next he lets the reader in on what this prayer entailed...

Prayer for the Church

11 Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, 13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Paul as he shares his specific prayer for the church, directed at our God and Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul asks for a way back to them.

He also prays that they would increase and abound in love to one another and to all.

If there is to be fruit from any ministry, love must abound.

This is the Greek 'Agape.' Love in action, a labor of love.

This love Paul is praying for among them is an active love, that seeks the well-being of others.

This love is purposeful, and intentional.

Notice this active love is first to be among one another in the church.

And it is only when the love is shown among ourselves can we actively show love to others outside of the church.

Our first ministry is to each other.

Remember Jesus said **John 13:34-35**

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Understand our love for each other, our help towards each other, our lives lived for each other, in service to one another, will be how this world is drawn to truth.

They should see our love and desire to be a recipient of that love as well.

There are a lot of ministries that focus on showing love to the lost, they focus on going after the lost, they also focus on loving those outside of the church.

And that is right and good, but only if the first is happening.

Gal 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Now no one will want to come to a Jesus whose followers are backbiting one another, who are gossiping about one another, who tear each other down.

It doesn't matter what kind of Gospel Track you hand out, if you are not loving those of the household of God, they will want nothing to do with our God.

You know if you invite your co-worker to our church, and in the next breath, you are telling her, “but if you come watch out for Jenny, that lady is the worst, oh and Bob, try to avoid him too.”

And you are just tearing down your brothers and sisters, who would want to come be a part of that?

But if the world sees us caring for one another, with this active agape love, they will be drawn to this kind of love.

Paul is praying for the love to abound or exceed to overflowing within the Church, for he knows this will be the greatest witness to the lost within their city.

Then Paul at last is praying that God will establish them blameless and holy when Christ comes for His Saints.

Now, Paul is speaking to the sanctification process that the Spirit is doing in the heart of the believer.

And this process is ongoing until this day Christ comes back for His Church and we will be caught up with Him.

Paul is praying that they will not only stand in their faith, but be sanctified and set apart in their walks with

Christ, until the process is completed at the Rapture of the Church.

It will be at the Bema Seat of Christ where our lives in the faith will be laid out truthfully before Christ.

And Rewards will be given accordingly to how pure our motives were in the work of Christ.

You see each and every one of us here this morning have a purpose and a place in the work of Christ, Christ lays before us all opportunity to serve Him sacrificially, to stand fast in our faith.

The Christian experience is one of continual growth and moving toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Now, if you are not moving forward in your faith, you are moving backward, or backsliding.

This morning maybe you are wondering where you belong in the work of the ministry.

Maybe you are wondering what God wants to do in your life for Him.

Be encouraged this morning to step out in faith.

Into the Work of Christ, in this ministry of serving others, being used to build others up, to come alongside of others.

I have notice among those most discontent in their faith, that many times it is because they are not serving others, giving their lives away.

Jesus over and over again told us the right way to live was not to live for ourselves but unto others.

This is the how we find success in our Christian living. Give your life away.

It is such battle to do this in our culture, everything is about us, and our wants and desires, seeking greener pastures, more comfort for ourselves.

Many of you have walked with the Lord for many years, God has given you experiences and put you through testings that can help these who are younger and a little more wobbly in their faith, to strengthen them.

This is the essence of ministry, equipping the Saints.

If you are younger in the Lord, the growing process will come through trials and difficult lessons, but endure through it, expect these trials.

It is those very trials and hardships we try so desperately to avoid, that actually teach us to stand, and eventually walk in our faith.

Now you never graduate out of the sufferings and trials, but as you mature in the Lord, you begin to understand with each new trial that comes, that God will be faithful to see you through, and He will teach you through them.

It is part of the sanctification process, God is working in you, establishing you in holiness.

Now, the trials are difficult, and sometimes seemingly unbearable, but understand that is why Church is so important.

We need each other to help one another through the hard times, to come along side one another.

And this morning we are here for you, we desire to minister to you this morning.

If you need prayer this morning, perhaps you need to be strengthened in the trials, come forward this morning and receive prayer.

The elders and pastors will be up front during this last song, they are here to minister to you this morning in your great need.

Also, if you have never asked Jesus to be Lord of your life, you have never repented of your sins, and surrendered your life over to the living and true God.

These men that will be up here this morning want to pray with you the prayer of salvation.

Please come forward and receive salvation freely this morning, paid in full by the blood of Jesus Christ.

I want to end by reading the end of a powerful poem that I read this week, it really puts our life into focus.

The Poet C.T. Studd declared in the last stanza of his famous Poem: Only One Life, Twill Soon Be Past...

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.
And when I am dying, how happy I'll be,
If the lamp of my life has been burned out for Thee.

What is the lamp of your life burning for this morning?

Whatever is not of Christ will burn up, but our eternal reward will be only from what is done for Christ.

Give your life away for Christ and others, and find true life...

Amen.