

## “Built Faith Tough”<sup>1</sup> (1 Thessalonians 3:1-13)

This past week while we were in Oregon, I filled up our van with gas for \$4.13 a gallon. I never thought I would be so happy to only have to pay \$4.13 a gallon. In this day of increasing gas prices, drivers are looking for every advantage.<sup>2</sup> One of the most overlooked strategies is keeping tires properly inflated. A group of Carnegie Mellon University students determined that the average driver could save \$432 annually (when gas is \$3 per gallon) by keeping tires at the recommended pressure. Tires usually lose air pressure v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y. If your car’s engine has a problem, you notice it immediately. But you can still drive on under-inflated tires—just not very efficiently. Likewise, we lose “efficiency” in the Christian life the same way tires lose air pressure: very slowly. When we finally are stopped dead in our tracks by sin or failure, it’s not because of a blowout. It’s because we failed to perform daily spiritual maintenance: prayer, worship, Bible study, self-denial, service, and obedience. Over months or years we can grow so spiritually inefficient that we fail to notice. Have you checked your spiritual air pressure lately? Are you operating for the Lord at peak efficiency? Be warned: Failing to perform daily maintenance can ultimately leave you stranded.<sup>3</sup>

So how can we ensure that our faith won’t leave us stranded? How can we have a “pumped-up” faith that will go the distance? How can we help other believers grow spiritually? These questions are answered in 1 Thessalonians 3 where Paul states, “Afflictions are not accidents—they are appointments.” In these thirteen verses, Paul shares two strategies to build ourselves and others up in the faith.

**1. Prepare God’s people to endure trials (3:1-8).** In this first section, we discover that the way to prepare others to endure trials is to strengthen them in the faith. Paul begins with these words: “Therefore when we<sup>4</sup> could endure<sup>5</sup> it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, 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” (3:1-2). Now this passage presupposes that we understand the circumstances surrounding Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica, so allow me to summarize those circumstances. Paul arrived in the Greek city of Thessalonica after he and his coworker Silas had received a terrible beating and been imprisoned in the city of Philippi. During their short time in Thessalonica, Paul, Silas, and Timothy led several of the Thessalonians to faith in Jesus and this new nucleus of believers formed a church. But soon trouble started, and Paul, Silas, and Timothy were forced to run for their lives and Paul and Silas were forbidden from entering Thessalonica again. So the three ministers traveled to the cities of Berea and Athens.<sup>6</sup> It was while they were in Athens that Paul’s concern for the Thessalonian Christians reached its peak, so he sent Timothy back to the city to find out how things were. For some reason the city ban against Paul and Silas didn’t apply to Timothy. Timothy had a Greek father and probably looked Greek. He would, therefore, have attracted no special attention in a Greek city, whereas Paul was immediately recognizable as a Jew (cf. Acts 16:20).<sup>7</sup> It is also likely that because of his youth the authorities didn’t notice him.

Now, let’s get into the text. The word “therefore”<sup>8</sup> that opens this chapter refers back to 2:17-20, where Paul expressed his great love for the Thessalonian believers. It is because of this love that he cannot abandon them when they need spiritual help. The verb translated “left behind” (*kataleipo*) is an intense and picturesque term that is used of a child leaving his parents (Eph 5:31) or the death of one’s spouse (Mark 12:19). In 2:17, Paul said that he felt “orphaned” from his friends in Thessalonica, and the Greek word can also mean “bereaved.” To leave these new believers was like an experience of bereavement. This is a good lesson for us today. Paul so loved the Thessalonian believers that he would have risked his own life to return to them.<sup>9</sup> He wanted to give of himself and his resources for them, as a parent provides for his or her children. Paul had a passion for these new believers. Do you have this type of earnest desire for new believers? Do you long to see other believers and help them grow in their faith? What new believers have you recently invested in?

In 3:2, we find two keys to this chapter. The first key word in this chapter is “faith” (3:2, 5, 6, 7, 10). Another key word is “strengthen/establish” (*sterizo*, 3:2, 13).<sup>10</sup> Paul’s problem is that he is separated from the Thessalonian Christians by distance and circumstances. He is in Athens with no telephone, FAX, email, or teleconferencing, incapable of meeting the spiritual needs of his Thessalonian friends. So he empowered Timothy with the confidence to minister. Notice how Paul describes young Timothy in 3:2: “our brother and God’s fellow worker.” Timothy is a brother in Christ, a follower of Jesus, related to every other Christian, as a brother. But he’s also called “God’s fellow worker.” This is a remarkable phrase—that any person besides Jesus Himself could be described as God’s fellow worker. Now some Bible versions have the phrase “God’s minister” (KJV) instead of “God’s fellow worker” or “God’s coworker,” because some scholars found the idea of God having coworkers a far too bold word to be applied to Timothy.<sup>11</sup> But the original word here is *sunergos*, where we get our English word synergy from. Paul seems to be saying that God’s partnership with Timothy provides synergy. What’s even more amazing is that it’s likely that Timothy was in his early to mid 20s when Paul wrote this.<sup>12</sup> Timothy was a young and inexperienced ministry intern, yet here Paul empowers him to be an extension of God to the Thessalonians. Timothy’s mission is to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith. Notice again that word “faith.” Paul is most interested in the faith of these believers, not their comfort, welfare, or prosperity. The word “strengthen” is a building term that means to cause a structure to become more secure. Think of retrofitting a freeway overpass, that’s what this word describes. When used to describe our faith it means “to cause someone to become stronger in the sense of firmer and unchanging in attitude or belief.” The word “encourage” here basically describes a coach who comes alongside a person to help them take the next step. Paul wanted Timothy to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians so they wouldn’t waver when problems and suffering came upon them.<sup>13</sup>

Verse 2 should be an encouragement to all college students and young adults. If God can use Timothy to affect an entire church, he can use you as well. The best example I can think of is our very own Sean Post. Sean came to Emmanuel as a senior in high school and for the last three years he has been active and committed to our church. Consequently, our church voted unanimously that he should be our youth and college pastor, at the ripe young age of 21. Most of us know that Sean has exceptional skills; however, he is on a fast track because of his exemplary character and commitment to the local church. Young people, you have a model to follow and imitate if you want to be mightily used by God. As Sean follows Christ, may you follow him (1 Cor 4:16).

In 3:3-4, Paul reveals his purpose in sending Timothy to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonian believers: **“so that no one would be disturbed<sup>14</sup> by these afflictions;<sup>15</sup> for you yourselves know that we have been destined<sup>16</sup> for this. For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction;<sup>17</sup> and so it came to pass, as you know.”** Several insights on affliction and trials come directly out of these two verses:

- ***Trials will come.***<sup>18</sup> No sooner had the Thessalonians trusted in Jesus when the bottom seemed to fall out of their lives. This is true in the life of every Christian. The truth is, if you aren’t presently in a trial you are either headed out of a trial or right now preparing to head into a trial. The word “afflictions” (*thlipsis*) has the idea of being “under the thumb” because of pressure from above. The “afflictions” that Paul is referring to are the sufferings the Thessalonians experienced at the hands of their countrymen because of their faith and stand for the Lord Jesus as mentioned back in 2:14.<sup>19</sup> Some of us will face this type of affliction from our family members, coworkers, neighbors, and classmates. We may also face other trials such as terminal illness, loss of job, robbery, imprisonment, death of a loved one, or divorce. This is a part of life. Regardless of how we may try, we can’t avoid afflictions. We can’t play hide-and-go-seek or peek-a-boo. They are part and parcel of every believer’s experience. *Afflictions are not accidents—they are appointments.*

- ***Trials can rock Christians.*** Many believers turn their back on God as a result of trials. One of the chief reasons for this is that many new believers have not been told the truth about Christianity. Instead, they have been told that being a Christian is all about health, wealth, and prosperity. However, the truth is that the Christian life is not one big spiritual Disneyland. At times it is difficult and disappointing. This is why Paul told these brand new Christians time and time again<sup>20</sup> that they would face trials. When I was growing up, my dad would always tell me, “Growing up is no fun.” At the time I didn’t really believe him, nor could I really understand, but I sure do now! In the same way, we must warn new believers that Christianity is not for wimps. We must tell them that “every rose has its thorn.” I respect people who will tell me the “straight-up” truth. I don’t want others to pull the punch and try to be mamsy-pamsy. I don’t want to have reality sugarcoated. I want to be adequately prepared so that when trials come I will stand firm. Yet, I also want to have a heart of compassion, concern, and care so that *when* (not *if*) trials do come upon others, I come alongside them to provide comfort. *Afflictions are not accidents—they are appointments.*
- ***Trials come from God.*** Paul says that we have been “destined” for afflictions. The phrase “we were destined” comes from a verb that means “to put or to place.” The verb is a perfect tense and passive voice, which is a very strong way of saying “these hard times were placed here by God.” Paul wants to reassure his friends that the troubles they’re going through aren’t arbitrary accidents, blind acts of fate, or the result of bad karma, but that suffering is the crown of being a follower of Jesus.<sup>21</sup> These trials didn’t happen by accident. In fact, this is the opposite of chance or circumstance. Affliction is God’s appointment for us. God places affliction strategically in our lives for our personal growth. This is God’s destiny for us and comes by His divine design. You may say, “I don’t like these side-effects of Christianity.” Sorry, this is just one of the by-products of being a believer. A disciple is someone under discipline. God appoints trials into our lives so that we will become more disciplined in the things of God.<sup>22</sup> Although God is with us through all of our trials, He is not always in a hurry to pull us out of our tribulations.<sup>23</sup> The reason is because suffering is the quickest path to spiritual maturity. *Afflictions are not accidents—they are appointments.*

In 3:5, Paul explains the reason behind the reason he sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonian church: **“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.”** In this verse, Paul once again demonstrates his pastoral heart. He is concerned about the Thessalonians and desperately wants to hear how they are doing in their faith. The reason that he is so anxious to learn of their spiritual progress is because he is all too aware of “the tempter.” Did you know that Satan has a “ministry?” That’s right...he’s a step up on many Christians. Satan’s special “ministry” is to attack Christians. Satan loves to attack new Christians. If he can sidetrack or defeat new believers from the get-go, he has won. Even though he can’t take away a believer’s salvation, he can render Christians ineffective.<sup>24</sup> And he has done this countless times. This is one of his specialties! Satan also loves to tempt mature believers to fall away during hard times. How does the devil tempt us in hard times? First, he tempts us to doubt God’s goodness. He whispers in our ear that God has forgotten us, that He doesn’t care, and that He isn’t good. Second, Satan tempts us to retaliate against others with anger and resentment. This is one of his favorite tools when the hard times involve problems with friends and family members. Third, Satan tempts us to give in to despair and discouragement.<sup>25</sup> Satan will tempt us to say, do, or think anything that will get us off track spiritually. Remember this simple principle: Satan tempts us to get the worst out of us; God tests us to get the best of us. In this context, Paul is fearful that Satan may cause his labor to be “in vain.”<sup>26</sup> Paul knew that no labor in the Lord is in vain (1 Cor 15:58). We have the Lord’s promise that He will reward us for faithful labors. But Paul also knew, because of the workings of Satan, some of his labor could be annulled or tarnished as to its effect on the lives of others. This is why he was so concerned about their faith and took steps to protect his labor.<sup>27</sup>

In 3:6-8, Paul rejoices when he hears that the Thessalonians are withstanding persecution. He shares his reaction to this news with them to encourage them to persevere as their afflictions continued. **“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,<sup>28</sup> for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction<sup>29</sup> we were comforted about you through your faith; for now we really live, if you stand firm<sup>30</sup> in the Lord.”** The phrase translated “brought us good news” (*euaggelizo*) is the exact equivalent of “preaching the good news of the gospel.” In fact, this is the only place in the New Testament where this verb is used in the general sense of bringing good news rather than of preaching the gospel. Paul’s use of this verb here shows his depth of feeling on hearing news of the Thessalonian Christians. The report from Timothy was, to Paul, like hearing the gospel. Paul most likely uses this word because through our lives we have the opportunity to influence unbelievers favorably on behalf of the gospel (cf. 1:6; 2:13).<sup>31</sup> Timothy reported that the new believers were manifesting “faith and love.” There’s that word “faith” again. It is “faith” and “love” in that order. You cannot have “love” unless you first have “faith.” It is one thing to believe in Jesus as Savior, but in order for there to be fruitfulness, there needs to be ongoing persistent faith.<sup>32</sup> Paul also exclaims that the church is standing firm in spite of persecution. They did not believe the lies that Satan had told about Paul, but they still held him in the highest esteem in love. Furthermore, their lives brought comfort to the apostles. This leads Paul to say “now we really live.” We often use the phrase “Get a life!” when we regard someone’s pursuits as insignificant. Yet, here Paul discusses “getting a life” in an unusual way.<sup>33</sup> Spiritually speaking, Paul is given a new lease on life...a new surge of energy, a new zest for living the Christian life.<sup>34</sup> *Afflictions are not accidents—they are appointments.*

[How can we help other believers grow spiritually? First, prepare God’s people to endure trials. A second way to help others grow spiritually is...]

**2. Pray God’s people prepare for future judgment (3:9-13).**<sup>35</sup> In these remaining five verses, we will learn how to pray that God’s people have a good showing at the judgment seat of Christ. These verses disclose three specific requests that we can pray today for other believers.<sup>36</sup>

- ***Pray for God’s passionate heart (3:9-10).*** In 3:9-10 Paul writes, **“For what thanks can we render<sup>37</sup> to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?”** As always, Paul is vertically focused. He wants to express thanks to God for “all the joy” that the Thessalonians have brought him. This gratitude and joy motivated Paul to pray “night and day,” a phrase that reflects the Jewish reckoning of time where the day begins at dusk. It simply means that Paul prayed consistently at various times of the day. Verse 10 also says that he prayed “most earnestly”...blood, sweat, and tears type of prayer.<sup>38</sup> He did so because he wanted to see these believers again and “complete” what was lacking in their faith. The word “complete” (*katartizo*) is a Greek word that means “to fit together, restore, repair, equip.” It was used of setting bones and repairing fishing nets.<sup>39</sup> The phrase “complete what is lacking in your faith” refers to “things still needed.”<sup>40</sup> The rest of 1 Thessalonians tells us what Paul found lacking in their faith. Some of the issues related to moral concerns (4:1-8), others to doctrinal issues (4:13-5:11), and still others touched the daily life of the church (5:12-22). This brings up an important truth: We never arrive in our Christian lives. Room for improvement is the largest room in the world. Even the apostle Paul continually sought to press on in his spiritual growth.<sup>41</sup> In Rom 1:17 he explains that as believers we must grow from “faith to faith.” In other words, the whole of the Christian life is built upon faith. Are you living the adventuresome life of faith? Have you grown complacent and satisfied with where you are in your growth? If so, why not ask the Lord to give you an earnest desire to mature? And as you pray, recognize that *afflictions are not accidents—they are appointments.*

- *Pray for God's sovereign direction (3:11).* Paul prays, **“Now may our God and Father Himself<sup>42</sup> and Jesus our Lord<sup>43</sup> direct<sup>44</sup> our way to you.”<sup>45</sup>** In 2:18, Paul describes how Satan “hindered” his path so he now intentionally prays for God’s direction. Who sets your ministry direction? Do you go to God with what you want to do for Him or do you ask Him what He wants you to do? Do you pray for the Lord’s clear and specific direction in your ministry? Do you pray for the Lord’s direction in our church? Do you pray that the Lord will speak to the leadership? Do you invite the Lord to give direction to every area of your life? Or, if you’re honest, would you have to admit that there are some areas that you do not invite the Lord to direct?
- *Pray for God's supernatural love (3:12).* Paul’s second request is, **“May the Lord<sup>46</sup> cause you<sup>47</sup> to increase<sup>48</sup> and abound<sup>49</sup> in love for one another, and for all people,<sup>50</sup> just as we also do for you.”** Times of suffering can be times of selfishness. Persecuted people often become very self-centered and demanding. What life does to us depends on what life finds in us; and nothing reveals the true inner man like the furnace of affliction. Some people build walls in times of trial and shut themselves off. Others build bridges and draw closer to the Lord and His people. Our growing faith in God ought to result in a growing love for others (cf. 1 Pet 4:8).<sup>51</sup> You cannot grow to maturity in Christ unless you learn how to love other Christians. And this requires a supernatural love from God. He alone must give us love for one another. The most spiritual people are not those who know the Word the best; the most spiritual people are those who love God and others the best. We need to change how we esteem Christians. God intends that the love Christians have for one another be a witness to the world (John 13:34-35; 17:23).

The goal and purpose of these three prayers is given in 3:13: **“...so that He [i.e., the Holy Spirit] may establish your hearts without blame<sup>52</sup> in holiness before<sup>53</sup> our God and Father<sup>54</sup> at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints [i.e., believers who have died and gone to be with Christ in spirit form, whose bodies will be resurrected when He comes (see 4:16)<sup>55</sup>].”** Again, Paul anticipates the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 2:19; 5:23). He says that submission to God’s passion, direction, and love gets us ready for the judgment seat of Christ! Paul wants us to be prepared to stand before Jesus Christ one day, with confidence. He yearns for the Lord to “establish” us as practically righteous, before Christ returns.<sup>56</sup> This should be our heart cry and our deep desire for every believer. I don’t know if you’ve noticed but very few Christians have a passionate longing for Christ’s return. We may yearn for it when overwhelmed by pain, sorrow, or disappointment, but once life returns to normal we are quite happy to remain on planet earth.

Earlier this month, some friends from Vancouver treated our family to a stay at Great Wolfe Lodge Waterslide Park. While we were walking around the park, I couldn’t help but notice a muscular man standing with his wife. (No, I wasn’t looking in a mirror.) I thought to myself, I need to find out this guy’s secret, so I approached him and asked about his workout routine. He told me about his weightlifting routine and then he talked about his cardio workout. His cardio workout is what interested me most because he and I were on the same schedule—4-5 days of week of cardio for 45 minutes at a shot. Yet, he said that he is on a new routine that calls for 3 cardio workouts a week of 15 minutes. The workout routine consists of intervals of 2 minutes of intensity and 1 minute of ease. This workout shocks your body and burns fat. It is intense and effective. I have tried it several times and it is flat-out brutal!

This metaphor is also true in the spiritual realm. If you and I want to build a rock-hard faith we will have to increase our intensity. Faith is like a muscle—you’ve got to use it or you’ll lose it. Sometimes you’ve got to push yourself to the limit. You’ve got to work those muscles to failure. You’ve got to shock your body into growth. If I sincerely believed that Jesus was going to return today (heart, soul, mind, and will), I would work out with a renewed intensity. I would also stop and enjoy the breaks that God gives. I would understand that God has a purpose in all of the afflictions I face and I must depend upon Him.

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### **Scripture References**

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13  
Acts 17:10-15  
Philippians 1:22-26  
1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:8-9  
Luke 22:31-32  
Ephesians 3:20-21  
Colossians 4:12

### **Study Questions**

1. Timothy provided the Thessalonian believers a huge source of spiritual comfort and encouragement (3:1-2). In the course of my spiritual growth, who has provided me the biggest spiritual lift in my quest for maturity? Has there been anyone in my life recently who has strengthened me and encouraged me in my faith? Who have I personally marked over the years that I have been a Christian? Who am I currently seeking to help grow spiritually?
2. Do I understand that suffering and trials are a part of the Christian life (3:3-4)? Why does this realization or reminder trouble me so much? How have I suffered for the cause of Christ? How did God use suffering in Jesus' life (Heb 5:8)? To better comprehend the New Testament emphasis on suffering read Matthew 5:10-12; John 15:18, 20; 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 4:7-11; 11:23-27; Philippians 1:29; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet 2:21; 4:12-16.
3. Why is mutual love and respect between leaders and church members so important (3:6-8)? How can I be a source of joy to my pastors and elders (3:9)? Read Hebrews 13:17. As a church leader, how can I demonstrate servant-leadership toward those I minister with? Read Matthew 20:26-28.
4. Like Paul, do I pray "night and day" for opportunities to help others mature in Christ (3:10)? Most likely not, right? How can I take one step forward to increase my sense of zeal and urgency to help others grow in Christ? Is there anyone on my spiritual radar that I can help grow to completion?
5. How would I rate my current love for the body of Christ (3:12)? Could I describe my love for fellow believers by the terms that Paul uses: "increase and abound"? If not, why not? Read John 13:34-35; 15:12-17; Romans 13:8; 1 Peter 4:8; and 1 John 4:7-13. What can I do to cultivate a greater love for my church family locally and universally? How does love for all the believers in God's family prepare me for a good showing at the judgment seat of Christ (3:13)?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This title is a play on the slogan “Built Ford Tough.”

<sup>2</sup> The average gas price in Washington State at the time of this writing is \$4.35.

<sup>3</sup> David Jeremiah, “Spiritually Deflated,” *Today’s Turning Point*, 7/14/08.

<sup>4</sup> This may be an epistolary “we” for Paul lapses into the first-person singular in 1 Thess 3:5. See Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*. New International Greek Testament Commentary series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1990), 127 and G.K. Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 95. Thomas explains further, “Yet his use of ‘us’ in 2:18 may well have been in a singular sense in light of the ‘I, Paul’ in the same verse. Also, 3:5 picks up the plural of 3:1 with the singular ‘I.’ For Paul to have used ‘we’ in v. 1 in any other than a singular sense would have defeated his apologetic desire to express his loneliness. If his long-time companion Silas had still been in Athens, there would have been little deprivation in Paul’s not having Timothy with him. He would not be ‘alone’ (*monoi*, v. 1) in the real sense of the word unless Silas too was away (Morris, NIC, pp. 98, 99). Robert L. Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), Electronic ed.

<sup>5</sup> The verb *stego* (“endure”) is used in the NT only in 1 Thess 3:1, 5; 1 Cor 9:12; and 13:7. This uncommon verb originally referred to “keeping water out of a vessel, such as with a watertight house or a boat that doesn’t leak (3:1; cf. 3:5). The image that the apostle paints, therefore, is of his deep affection for the Thessalonians that he is no longer able to contain within himself and prevent from leaking out.” Jeffrey A.D. Weima, “1 Thessalonians” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 417.

<sup>6</sup> For more on this account, see Acts 17 (esp. 17:10-15).

<sup>7</sup> F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. Word Biblical Commentary series (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 64.

<sup>8</sup> The only other use of the conjunction *dio* (“therefore”) in 1 Thess is found in 5:11.

<sup>9</sup> Paul so loved the saints at Philippi that he was willing to stay out of heaven in order to encourage them (Phil 1:22-26).

<sup>10</sup> The verb *sterizo* (“strengthen”) means “to support, stabilize, establish, fix, strengthen.” This word is used 14 times in the NT (Luke 9:51; 16:26; 22:32; Rom 1:11; 16:25; 1 Thess 3:2, 13; 2 Thess 2:17; 3:3; Jas 5:8; 1 Pet 5:10; 2 Pet 1:12; Rev. 3:2) and in all but two of its uses it is used metaphorically of providing some form of spiritual stability or strength.

<sup>11</sup> Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 128.

<sup>12</sup> This is based on the fact that 1 Thessalonians was written in 52 AD. In Paul’s later letter 1 Timothy, Timothy is told “let no one look down on your youthfulness” (4:12). Most scholars take this to mean Timothy was in his 30s, and it’s likely that 1 Timothy was written somewhere around 67 AD. This puts Timothy in his early to mid 20s during his mission in Thessalonica.

<sup>13</sup> Paul sent Timothy to Corinth to help straighten out the problems there (1 Cor 16:10-11). He also planned to send Timothy to help the saints in Philippi (Phil 2:19-23). Timothy was a great discipler.

<sup>14</sup> This is the only NT use of *saino* (“disturbed”). It originally referred to a dog wagging its tail.

<sup>15</sup> The noun *thilipsis* (“afflictions”) is used by Paul in Rom 2:9; 5:3; 8:35; 12:12; 1 Cor 7:28; 2 Cor 1:4, 8; 2:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2, 13; Eph 3:13; Phil 1:17; 4:14; Col 1:24; 1 Thess 1:6; 3:3, 7; 2 Thess 1:4, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Gk. *keimai* (“destined”) is used 24 times in the NT, but only means “appointed, set, destined” in three contexts (Luke 2:34; Phil 1:16; 1 Thess 3:3).

<sup>17</sup> The verb *thilibo* (“suffer affliction”) is used in Matt 7:14; Mark 3:9; 2 Cor 1:6; 4:8; 7:5; 2 Thess 1:6, 7; 1 Tim 5:10; and Heb 11:37.

<sup>18</sup> We must expect to “suffer for His sake” (Phil 1:29). Persecution is not foreign to the believer (1 Pet 4:12-19).

<sup>19</sup> Hampton Keathley III, “Concern for the Thessalonians Continued (1 Thess 3:1-13):” *An Exegetical and Devotional Commentary on First Thessalonians* ([www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org)).

<sup>20</sup> The imperfect tense *proelegomen* (“kept telling”) means repeated action in past time.

<sup>21</sup> Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 130.

<sup>22</sup> Grant C. Richison, *1 Thessalonians* (<http://www.gracenotes.info/> 1997), 14.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Eaton, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 1997), 45.

<sup>24</sup> Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) once said, “I can resist anything except temptation.” Quoted in Sam Gordon, *Hope and Glory*. Truth for Today (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2005), 112.

<sup>25</sup> Ray Pritchard, “Living in Hard Times” (1 Thess 3:1-8): <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1996-09-22-Living-in-Hard-Times/>.

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<sup>26</sup> For the idea of useless efforts (or laboring in vain) cf. Gal 4:11; Phil 2:16; and for the OT background see Isa 49:4; 65:23. Michael W. Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 99 n. 16.

<sup>27</sup> Keathley III, "Concern for the Thessalonians Continued."

<sup>28</sup> Wanamaker writes, "Contemporary Christians can learn from Paul's missionary practice by recognizing that meaningful evangelism must aim for more than acceptance of Christian beliefs by converts. Evangelical Christianity needs to strive to create a social context or community in which converts may be resocialized into a new and distinctively Christian pattern of behavior and practice." Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 139.

<sup>29</sup> The words "distress and affliction" are used in Job 15:24 LXX.

<sup>30</sup> The Greek verb *steko* ("stand firm") is a frequently recurring call for continued perseverance (cf. 1 Cor 16:13; Gal 5:1; Phil 4:1).

<sup>31</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. New Century Bible Commentary series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott Pub. Ltd., 1983), 94.

<sup>32</sup> Eaton, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 47.

<sup>33</sup> Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 103.

<sup>34</sup> Gene A. Getz, *Standing Firm When You'd Rather Retreat: Based on 1 Thessalonians* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1986), 91.

<sup>35</sup> Holmes writes, "There is clearly a substantial connection between these verses and those that precede them. The single sentence comprising 3:9-10 is closely joined with 3:8 by the conjunction *gar* ("for," omitted by NIV, NRSV), and 3:11-13 form a 'benediction' that draws to a close the entire first part of the letter (1:2-3:13)." Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* 113. See also Earl J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*. Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995), 163-178 and Peter T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 156-164.

<sup>36</sup> This prayer contains three optative verbal forms: *kateuthunai*, *pleonasai*, *perisseusai* ("direct," "increase," and "abound"). The optative mood is the mood of potentiality used in prayers.

<sup>37</sup> The verb *antapodidomi* ("render") echoes Ps 116:12. Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 114.

<sup>38</sup> The adverb *huperekperissou* ("most earnestly") is a very strong, triple compound: *huper* + *ek* + *perrissou* (Eph 3:20; 1 Thess 5:13). Epaphras must have learned from Paul how to pray for people: "always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God" (Col 4:12).

<sup>39</sup> The word "complete" (*katartizo*) was used for mending torn nets and setting broken bones. He used the same word in Gal 6:1 for restoring sinning saints and in Eph 4:12 for equipping all the saints for the work of ministry.

<sup>40</sup> BDAG s.v. *husterema* 2: "a defect that must be removed so that perfection can be attained, lack, shortcoming."

<sup>41</sup> See Phil 3:12-16; Eph 4:13; cf. 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18.

<sup>42</sup> The word "Himself" (*humon*) is very emphatic in the Greek.

<sup>43</sup> Paul addressed two members of the godhead in prayer. He regarded both of these as God as is clear from his use of a singular verb ("direct") with a plural subject. "Himself" emphasizes Paul's dependence on God to grant his request. See also 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 2:16.

<sup>44</sup> Gk. *kateuthuno* ("lead, direct") is only used in Luke 1:79 and 2 Thess 3:5.

<sup>45</sup> Paul may have been reflecting on Prov 16:9: "The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps."

<sup>46</sup> The entire Trinity is involved in this prayer. Paul addressed the Father and Son in 1 Thess 3:11. In 3:12 "the Lord" may refer to the Holy Spirit, since "our Lord" at the end of 3:13 certainly refers to Jesus Christ. If this is so, then this is the only prayer I know of in the NT directed to the Holy Spirit. The biblical pattern of prayer is: to the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier of the believer, and this is a prayer for holy living, the address is proper.

<sup>47</sup> The word "you" (*humas*) is in the emphatic position (i.e., first word in the Greek sentence).

<sup>48</sup> Gk. *pleonazo*: see Rom 5:20; 6:1; 2 Cor 4:15; 8:15; Phil 4:17; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2 Pet 1:8.

<sup>49</sup> Gk. *perisseuo*: also translated "overflow" by the NIV and HSB. Paul uses this term in Rom 3:7; 5:15; 15:13; 1 Cor 8:8; 14:12; 15:58; 2 Cor 1:5; 3:9; 4:15; 8:2, 7; 9:8, 12; Eph 1:8; Phil 1:9, 26; 4:12, 18; Col 2:7; 1 Thess 4:1, 10.

<sup>50</sup> The word "all" (*pantas*) in 1 Thess 3:12 is used in 4:9-10 (cf. 5:15) of all Christians in Macedonia outside Thessalonica. Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 109.

<sup>51</sup> Stott aptly writes, "Truth is hard if it is not softened by love, and love is soft if it is not strengthened by the truth." John R.W. Stott, *The Gospel and the End of Time: The Message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 70.

<sup>52</sup> Gk. *amemptos*: "without blame" or "blameless" is used elsewhere in Luke 1:6; Phil 2:15; 3:6; Heb 8:7.

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<sup>53</sup> In this context, the preposition *emprosthen* means “in the presence of” a judge obtains (e.g., Matt 27:11; 25:32; Luke 21:36; 2 Cor 5:10). BDAG s.v. *emprosthen* 1 b.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas notes, “Earlier Paul has made ‘our Lord Jesus’ the judge at this scene (1Thess 2:19). This is no contradiction. The unity of the Father and Son, just seen in v. 11, allows a joint judgeship. The *bema* of Christ (2Cor 5:10) is also the *bema* of God (Rom 14:10), because Christ in his present session is with the Father in his heavenly throne (Rev 3:21; cf. Rom 8:34; Heb 1:3; 10:12). This hearing will take place at the future ‘visit’ (*en te parousia*, “in the coming”) of the Lord Jesus (cf. 2:19). For the Thessalonians Paul prays for a favorable verdict at that time.” Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” Electronic ed.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas explains, “Others present at this reckoning will be ‘all his holy ones.’ Their identity has been variously taken either as that of angels or of redeemed human beings, or both angels and redeemed human beings. The last possibility can be eliminated in that Paul would hardly include two such diverse groups in the same category. That angels alone are meant is unlikely in light of NT usage of *hagioi* (“holy ones”). Universally in Paul and perhaps the entire NT Jude 14 is debatable) it is a term for redeemed humanity, though usage in LXX and later Jewish literature differs. The redeemed are elsewhere associated with Christ at his return (2Thess 1:10). Since human beings are the objects of judgment and their holiness is what is in focus (cf. “blameless and holy”), it is entirely appropriate to identify “the holy ones” as other Christian people joined with the Thessalonian Christians before the *bema* of God and Christ.” Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” Electronic ed.

<sup>56</sup> Keathley rightly notes, “In 3:13 Paul is referring to experiential sanctification. Paul would not pray for something to be accomplished that took place at conversion.” Keathley III, “Concern for the Thessalonians Continued.”