

**While I'm Waiting
(Week 6)
1 Thessalonians 3:11-13
"A Prayer For The Church"**

Introduction

Now may our God and Father Himself, and our LORD Jesus, direct our way to you. And may The LORD cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we do for you. 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. **1 Thessalonians 3:11-13**

At the beginning of every year in our church, we serve communion to families individually, and we pray together for their specific needs. It is actually my favorite thing that we do here at Freedom Fellowship, for it gives me, as your pastor, the opportunity to pray with each of you and get to know you on a more personal level. Nothing will unite a church more than praying together and lifting up one another's burdens before the throne of God. I believe that it is vital that believers love and pray for one another, but I also believe that believers should be constantly in prayer for the LORD'S guidance and provision for the church.

Prayer is the most powerful weapon that a believer possesses, and this is the reason that we are commanded in scripture to be in a constant state of communication with God.

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

We are commanded to be a "praying people", and our prayers should not be offered only for ourselves. We are to be equally concerned for our brothers and sisters in Christ. And we are also commanded in Scripture to pray for those who are called to be our spiritual leaders.

When they had appointed elders for them in every church and prayed with fasting they committed them to The LORD in whom they had believed. **Acts 14:23**

Not only are we to pray for one another, as well as, those who are in leadership, but we must pray for our church as a whole. In Paul's writings, there are many prayers for the churches that he had planted, and we will be examining one of those prayers today. It is a prayer offered for the Church of Thessalonica, and it gives us an example of how, I believe, we need to be praying for our church in this coming year.

The Apostle Paul, due to circumstances beyond his control, had been separated from the church of Thessalonica long before he had been ready to leave them. Persecution had driven him from the city, and he longed to be reunited with the fledgling church there. He wanted to be there with them in order to give them additional teachings to strengthen their faith (**1 Thessalonians 3:10**). For you see, Christians were not designed to be apart. We have been designed by God for fellowship. It is from this fellowship that we draw strength and encouragement from one another.

So, why is this prayer so relevant for us today? Due to circumstances beyond our control, we too have been separated from one another. And we need each other, in order to become all that God has called us to be. Therefore, this prayer offered for the church at Thessalonica is just as relevant for us today as it was for them then. I believe that this prayer is a perfect model of how we need to pray together for our church in 2021. It is a petition asking God for the Church to **Reconnect** in Fellowship, to **Remain** in Love, and for a **Return** to Holiness. None of us need be reminded that we are living in difficult times. Not only are we suffering through this pandemic, but also, we see first hand our nation's dire need of spiritual awakening and revival. If these things are to occur, it must begin with the people of God. So, as your pastor, I ask for you to join with me in this prayer for our church in the coming days.

Reconnect (in Fellowship) vs. 11

Now may our God and Father Himself, and our LORD Jesus, direct our way to you.

1 Thessalonians 3:11

The fellowship of believers is vital to the health of the church. After all, we are “the body of Christ” (**1 Corinthians 12:27**). We have each been given spiritual gifts to be used in concert with one another to carry out the great commission of the Church of Jesus Christ. **1 Corinthians 12** makes it abundantly clear that we cannot be all that God intended for us to be, if we do not function as a cohesive unit. Therefore, we are commanded in Scripture:

And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching. **Hebrews 10:24-25**

Severe persecution had separated Paul from the fellowship of the church at Thessalonica, and he was longing to be able to return to them. In a similar way, circumstances beyond our control (a pandemic) has disrupted our fellowship as well. Simply put, it is not healthy for the church to be apart. We desperately need each other. I fear that when these tragic times are at an end, the church will have lost a substantial part of its body. For the longer that we are absent from the fellowship, the easier it becomes for many to remain estranged.

Hard times often cause people to “build a wall” around themselves and develop an “bunker mentality”. But there is no such thing as a “hermit Christian”. We are part of a body, and it takes all of us to function properly. Do not let yourself become so overwhelmed with your current circumstances that you forget the needs of others. Do not neglect your brothers and sisters in Christ in their time of need. We must, as the church, keep the communication lines open and continue to bear one another’s burdens (**Galatians 6:2**). Depression comes as a result of fixating on self and not being committed to the service of others.

So how should we pray for our church in 2021? Answer: Just as Paul prayed for the Thessalonians; that God The Father and Christ Jesus, would intervene so that fellowship can be restored. Due to the pandemic, a great many of our brothers and sisters have experienced insecurity in being able to join us in fellowship. Simply put, they have been afraid to come and be with us. Some have been unable to attend a worship services for several months. We need these people, and they need us. It is the way we were designed. Our prayer is that God will miraculously intervene, so that our fellowship can be completely restored. We do not wish to lose a single one of those that God has placed within our church. So pray. Pray earnestly that our fellowship will be reconnected.

It is also important to examine the original Greek text that Paul uses in this verse, asking **“God and Father Himself, and Our LORD Jesus to direct our way to you”**. The way this is phrased in the Greek leaves no doubt that The Father and The Son are equal. The text is impossible to interpret otherwise. So, if anyone ever tries to tell you that Christ is not as much “God” as The Father, show them this verse! As believers in Christ, we are given full access to the very throne on heaven, and therefore, when we pray in Jesus Name, we pray in the power of Almighty God himself. Now, we know that our God can do all things. And we know that His will is for His people to be in close fellowship. So we can also know that we are praying in His will for our church fellowship to be restored. So let us pray earnestly together in Jesus Name that we all be reconnected and very soon. If, for whatever reason, you haven’t been able to be with us for a while now, **May our God and Father Himself, and our LORD Jesus, direct our way to you.**

We need one another, and we long to be reconnected as a church, united as one in Christ and one with each other. It is simply not the same watching your church from home on a computer screen. We NEED the personal face-to-face fellowship to be reconnected. Let us pray for this together, so that we may **BE** together soon.

Remain (in Love) vs. 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. **1 Thessalonians 3:12**

Love is the single most distinguishing characteristic of the Believer. Christ has told us that His disciples would be known by their love (**John 13:35**). Now we know that the Church in Thessalonica had the love of Christ in them for Paul spoke of it his letter.

We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by LOVE, and your endurance inspired by hope in our LORD Jesus Christ. **1 Thessalonians 1:3**

But in his prayer for them, he prays that their love may “*increase and overflow*”. You see, love is the one thing that a church can never have enough of! We need to pray that our love increases and overflows.

First, we need to pray that our love for Christ grows stronger with each passing day. This is achieved by spending more time with Him in prayer and in the study of His Word. By having communion with Him does our love for Him increase. It’s just that simple. The way to develop a deeper love relationship with someone is by spending more time with them.

Second, we need for our love to increase and overflow for one another. This is also a by product of fellowship. We need to get involved in one another’s lives, so our love for one another may increase. These are two of the most important priorities of the Believer.

And one of them, and expert in The Law, asked a question to test Him: “Teacher, which command in The Law is the greatest?” He said to him, “Love The LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love you neighbor as yourself. All The Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

Matthew 22:35-40

If ever there was something that the church should pray to have in abundance, it is love. We need our love to “*increase and overflow*”. We need to love God, and love our neighbors. Look closely how Paul describes just whom we should love. He prays that the church of Thessalonica increases in love for one another and for EVERYONE. This means that we are not only to love our Christian brothers and sisters, but to love our enemies as well. If there is one thing that is needed desperately in our world today, it is for The Church of Jesus Christ to remember that it is commanded to love lost people. Even when we strongly disagree with everything that they stand for, we still must respond with love. We are living in the most divisive times that most of us have ever experienced. Be careful not to jump on the “hate bandwagon” that seems to be making its continual rounds these days.

Hate and ostracism have never reached a single lost person. It is very possible to love sinners and still hate sin, no matter what others may say. So pray. Pray that we as a church will love God, love one another, and love the lost enough to see them rescued from hell’s flame. This is how we know that the church is in good condition; if we are known by our love. If there was ever a time that this world needed to see the love of Christ shining out through His followers, it is now. For soon He will return. And when He does, will He find us showing His Love? How is your love this morning? Have you gotten so caught up in the politics of this world that you have forsaken the priorities of The Kingdom of God? Satan would have us become so consumed with what we want for ourselves that we let our own desires crowd out our desire to love. So let us pray. Pray together that as a church, that our love will increase and overflow. This world has enough hate. And our anger certainly won’t solve this world’s problems. Let us leave wrath to God, as we commit ourselves to remain in love.

Return (to Holiness) vs. 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. 1 Thessalonians 3:13

Just the other day, someone asked me what it would take to bring revival to our nation. Revival is just a churchy word for a return to holiness. Hear what The LORD has said about revival:

(If...) my people, who bear My Name, humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land. 2 Chronicles 7:14

Revival will only come, when God's people begin to do an honest evaluation of their own lives and turn away from the sins that hinder a mighty work of The Spirit. Simple as that. Revival won't come to America unless it first begins within the Church. And the Church desperately needs a return to holiness. And what is *holiness* exactly? It is complete obedience to God's commands. The word actually means to be "set apart" or *consecrated*. While sin is failure to obey, holiness is exactly the opposite. When most people hear the word holiness, they think of moral purity, but it is so much more than that. If I refrain from sexual immorality, but I am filled with greed or envy, I am no less unholy. To be holy is to imitate the nature of God Himself.

But as the One Who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in ALL your conduct for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy. 1 Peter 1:15-16 (emphasis added)

And why is it so important for the Church to be holy in all it does? Paul tells us in his prayer that it is so our hearts will be "blameless before The Father at the coming of our LORD Jesus". The word he uses for "coming" in the Greek text is *parousia*, and it literally means "the presence". It is a word that Paul often uses to describe the rapture of the Church, when we rise to meet The LORD in the clouds. No one knows when this day will come (**Matthew 25:13**), so we, as God's people, must always be ready. It seems that so many within the church these days are trying to figure out what is going on in the world and looking for the antichrist, when what we really should be doing is looking for Jesus Christ! We do not want to be ashamed when The LORD returns. We are to live as a bride who is expecting her groom to walk in the room at any moment. No honorable bride would wish for her groom to find her being unfaithful to him. And neither should we. Jesus is coming soon. When He comes, let Him find us faithful and holy, as we await His return.

Yet another reason that we must strive for holiness is so that we can serve Him faithfully until He comes. For you see, just as we would never serve The LORD'S Communion in a dirty cup, He will never use "dirty lives" to serve in His kingdom. I believe that the reason that the Church is not as effective in its witness as it should be in these last days is because we have allowed sin to creep into our midst. Sins of all shapes and sizes, from immorality to self-righteousness and everything in between. Instead of condemning sin, we tolerate it. Instead of being offended by it, we've grown comfortable being around it. Instead of hating the sin, but loving the sinner, churches have by and large chosen to love sinners and accept their sins in an effort to become more "tolerant". We don't need more tolerance in the church, we need more holiness. There can be no salvation, without repentance. If revival is to come to the church, then holiness must make a comeback. So pray. Pray that we, as the people of God, will do a self-evaluation and ask God to search us as David prayed:

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way. Psalm 139:23-24

This is the prayer of someone who is longing for a return to holiness. And it should be our prayer for the church as well. So how should we pray together for our fellowship in 2021. We should ask The LORD to help us Reconnect in Fellowship, Remain in Love, and Return to Holiness. The word for "church" in the Greek is "Ekklesia", and it actually means "the called out ones". These three things; Fellowship, Love, and Holiness are essential for the Church of Christ to be all that we have been "called out" to become. I pray that we will answer that call in the days ahead.

And let His "called out ones" agree and say... TRUTH!!!