

FIRST AND SECOND

THESSALONIANS

Living in Light of Christ's Return

L E A D E R G U I D E

STANDING STRONG

BIG IDEA: We are called to minister to new believers so they stand strong in their faith.

DATE: Wednesday, October 14 and Sunday, October 18, 2026

SCRIPTURE: 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

OPENING QUESTION

What was the best “on the job training” you ever experienced? *What did the trainer do to help you master your new responsibilities? What was your part in this process? (For most people showing is not enough - they need to do it for themselves. People need practice to learn the new skills and then be trusted to do them. Some people in your group have trained others and you could ask them about that experience, too.)*

Paul and Timothy are an example of “on the job training.” In the early days of the church, leaders were developed “on the job,” as they learned from and ministered with others with more experience, like Paul, who had been preaching and teaching the gospel since the very beginning. Because Paul was no longer welcome in Thessalonica, he sent Timothy to minister to the young believers, and he was ready because of the training he received.

SETTING THE STAGE

Before a child can walk, he must learn to stand. Usually, the father and mother teach the child to stand and then to walk. Paul was a “spiritual parent” to these believers, but he had been forced to leave Thessalonica. How, then, could he help these young Christians learn to stand in the trials of life? In the first two chapters, Paul explained how the church was born and nurtured. Now he dealt with the next step in maturity: how the church was to stand. The key thought is expressed in 1 Thessalonians 3:8: “*For now we live, if you stand firm in the Lord.*”

The “therefore” that opens chapter 3 refers to 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20, where Paul expressed his great love for the believers. It was because of this love that he could not abandon them when they needed spiritual help. Paul was not only an evangelist; he was also a pastor. He knew that soul winning was but one part of the commission God gave him. These new believers must also be taught and established in the faith.

SCRIPTURE READING

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 (CSB)

Therefore, when we could no longer stand it, we thought it was better to be left alone in Athens. ² And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith, ³ so that no one will be shaken by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. ⁴ In fact, when we were with you, we told you in advance that we were going to experience affliction, and as you know, it happened. ⁵ For this reason, when I could no longer stand it, I also sent him to find out about your faith, fearing that the tempter had tempted you and that our labor might be for nothing.

⁶ But now Timothy has come to us from you and brought us good news about your faith and love. He reported that you always have good memories of us and that you long to see us, as we also long to see you. ⁷ Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and affliction, we were encouraged about you through your faith. ⁸ For now we live, if you stand firm in the Lord.

⁹ How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience before our God because of you, ¹⁰ as we pray very earnestly night and day to see you face to face and to complete what is lacking in your faith? ¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you. ¹² And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we do for you. ¹³ May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen.

DISCUSSION

The key thought in 1 Thessalonians 3 is *establish – to make firm or steady; to introduce and cause to grow and multiply*. What does this word mean to the believers?

Paul explained three ministries that he performed to help these new Christians become firmly established.

HE SENT THEM A HELPER

READ: 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

From the Commentary:

When Paul and his friends left Thessalonica, they went to Berea and ministered to the Word. But the troublemakers from Thessalonica followed them and stirred up opposition. Paul left for Athens while Silas and Timothy remained at Berea. Apparently, Timothy did join Paul in Athens, but Paul sent him back to Thessalonica.

How was Paul's decision to send Timothy a way to show love for the believers there? What does this small detail imply about training leaders and teachers in the church? (Paul could not be everywhere personally training new believers, just as our pastors cannot be everywhere. We are all called to minister to new believers so that they stand strong in their faith. We are disciples who make disciples who make disciples.)

From the Commentary:

Not every believer is equipped to establish other Christians in the faith. Ideally, every Christian should be mature enough to help other Christians grow in the Lord and learn to stand on their own two feet. Unfortunately, some Christians are like those described in Hebrews 5:11-14. They

have gone backward in their spiritual walk and have forgotten the basic truths of the Word. Instead of teaching others, they themselves need to be taught again. They are going through a second childhood spiritually.

ASK: What kind of person can help younger believers grow in the Lord? What are the basic requirements for someone who can lead others? Why was Timothy the perfect choice to send to Thessalonica?

Not every believer is equipped to establish other Christians in the faith. Ideally, every Christian should be mature enough to help other Christians grow in the Lord and learn to stand on their own two feet. Timothy was the ideal man to send the churches to help them stand firm. Timothy and Titus were Paul's "special agents" whom he used as troubleshooters whenever the church had problems.

What kind of a person can help younger believers grow in the Lord? To begin with, he must be a *Christian* himself: "Timothy, our brother." We cannot lead another where we have not been ourselves, nor can we share that which we do not possess. Paul had led Timothy to faith in Christ so that he was truly a brother. But he was also a *minister*. This is simply the Greek word for a servant. Timothy was not afraid to work. He had faithfully served with Paul and knew how to minister in the churches. Timothy was also a good *team man*; he was a fellow worker/coworker. He did not try to run the show himself and get people to follow him. He was a fellow worker with God but also a fellow worker with other believers.

HE WROTE THEM A LETTER

READ: 1 Thessalonians 3:6-8

Timothy reported that the new believers were standing firm in spite of persecution. They did not believe the lies that the enemy had told about Paul. But they still held him in the highest esteem in love.

I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, in keeping with a command we have received from the Father. (2 John 1:4)

There is no greater joy than seeing our children walk in the ways of the Lord. This includes our spiritual children as well. Share about someone you discipled whose faith has held strong.

How have you used letters, notes or other things to encourage your children or those whom you disciple? How has someone encouraged *your* faith?

HE PRAYED FOR THEM

READ: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

From the Commentary:

The Word of God and prayer should go together. Jesus prayed for the disciples just as Paul prayed for the Thessalonian Christians, that their faith would not fail. The greatest need of missionaries and churches is prayer. We must also pray for young Christians. It is not enough to teach them Bible truth; we must also support them in our prayers.

ASK: What did Paul ask God to do for the Thessalonians? Why was prayer so important to Paul and those he ministered to? Why is prayer so important to the local church?

What are some things you pray for your children/grandchildren/friends – both physical and spiritual?

Paul prayed for three specific requests:

- ✓ that their faith might mature (v. 10)
- ✓ that their love might abound (v. 12)
- ✓ for holiness of life (v. 13)

From the Commentary:

That their faith might mature (1 Thess. 3:10)

Paul asked God to make it possible for him to minister to them personally, but God did not answer that request. Paul longed to see them again; he longed to minister to them and help bring their faith to maturity. Faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. God tries our faith, not to destroy it, but to develop it. Paul prayed that the suffering Christians in Thessalonica might grow in their faith, and God answered his prayer.

That their love might abound (1 Thess. 3:12)

Times of suffering can be times of selfishness. Persecuted people often become 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. This was Paul's prayer for these believers, and God answered it. Our growing faith in God ought to result in a growing love for others. We love one another, but we also love the lost and our enemies. Abounding love must not be bound. It must be free to expand and touch all men.

For holiness of life (1 Thess. 3:13)

It is the return of Jesus Christ that motivates the believer to live a holy life. Our Lord's return is also a source of stability in the Christian life. Where there is stability, there can be sanctity, and where there is holiness, there is assurance. The two go together.

Paul modeled a three-fold prayer we can all pray - not only for new believers but *all* believers.

From the Commentary:

Paul ended 1 Thessalonians 2 with a reference to the place of the saints at the return of Christ, and he ended this chapter in the same way. He prayed that his converts might stand blameless and holy before God at Christ's return. Since all believers will be transformed to be like Christ when He returns, Paul could not be referring to our personal condition in heaven. He was referring to our lives here on earth as they will be reviewed at the judgment seat of Christ. We will never face our sins in heaven, for they are remembered against us no more. But our works will be tested and you cannot separate conduct from character.

Paul's prayer teaches us how to pray not only for new believers but for *all* believers. We should pray that their faith will mature, their love grow, and their character and conduct be holy and blameless before God.

GROUP TIME: Pair up by table or in groups of 3-4 and discuss the following:

- What has rocked your faith? Does what you believe about God on a sunny day unravel on a stormy day? How has your faith been established so that it holds firm and is steady in the storms of life?
- How have you helped a young believer move toward maturity in their faith? What challenges did you face?

GOING FORWARD

Paul sent a helper, Timothy wrote a letter and Paul prayed a three-fold prayer for the new believers. Who in your life could use a helper? A letter? How fervently are you praying for young believers? Whose faith can you encourage this week?

Close by praying the words of Paul over your group: May the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone. May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen.

Wiersbe, Warren. *Be Ready: Living in Light of Christ's Return*. David C. Cook, ©1979

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