

The background of the slide is a photograph of a coastal town, likely Thessalonika, with a prominent white domed church on the left. The town is built on a hillside overlooking a body of water, with mountains in the distance under a hazy sky.

# WEEK IV

I THESSALONIANS 3

## DAY 1 - MONDAY

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13, John 13:34-35, Galatians 6:10

**REFLECTION:** When was the last time you felt like someone genuinely cared for you? What did they do to make you feel that?

How might you begin to show the kind of care Paul shows towards God and others today?

### LOVE AT THE CENTER

Love is a genuine emotion we all feel that is meant to be powerfully put into action in the Christian faith. It's the heart and center of the Christian faith. The Bible goes to great lengths to remind us not only that love is what we're called to do daily, but to remind us that it has been and continues to be done for us daily through the grace and love of Jesus. But what does it look like in practice?

Paul gives us a great insight in 1 Thessalonians 3 of what love is practically. He expresses it through his genuine care for the Thessalonians. Paul may not be with them, he may not even be physically near them, but his heart is drawn toward them because he cares for them. Paul's care is translated through his original visit to them to preach the message of the gospel. His care is seen in his thoughts and prayers for them when he's gone. His care is expressed by sending Timothy to visit and check in on them. His care is found in every intentional word Paul writes to the Thessalonians.

## DAY 2 - TUESDAY

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5, Lamentations 3:19-24, John 14:18-26, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

**REFLECTION:** Paul finds it important that these believers strengthen one another in the midst of suffering so that they can stand firm in their faith. Are there some things you can do to help encourage someone who is in the midst of suffering or difficulty?

### COMFORT OF COMMUNITY

In Thessalonians, he (Paul) uses heartfelt, personal words to support his friends and tell of his own troubles in reaching them. Twice, Paul tells them of how he longed to be with them, and when he could not, he sent Timothy, who was like a spiritual son to him, in his place. From Athens, he anxiously awaits for Timothy's return and news of the church in Thessalonica. Deeply encouraged by their growth in Christian love and faith in the face of persecution, he writes to them, declaring, "Indeed you are our glory and joy!" (1 Thessalonians 2:20). The growing community of believers in Thessalonica were walking with each other in their trials, sharing in one another's suffering and in one another's comfort. That is how the Church works, both then and now. Paul says that the Father "comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 Corinthians 1:4). His Spirit is our greatest comfort because He shared in our affliction and understands our suffering, though He Himself never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). Comfort does not always mean an end to suffering, but the Church can be a relief in the midst of suffering. Look at grief as an example; the loss of a brother or sister in Christ is not undone by comfort. But when a church community comes together to grieve, the burden of suffering and the relief of joy are shared. The weight of individual suffering becomes lighter when shared in community, when sorrow turns to hope (Lamentations 3:19, 21-22). The hope of all is the hope of one.

The Church offers that support, from the saints in Paul's day to the congregations we are a part of now, both locally and globally. Above all, we have with us the love and mercy and comfort of the Father, the suffering Christ, and the Holy Spirit, who guides and kindles the Body of Christ.

By David Chaniott - *He Reads Truth 1 & 2 Thessalonians Reading Plan*

## DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13, 1 John 4:19

**REFLECTION:** What do you typically pray for when you pray for others?

How do you think a marker of our love is praying for people even when they don't ask for it or know you're doing it?

### THE DEPTH OF HIS LOVE

Toward the end of his first letter to the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul encourages his readers by transcribing his prayer for them. In 1 Thessalonians 3:12, he prays, "May the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we do for you."

As he says earlier in the chapter, Paul is anxious about the Christians at Thessalonica (vv.1-5). He fears that Satan has tempted these new believers to abandon the gospel because of the difficulty and persecution they've had to endure as a result of their faith in Jesus. But in today's reading, as Paul finishes up his letter to his brothers and sisters in the faith, he feels the need to encourage them to continue to grow. If they are going to endure current hardships and afflictions, as well as troubles yet to come, they will need one another. They must learn to love each other in a way that cannot be quelled, no matter the circumstances they face. Their love must be strengthened in the face of persecution, not eroded by it.

Paul's prayer was for the Christians of Thessalonica to understand the depth of God's love for them, trusting that from that understanding, their love for others would overflow. He also prayed that the Lord would "make [their] hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father" (1 Thessalonians 3:13). Learning to love and live this way comes not from our own strength, but out of the abundant, overflowing love of the God who loved us first.

By Chris Martin - *He Reads Truth 1 & 2 Thessalonians Reading Plan*

## DAY 4 - THURSDAY

1 Thessalonians 3:8-13, John 10:7-10

**REFLECTION:** What is Paul's overarching tone to the Thessalonians in these verses? What can we learn from Paul in these passages?

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REALLY LIVE?

Unfortunately, humankind rarely turns to God for His thoughts on how to live, even though He is our Maker. Instead, we tend to seek out "many devices" of our own to make us happy. We substitute the artificial for the authentic, the phony for the real - particularly in three areas:

1. Mentally, we substitute knowledge for wisdom. - Many times, we are more impressed by scholarship and the opinions of experts than by divine understanding.
2. Emotionally, we substitute feelings for facts. - We're more prone these days to believe what feels right rather than what the facts say is right.
3. Spiritually, we substitute the temporal for the eternal. We cling to what won't last and let go of what will.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:8, we see Paul's joyful response to the Thessalonians' firm faith as he says, "For now we really live" Paul was enduring constant hardships, but because of four factors in his life, he could experience God's perspective on real living. The first factor appears in verse 9, he was joyful in gratitude. Paul thankfully counted God's blessings in his life. The second factor appears in verse 10, he was earnest in prayer. He was handing the burden for the Thessalonians into the hands of God. The third factor appears in verses 11-12, he was abounding in love. Only the Lord can inspire that kind of penetrating and far-reaching affection. The first three factors in Paul's life all build toward the fourth, which involves personal holiness. The world may chip away at God's standards and try to convince us that "anything goes" and if it feels good, do it." But when Christ comes again, his idea of right and wrong will be the standard. When these four factors come together in our lives (as we see in the life of Paul), mentally we will grow wiser; emotionally, we will grow stronger; and spiritually, we will grow purer. This is what an abundant life looks like.

Adapted from *Contagious Christianity* by Charles Swindoll



## DAY 5 - FRIDAY

I 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, Philippians 4:6-8

**REFLECTION:** What seems powerful to you about Paul's prayer?

What do you want your prayer life to be like? How can you begin to invite that into your life?

Pray the three aspects of Paul's prayer found in verses 11-13: that you might be able to be present with those suffering, that your love for them would increase and that your heart would be strengthened to pursue holiness.

### THE POWER OF PRAYER

Has this situation ever happened to you: you're sitting with someone, maybe a friend or family member, and they are opening up about a significant struggle in their life? They're lamenting the situation. They're profoundly hurting. As they wrap up, you feel a need to encourage them or try to offer help, so you say something like, "I'm so sorry you're dealing with that. I will be praying for you."

If we're honest, this probably happens a lot. Maybe it's a desire to express southern hospitality; perhaps it's a genuine feeling we have to offer prayers to a God that we know is capable of ultimately impacting this situation. Often the problem is that there's a significant difference between just talking about praying and actively engaging in it. It's nearly impossible to experience the working power of prayer when we are just talking about it. The power of prayer is felt in actively doing it.

Wrapping up chapter 3, Paul is not just talking about his prayers for the Thessalonians but actually lifting them up in prayer at the moment. He prays for not just what they may want but, more importantly, what they need: strong hearts, holiness, and blameless lives. Paul's prayer is powerful, not because he uses big and powerful words, but because it's active. An active prayer is a powerful prayer. What might our lives and the lives of those we live with look like if we leaned into the power of prayer?

## DAY 6 - SATURDAY

### Reflection Day

#### 1 Thessalonians 3

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS & NOTES:

In 1 Thessalonians 3, Paul seems to say that there isn't necessarily anything wrong with the Thessalonians' faith at present; he only implies that their faith needs to continue to grow especially in the face of opposition. In what ways can the content, passion and pattern of Paul's prayer be a model for us?

Paul is very concerned with them being swayed away from "standing firm in the word" (3:8). What are you tempted to "stand firm" in other than the word?

- Write down what you learned about who God is this week.
- What is one truth you learned this week that you want to share?
- As we read about Paul's care and prayer for others, did anyone come to mind that you could be praying for? What would it look like for you to reach out and care for that person this week?
- How can you begin to internalize and live out what you read and learned in this week's study?

## DAY 7 - SUNDAY

### Rest Day

Use today to rest, pray, and catch up on any of this week's reading that you missed. Use the extra space on this page to journal, write down questions, thoughts, or ideas.