



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Satisfaction Guaranteed

Ready: Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow | Part 5  
Tim Badal | February 7, 2016 | 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13



We're going to be in 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13 as we come to the heart and central part of this letter. We learned last week that Paul sent young Timothy to minister to the church in Thessalonica because Paul couldn't go back himself. He had been thrown out of the city and probably threatened that if he came back he and his missionary team would be harmed as well as the people he was going to minister to. Paul knew, "If I go back it's going to cause all kinds of great turmoil for those that I love." Paul was in the city of Corinth some 300-400 miles southwest of Thessalonica when he wrote this letter. They didn't have phones or any other means of communication, so Paul sent Timothy to see how the Thessalonian church was doing.

As we've been studying this text since the beginning of this year, there are three truths that we have come to know:

1. Paul absolutely adored the people of the Thessalonian church. Though he didn't spend a lot of time there and his departure was abrupt, Paul expresses all kinds of accolades and sentimental thoughts toward these people. He cared about them deeply. The Thessalonians also cared deeply about Paul and his team.
2. Afflictions and hardships will come into our lives. Paul says we are destined for times of affliction, trouble and pain. If you've lived for any amount of time you know that there are great times in life, but as you get older you know that with great times also come difficult times. We were reminded last week that we can take solace in the fact that we know God is sovereign over trials, tribulations and temptation. He will walk us through those fiery trials that we face.
3. A group of people who are sold out for the Lord can do great things. This church in Thessalonica was made up of nobodies. Unlike many other letters to churches that had names of people throughout the letter — "This guy is doing this." "This guy is doing that." "We're so blessed to have this lady in our church." — nowhere in the letter to the Thessalonians do you see any regard given to a superstar of the faith. This church was made up of ordinary nobodies — people like you and me. These kinds of people aren't all that popular and aren't necessarily doing big things in life. This group of working class people not only changed the city of Thessalonica, but the Bible says they changed all of Greece with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

With these three things in mind, what a great book to study! What a great model of what Village Bible Church should be. It is my prayer that I would be like the Thessalonians. It's my prayer that our church would be like the Thessalonian church who did great things for God even though, in the world's eyes, they were pretty small.

First Thessalonians 3:6-13 says:

<sup>6</sup>But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—<sup>7</sup>for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. <sup>8</sup>For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. <sup>9</sup>For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, <sup>10</sup>as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

<sup>11</sup>Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, <sup>12</sup>and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, <sup>13</sup>so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

I want to deal with our passage under the heading “Satisfaction Guaranteed.” We live in a world where everything we buy — whether something we consume, something we wear, something we use in daily life or something that’s only used a fraction of the time — at some point or another had a sticker that says, “100% Satisfaction Guaranteed.” It’s a reminder that the person who made the product is willing to stand behind their product in such a way that if you, the customer, are not fully satisfied you can return the product you bought and you’ll get 100% of your money back.

As a preacher, when you’re going to use an illustration, you want to understand where it comes from. The earliest use of the “100% Satisfaction Guaranteed” label was around the turn of the last century in the Sears, Roebuck & Company catalogs. These catalogs were like an old-school Amazon. They came in the mail and contained thousands upon thousands of items that you could buy from Sears Roebuck. Then when you ordered an item it would come through the mail in about two months. For the first time, shoppers were no longer looking in person at the stuff they were buying. For the first time in their lives they were going to have to take the word of the advertiser that what they were buying was actually worth all the money they were spending. So this little label was put on there, but the problem was many merchants didn’t stand behind their statement. When you sent it back you would face all kinds of issues in the process of getting your money back.

So the federal government got involved when, after going through the circuit court and the appellate court, the following case came before a federal court. Eventually a jury heard the case on the issue of “100% Satisfaction Guaranteed.” This was a court case about 100 years ago that involved a recently widowed woman and a sculptor. The widow desired to have a bust made of her recently deceased husband. She wanted to place it in her foyer so that whenever anyone came over they would know that she had a husband and would be able to see his likeness in the sculpture. The sculptor was very well known and he did a phenomenal job. In the legal rendering the jury said that when you looked at the sculpture it was a perfect likeness to the pictures they had seen of the husband. But the jury decided in favor of the widow because she was the subjective judge of the work that was done. The man would have to repay all the money he had spent and the purchase price he had received from the woman. She got to keep the work but she got to keep the money also. The reason is that satisfaction is found in the eye of the beholder.

We can look at the Scriptures and see that there was satisfaction in Paul’s life. He says, “We thank the Lord for the joy that we feel for you.” Paul had joy and we know that Paul was an apostle of joy. He wrote a whole letter to the church in Philippi that was full of joy. Many of us we want the joy that Paul had. Some of you are struggling to have joy. You say, “I want God to put a label on my life that says, ‘You’re going to have satisfaction. You’re going to find joy and contentment. If not, you can trade in your life and get a new one.’” Sadly, as much as we may want it to, life doesn’t work that way.

Paul was filled with joy. We ask, “How did Paul have joy?” His joy was not found in everything going well for him. In verse seven he says, *“For this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction...”* Let’s stop there for a moment. Paul’s joy was not found in everything going well but in the midst of affliction and distress. He was struggling. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth that he came in weakness, fear and trembling. He was a broken man. So how could Paul write that he was filled with joy and satisfaction? I’m going to show you through our text that you can find joy. You can find satisfaction even when things in your life aren’t going the way you want them to. The number one reason that Paul could find joy amidst great affliction and struggle was because he knew Jesus.

As I was preparing this sermon, I was reminded of a song that I knew as a teenager. I looked at the words and had no real remembrance of what the verses said but I kept remembering the chorus. In the mid-nineties Steven Curtis Chapman wrote a song called “What Kind of Joy” talking about the Apostle Paul. He says in verse one:

Anybody in their right mind  
Would’ve given up their preaching and headed for home.  
They’ve been warned a hundred times,  
But something inside them keeps giving them hope.  
And just when you think they’d be crying,  
Instead of the tears, there’s joy in their eyes.

He goes on in verse two and says:

Anybody else with his pain  
Would want to shake their fist at heaven  
And give up the fight.  
'Cause trouble had been Paul's middle name  
Ever since he'd been captured by God's blinding light.  
But just when his hope should be dying,  
If you listen you'll hear him singing a song.

Then the chorus goes:

What kind of joy is this  
That counts it a blessing to suffer?  
What kind of joy is this  
That gives the prisoner his song?  
What kind of joy could stare death in the face,  
And see it as sweet victory?  
This is the joy of a soul that's forgiven and free.

We can experience joy. We can experience satisfaction even in this world of trouble, and Paul tells us how.

## 1. Rejoice in the Good News of Others

In verse six we're told that Timothy has come back to the Apostle Paul: *"But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love..."* Remember, Paul was anxious and concerned about this church that he left abruptly. He had come to know them and built relationships with them. They responded to his preaching, were living in obedience, had turned from their idols, turned away from sexual immorality and all other kinds of sin, and now they were living for Christ. Paul had this warm remembrance of them. He longed to see them face-to-face. So he sent Timothy to exhort and establish the church.

Timothy had been gone for some months now. Paul's mind was probably racing. "I wonder what's going on. Is Timothy running into the same persecution we did? Are the Thessalonians living the life that they were called to in Christ Jesus? Have they turned back to their idols? Have they fallen prey to heresy? I wonder what's going on." Then all of a sudden the door opens and there is young Timothy, out of breath. He comes into the room and says, "Paul! Paul! I've got great news. The Thessalonians are doing great. They're still living in light of the truth that you articulated. They're living for the gospel. They have held fast to the truth. They haven't fallen back to their idols. They're not caving to the persecution around them. They are doing a great job!"

Paul says that Timothy has brought him the Greek word *euangelion*, which means "the gospel." When we talk about someone being saved by the gospel of Jesus Christ, we would say they are saved by the *euangelion* of Jesus Christ. So Paul is saying that Timothy has brought the gospel of the Thessalonians' faith and love. He's not saying there's a new gospel. He's not saying there's a different gospel. He is using a play on words to tell the Thessalonians that their faith is a gospel — is good news of Jesus Christ. He was commending how they were living and what they believed was a gospel, a testimony of good news, to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was a wonderful advertisement to what the good news of Jesus Christ can and will do in the lives of people.

Where was this good news coming from? Paul says it came in seeing their faith and love. The great reformer John Calvin said this in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians: "In these two words of faith and love Paul states concisely the sum total of all godliness... All who aim at this double mark in life are beyond the danger of error for the entirety of their lives." He's saying if you can get faith and love down, things will go well in your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now I want to give a sermon within a sermon to the parents. This is a truth that I've been wrestling with in this new year. As parents and grandparents we are concerned about three things as our kids are growing (at least this is what we tell others we're concerned about). We're worried about academics, athletics and involvement in the arts.

"How's Johnny doing?"

"Well, Johnny is on the honor roll. He's doing great in school. The teachers say he's right on track. He's also on the basketball team. He's scoring some baskets and loves being part of the team. We're running around like crazy from practice to practice and we're having a great time. He's also picked up the trumpet. He plays it well. It was a little rough there at the beginning; it sounded

like an animal was dying a horrific death. But he's really come along. He went from third chair, to second chair and now he's playing all the solos because he's first chair. Everything is going great."

We put it on our bumper sticks. "My kid is an honor student." We make sure that we take pictures and put them on Facebook when they've won the tournament. You do it. I do it. It's not a sin. It's wonderful and the great joy of parenting. But let me remind all of us parents of this truth: at the end of the day none of that matters. It may get them into a better college. It may get them some press in the newspaper. It may even remind you of all kinds of stories of what you did when you were young, slender and athletic. You might pull out an old photo album with your children and say, "Look at all of the things the Beacon News used to say about your old man." They look at these pieces of paper and say, "What's that?" You say, "It's a newspaper. It's how we used to get our news."

All of that is secondary. When I say it's secondary I'm not saying it's sinful. What I'm saying is there is something more important: your child's faith and love. It's great that our kids are involved in all of these things. It's great that the kids bring home good report cards. But at the end of the day, what I'm going to be held accountable for as a father is the same thing that Paul said he was going to be held accountable for in the Thessalonian church: their faith and love.

Why their faith and love? Why would John Calvin say it's the sum total of all godliness? Faith defines our relationship with God. As parents let's ask ourselves the question, "Are our kids faithful and faith-filled followers of Jesus Christ?" That's what really matters. I will not have prepared my children for the Day of Judgment if when little Luke sees Jesus he says, "But I was the best soccer player on my team, God. That's why I should be able to come into Your glory."

"I made student council."

"I was the valedictorian of my school."

If we come up with these secondary reasons for why our children should be brought into glory, then we have failed them. God wants to know, "What did you do with My Son, Jesus Christ?" If the only Jesus they see in your life is you yelling them into the car and telling them to put on their smiling faces so you can go to church one day a week and then the rest of the week you don't live like Jesus at all — if they don't see you in the Word, they don't see you praying, they don't see you with God's people — then you have failed your child in the most important thing: faith.

Faith tells us about our relationship with God while love tells us about our relationship with others. The first relationship that you've got to help your kids get right is their relationship with God. Each and every day you should be teaching them about God and His desire to be in a relationship with them — when they're sitting down, when they're getting up, wherever they may be (Deuteronomy 11:19). But we can't just focus on the vertical relationship. We also have to teach them about the horizontal. How do you treat others? A parent's job is to teach their children how to treat others and care for them.

It begins in the home. This is difficult. I am in a family of three boys. We need to teach our children how to love their siblings. We need to teach them what it means to show sacrifice, concern and care for others around them. We need to teach them what it means to love their mom, dad and grandparents, showing the respect that family members are due. We need to teach them how to show love and concern for their friends and minister to them. Teach them to encourage their friends so that they can be built up in the time they spend with your child. How do your children do with acquaintances and people they barely know? Do they build relationships? Do they try to get into the lives of people in positive and encouraging ways? What about strangers or people of different ethnicities? How do your children view those who are down and out? How do your children deal with people who suffer from handicaps?

We need to teach our children in the same way that Paul told Timothy to teach the Thessalonians. We don't only focus on their faith but their love as well. You can't have one and not the other. It's like love and marriage. You can't have faith and not have love. You can't have love and not have faith. Why? *"Love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God"* (1 John 4:7). So we have to give this a one-two punch: faith and love, faith and love, faith and love. We always have to pivot back to, "Son, I'm glad you're doing great in basketball, but how is your faith? How are you loving your teammates? How are you caring for those around you?" Whether in the church that we're leading or the family in our homes, Paul says if we are going to teach anyone how to have satisfaction when life throws you a bunch of curve balls, we must establish them and exhort them in faith and love.

## Others care about us

Paul says, "You're doing a great work. Your faith and love are commendable." Then he shares something about the good news that the others were sharing. Paul received the word he wanted to hear. Verse six says, "...*you always remember us kindly...*" He is saying it is good for us to know and take solace in the fact that others care about us. Paul was overjoyed by the knowledge that others were concerned about him. We're getting right into Paul's heart. He was broken down and hurting. He had been beaten down by incessant persecution and his heart was incredibly warmed by knowing that there were people out there who cared and were concerned about him. I don't know any personality type on the personality scale that doesn't like to know that people are concerned for them.

Yesterday my brother and I, along with our wives, took our parents out for dinner. We usually do it around the holidays but they were pretty busy this year so we moved it back. We celebrated my mom's birthday, which was last week. We were sharing a meal together in a restaurant and at one point my mom leaned over and put her arm around me and said, "Son, I'm concerned about you. You look tired." Then she said with joy and gladness in her heart, "I think you've gained a couple of pounds. That may be causing your tiredness." I said, "Mom, I'm exhausted." And she said, "Well, eat better and get some sleep." So I had a salad last night. At 39 years of age my heart was incredibly warmed because there is a woman who is uniquely concerned about me. I'm not a "momma's boy" by any stretch of the imagination. My mother can tell you that. But it warms this rugged man's heart that there is a lady who loves and cares about me.

Every one of us needs someone like that in our life. Jesus can do that, but He also says that it's not enough for us to know the love of Christ. We must know the love of Christ as it is exhibited in the lives of those around us. We need people in our lives who care for us and love us. So our church is constantly looking for ways to let you know that you're cared about here. Come hang out with us. Come live life with us. If you think what we're doing is just setting up programs like a community center, then you have diminished pastoral work to being a cruise director. Our hearts' desire is that there will be no one in this place who feels isolated. We look for every way possible to pull as many people in as possible. We don't do that so we can experience events but so that we can share common experiences.

Men, are you feeling isolated? Come to the men's conference where a group of us are going to hear from God's Word and engage with one another in real fellowship and real dialogue, having a great time along the way. Are you looking for other opportunities? We have a movie night. I know for a lot of you men when our staff gets up here and gives announcements you're thinking, "Can we get on to the important stuff?" That is the important stuff! Those are the on ramps to real fellowship and identity in this body of Christ. Why do we do it? Because we want you to know that we care about you. There are people here who care about you as Paul did the Thessalonians.

Here's the problem: in our world today relationships have become optional. I was watching CSPAN not too long ago with an interview at the Press Club of Washington, D.C. with Mark Zuckerberg, the multi-billionaire who is the richest man in the United States. What made him a billionaire? He started a website called Facebook. They were talking about the impact Facebook has had on us as a society. Mark Zuckerberg said that when they were putting Facebook together on the campus of Harvard University, they knew they had before them something that would revolutionize relationships. They were absolutely right. Hundreds of millions of people are subscribers to their website, interacting with other people. Zuckerberg said, "We knew we were going to revolutionize relationships." But then he put his head down and looked back up after a pause and said, "We just wish it wouldn't have been like this. We had hoped for deeper relationships." The reporter had gone to Zuckerberg's Facebook page and had identified about 150 close friends. Then the reporter asked a couple of questions about particular friends to which Zuckerberg said, "I can't answer you about who those people are." The person who created Facebook to encourage relationships didn't even know the people who are supposedly in his closest group of friends.

I checked this morning and I am nearly to 1,000 friends. I don't know most of them. I think I remember them; maybe at some point we went to school together or ran into one another and now we're friends. We've redefined the words "friendship" and "relationship." Your pastor has a Facebook account with 1,000 friends. I'm not saying Facebook is sinful. What I am saying is that we need to recognize the societal pull that's going on now. We think that when we read these short little tidbits about people's lives in our feed that we have a relationship with them. We don't. We're reading headlines about people, many of whom we don't even have relationships with at all. What happens then is we become a bit voyeuristic where we're looking into the lives of people we have some level of acquaintance with but no real desire to deepen our relationship with them.

I read an article two weeks ago about the generation of children growing up right now. It called them "generation isolation." They said because of technology, this generation of young people is growing up without knowing what real relationships are like. Many of us know what it means to have a close friend who walked through the ups and downs of our childhood. The article said the survey asked young students in elementary school the question, "Do you see the need for friends?" Their response was, "Friends are needed when you need something from them." We bus our kids to and fro from activities. The activities that they're part of are usually team events where they need teammates to participate. My children are involved in soccer and basketball. They cannot play those sports by themselves, so they need people to play with them. That's the only thing this generation recognizes as friendship. "When I need people they are welcomed into my life because I want to play on a team. I want to win the championship of the five-on-five basketball tournament so I need four other people and those become my friends."

Herein lies the problem: what will happen when that generation grows up and they only need the people around them for selfish reasons? "I need a spouse," for selfish reasons. "I need a church," for selfish reasons. "I need relationships," for selfish reasons. The reason our children seem to think that they don't need personal contact with others is that they are glued to devices. Read any study about what's going on with sociologists in the nation of Japan. Did you know that Japanese citizens are paid to get married? The men of Japan say, "We have no need for women. We have our computers." The government of Japan is saying, "We will pay you thousands upon thousands of dollars to just get married to somebody. Our birth rate is dropping." But the people are saying, "We don't need relationships. We have technology and that's all the companionship we need." Civilizations are shriveling up as a result of the lack of relationships.

Where did that begin? You can blame this generation but back in the Mayberry days (the mid-sixties) the home that I grew up in was nothing to be desired. We had a nice house with not a lot going on inside. We didn't have fine china or anything like that. But I can't count the number of people that my parents brought into our home on a weekly basis. My parents' house was a place of hospitality. I know it's alien for a lot of us, but every night we would sit around the table and share a meal. At that meal we would talk about our day and what was going on. There would be some admonishing and encouragement that would take place. Around that table there were real relationships.

We live in beautiful mansions compared to our forefathers. Our homes have all the bells and whistles of everything we would need to throw party upon party, but instead of being bastions of hospitality our houses have become islands of isolation. So what do your children see? They see you having a relationship with the thing that's attached to the wall. You have a remote in your hand so that you can have relationships with people you've never met and never will. There is no need for reality TV if you're involved in relationships. We have to watch people have relationships because we're not having them in our own lives.

Paul is saying the Christian life is a life where you know others care about you. If you don't have people in your life who you know care about you then get involved in a local church and pour yourself into it. As difficult as that may be for your personality, God says it is good. I know it means transparency and sacrifice of time, but God wants you to know that there are people who care about you during times of great affliction and sorrow.

## **Others are counting on us**

Paul reminds the Thessalonians in verse ten, "We desire to see you face to face so that we may supply what is lacking in your faith." Paul saw his job in his relationship with these people as one who helps complete the work that God was doing in their lives. Paul recognized that they needed him to get the most out of God. That sounds weird because we believe in a private and personal relationship with Jesus. "*There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Timothy 2:5). That is correct. But God has put us in relationship with people and established the church so we as believers will gather together and count on one another.

Who is counting on you to supply what is lacking in their lives? Parents, your children need you. They don't just need you to pay the bills, or to put clothes on their backs and food in their bellies, but to raise them in a way that honors God. But what about in the other relationships in your life? Who is counting on you? Who needs you in their lives?

On Friday night a man from this church pulled me aside and said, "I want to thank you for being a Paul in my life." That encouraged my heart. It's not that I'm doing anything great. In some ways I sat there and thought, "What have I done?" But it's good to know that people are counting on you. So as you go to work tomorrow, look around and ask the question, "Who needs encouragement?" Who is counting on you to bring the gospel to them? Who is going to come to you in a time of need and sorrow for you to put your arm around them and love them? Who is going to be the one person in the tollbooth who says, "God bless

you. I'm going to pray for you," as you hand them the money. Who is going to encourage that individual in the checkout line? People are counting on you.

In his great book *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis speaks of a relationship he had with two other friends. He talks about all the good that was going on in that three-amigo friendship. Then one of the three named Charles died. He says, "Not only did Charles die, but a little part of me and my friend Bob died with Charles." He goes on as C.S. Lewis does and says, "Because when Charles died that bit of Charles that was able to draw me out is no longer there. The way Charles would tell a joke and Bob would laugh is no longer there. The way Charles would talk about God and help us understand Him is no longer there. We need Charles in our lives because Charles brought out the best in us."

You may think, "I'm not a pastor. I'm not gifted in this way or that way. What good can I do? Why would people count on me?" Because you have a part of God in your life that nobody else does. You can speak about God and you can show God in a way that nobody else can. People are counting on you to do that. Paul says, "We're here to supply what is lacking in your heart."

How do you find satisfaction? You rejoice in the good news of others and the good news of what God is doing.

## 2. Rely on the Gift of Prayer

In verse ten Paul says, "...as we pray..." Paul knew there was little that he could do for the church. He was now in Corinth some 400 miles southwest of Thessalonica. He had little contact with them. His ministry with them had come to a complete stand still. While he was physically gone there was something he could be doing. He could pray. What a great reminder for our senior saints who are here. We are blessed to have so many elderly individuals within our church. One of the things they always say is, "Pastor, I wish I could do more. Pastor, I wish I could serve more. I'm tired. As I get older it becomes more and more difficult to be able to do all the things that I once did for the church."

I was reminded of this truth on Friday at our annual meeting. What a great time of blessing. One of the oldest members of our church says it takes all his strength to put on clothes and make it to church. You know you're old when a simple task like that takes all of your strength. Do you know what he and his wife are doing now? They eat a little soup and they're resting because it took all they had to be at church. That dear man got up at our annual meeting and said, "I can't do much for this church so this is what we do: we pray. We pray for you. We pray for what's going on." I can assure you that before they got to church this morning they did what they always tell me they do: they prayed for the big guy to preach the Word. What a testimony that when we have no other answer, when we don't know what else to do, we can pray.

Paul tells us a couple of things about prayer that are important to realize. In verse ten Paul says, "*as we pray most earnestly night and day.*" Let's look at the phrase night and day first. Paul is not saying be like the Muslims who pray at a certain hour of the day. He's saying that they lived in a habitual state of prayer. Paul says be praying continually for one another. He's going to say this again later in our text in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. "*Pray without ceasing.*" He's saying, "I'm praying without ceasing."

In your comings and goings, in your driving, in your going to the grocery store, in your changing classrooms at school, be in a spirit of prayer. As you see someone pray for them. If you know what's going on in their lives lift them up. When you see their picture on Facebook pray for them. Be in a spirit of prayer, whether you know them or not.

He also says to earnestly pray. To earnestly pray means to pray prayers as if they're actually going to happen. We don't pray like that, do we? We don't pray as if we believe that what we're praying is actually going to come true. Paul says, "When I pray I believe the things I'm praying about are going to take place because I believe in a God Who does great work through prayer."

Paul also addresses the pattern of prayer. What should we be praying about? If there has been an often-repeated question that has been brought to me as a pastor, it's been this: "Pastor, I want to pray but every time I pray I don't know what to pray about." If you're struggling with that, Paul gives us three things that we should think about in our times of prayer.

### Thank God for what He has done

Verse nine says, "*For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you...*" Amidst trials, tribulations and troubles that Paul faced he was truly thankful. Here's why: because the old adage is true — we don't know what we have until it's gone. Trials take away things in our lives. Troubles and calamity steal things from our lives and then we start praying. Trials bring us closer to God

because when things are going well, who needs God? But when a bad diagnosis comes, when bad news comes, when financial calamity hits us, then we start praying. We should be reminded in those moments of the good that God is doing.

You could fill your calendar in prayer for all the things that God has given to you. "Thank You, God, for my life. Thank You, God, for breath. Thank You, God, for water. Thank You, God, for clothing and food. Thank You, God, for my wife. Thank You, God, for my children. Thank You, God, for my home. Thank You, God, for the vehicles we have. Thank You, God, for a job. Thank You, God, for a loving family." I could keep going and I've barely gotten out of the Badal house. We have so much to be thankful for. We are told in Lamentations that God's mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). So every morning God puts on the menu a myriad of things for us to be thankful for. Spend some time in prayer giving thanks to God.

### Think about the lives of others

Verse nine says, *"...for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God..."* That phrase "for your sake" is very important. It has taught me something about prayer that I never knew before. It is translated "we are praying for you as if it was me." What Paul is saying is, "We're putting ourselves in your shoes." Have you prayed for others as they would pray for themselves? As a pastor, as a father, as a husband I pray selfish prayers. "Lord, I pray that the boys would do well." Why do I pray that way? Because how they do reflects back on me. "Lord, I pray that the church would do well." Why? Because that reflects well on me as a pastor. "Lord, I pray that my marriage would do well." Why? Because then people will think I'm a great husband. I pray a lot of selfish prayers.

But have I ever prayed from my sons' point of view? "Father God, I pray that my boys would not be hindered because they have a father who is at times hypocritical and capricious." "Father, I pray for Amanda that she would be able to see Your glory and grace in a husband who at times is neglectful." "Father, I pray for my church that they would honor You and strive to seek after You with a knucklehead like me as their pastor." Putting yourself in the shoes of others allows you to pray for your enemies, for those who persecute you. Pray for those you love in a way you never thought you could before.

### Trust Him with our plans

Paul says, "May God direct our way to you." He heard from Timothy that things were going well. It would be understandable for Paul to think, "I want to be there! I want to get to Thessalonica. Great things are happening." After verse 11 he starts complaining. He says, "God, I blame You for my circumstances. Thessalonians, do you understand what a victim I am, the hardships I've had and how bad my life is? I've been bellyaching night and day. I can't stand this life. I deserve a better life." Wait a minute. That's not in the text. Where'd I get that? That's me. That's what I do when trouble comes. That's what I do when God changes my schedule. You say, "I haven't heard you say that, Tim." I'm smarter than that. I just say it in my heart and mind. Paul says, "Life is hard. At times I'm at the breaking point. But I know I have a good God."

Notice Paul uses the word "may." "May God direct our way." He doesn't say should or would, but may. That means his hands were open. Are you ready to open your hands tomorrow and say, "Lord, direct my ways. If You want me to talk to someone about my faith, I'll do it. If You want me to sacrifice in a certain way, I'll do it. Lord, if You want me to endure some hardship for the glory of Christ, I'm willing to do it. May God direct my path."

Why does he say, "may God?" He says, *"Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus..."* He knows he is entrusting himself to a great and good God. You're not putting yourself in the capricious hands of another human being. You're putting yourself into the hands of a loving Creator Who says He wants nothing but the best for you. First Corinthians 2:9 says, *"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him..."* So if God is going to bring a trial into your life you can say, "It's okay, God. You're a good God and Your love endures forever." When temptation and difficulties come into your life you can say, "It's okay, God. You're a good God and Your love endures forever." If difficulty is at your front door tomorrow you can say, "It's okay, God. You're a loving God Whose love endures forever." Paul says, "I can trust Him."

Lastly Paul says He can *"...direct our way to you."* That is a statement of peace and patience. It means I'm in the waiting room right now. Instead of bellyaching and griping I'm going to trust, knowing that God's timing is best. "But you're enduring hardships, Paul." "That's okay. God knows best."



### 3. Respond to Direction He Gives

How do you find satisfaction? By rejoicing in what God is doing in the lives of others, by relying on prayer and by responding to the direction He gives. I'm not going to do any more teaching on this because Paul gives a thesis statement in this last part of the text. He says, *"...and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."* He gives a three-point outline of what he's going to do in chapters four and five. What's God's will for your life? God's will is threefold.

#### Love each other

Paul says, *"...may the Lord make you increase and abound in love..."* Who needs your love? Who needs your love to abound and increase toward them? Some of you need your love to abound and increase toward Jesus Christ. You've left your first love. Your love has grown cold. Abound in your love for Christ. Abound in your love for others. Paul is going to talk to them in the next chapter about what it means to have brotherly love for one another.

#### Let Him grow us

This verse says it is God Who will establish our hearts blameless in holiness. He's going to do it. Paul told the Philippians, *"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ"* (Philippians 1:6). Does that mean you've got no responsibility? Of course not, but you can't do it on your own. So with open arms you should say, "God, grow me and make me more like Your Son."

#### Look to His coming

Why can we have satisfaction in this life even though it's filled with troubles, heartaches and pain? The answer is one day — and it could be today before the big game — Jesus will break through those clouds. In that moment Jesus will take us and make us like Him. We will see Him and we will know Him as we are fully known. In that moment in time there will be no more crying, no more pain, no more sorrow, no more affliction, no more distress. The old will be gone and the new will come. We will be there forever because we will reside with Jesus and for all of eternity we will praise His name. If we have that hope then as Peter says, the troubles that we face are but light and momentary in comparison to what God has for us (2 Corinthians 4:17).

So let's pray to that end. Are you looking for satisfaction?