

**Called Up
Encouragement- Session #3
Small Group Notes**

Introduction:

What is the most encouraging thing anyone has ever said to you? Why was this so meaningful to you? Do you think you have made a similar impact in someone else's life?

Along with jealousy, are there things or reasons that we choose sometimes to not give encouragement?

When have you found times that encouragement is needed more than others? What helps us ensure we make the correct choice whether to give encouragement or not?

In today's discussion we are going to reflect upon how we are called up to show encouragement. Remember back in chapter 2, we saw how Paul knew that the church was suffering and going through difficult moments. While Paul desired to be there among the church, he knew that the best thing he could at that moment was to provide encouragement for the days ahead.

Discuss:

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

Paul used strong, emotional terms to express how much he regretted the situation that had forced him to leave Thessalonica. Further, he was sorry that circumstances had kept him away from believers for whom he felt such affection. The verb "forced to leave" is literally "orphaned." Luke detailed this situation in Acts 17:5-10, making it clear Paul was in distress when he left Thessalonica. His departure had been as heartrending as when parents and little children are torn apart. In verse 19, Paul asked a rhetorical question, asking his readers to think about the coming of Jesus, the time when they would all be reunited before Him. Paul looked forward to this wonderful time, and he used three terms in verse 19 to describe how the Thessalonians fit in. First, they were Paul's "hope." This means he was confident God's work in them would reach full completion. Second, they were Paul's "joy," meaning he was rejoicing that their faithfulness to Christ proved his own ministry was successful. Third, they were Paul's "crown," a Greek term that referred to a victorious athlete's wreath. Paul expected that in the presence of our Lord Jesus, he would hear "well done" (Luke 19:17; see 1 Cor. 4:1-5).

In David Nasser's testimony, you heard about his leaving of his homeland. Describe how someone might feel if suddenly forced to flee his or her homeland. Have you ever had a similar experience or how could you sympathize with someone that has faced that decision?

What words reflect Paul's genuine concern for the people of Thessalonica in verses 17-18? Why did Paul use such terms? When is such use appropriate for us?

How do we keep people as the focus of our lives and ministry efforts, as Paul did?

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-10

Persecution in the 1st century had very real and very serious economic and personal consequences. Many Christians in Thessalonica would have been excluded from a variety of business and social activities that provided them with much needed income. They would have likely faced strained relationships with family members, business associate, and civil authorities. Paul was not naïve to these realities and instructed them that these troubles would come. Because Jesus was no stranger to rejection and suffering, all who profess faith in His name should expect some measure of persecution in this life. Thankfully, the Thessalonians were doing well and persevering in the faith even amongst the persecution they were facing. Timothy was able to do all Paul sent him to do, and was mutually encouraged by the Thessalonians as they recounted their thankfulness and appreciation for Paul and his ministry. They were just as eager to see Paul as he was to see them. Paul was no stranger to persecution himself (2 Corinthians 11:23-28), and the Thessalonians' enduring faith was able to also provide Paul with a measure of comfort in his own trials.

Why is it important for us to know what we believe before we face persecution? How does a solid foundation give us strength to withstand trials? How does knowing the reason for persecution and having a source of hope help us face persecution when it comes?

What about these believers comforted Paul in his own struggles against persecution? How can we continue to find comfort and encouragement from these 1st-century believers today?

How does hearing someone else's testimony give you encouragement?

3. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:13

Salvation isn't finished once a person believes in Christ and receives forgiveness of sins. Paul's prayer for the believers at Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 was that God would establish their hearts as blameless in holiness before God. He pointed out that God's will for them was to abstain from sexual immorality and to love one another (1 Thess. 4:1-12). Paul used his example of work to encourage them in their own work, so they would not be unnecessarily dependent on anyone (1 Thess. 4:10-12; 5:14).

What does Paul teach you about prayer in this passage? How would your spiritual health benefit from modeling your prayer life on Paul's?

What things do you do in your day-to-day life to get to know Christ better? How is your quiet time? What are you learning? What further steps do you need to take to grow in knowing Christ?

In order to join Paul in striving to know God and grow in Christlikeness above all else, what current pursuit of your life would be the most difficult for you to sacrifice? What are things that you are willing to give up to encourage someone else?