

1. There is a verse from Proverbs that ties very well to this lesson:
 - a) “Like cold water to a weary soul, is good news from a distant land.” (Proverbs 25:25 NIV)
 - i) This Proverb compares two thoughts: It states that the same way cold water feels good to one who is weary (thirsty), so is good news from a distant land.
 - ii) The main point of the Proverb is that good news from far away can revive the soul the same way cold water can revive a person who is really thirsty.
 - b) The reason I opened with that Proverb is that it describes Paul in this lesson.
 - i) If you look at the first few verses of this chapter, along with the Acts 17-18, Paul is going through a time when he had “had it” and was burned out.
 - ii) He was discouraged and lacked the motivation to move on.
 - iii) What reinvigorated Paul was good news from a distant land, which in this case was Thessalonica. Paul discusses how he heard the church that Paul planted was growing and thriving, and the news of that fact revived Paul.
 - a) This chapter describes how Paul’s faith was revived by the good news that Thessalonica was thriving as a church. We get clues in the book of Acts how that good news may have revived Paul to keep moving.
 - b) We’ll get to the details when we discuss Verse 1.
 - c) For those who are new to these lessons, the purpose of the introduction is to help see the big picture. A big picture idea of this chapter has to do with encouragement.
 - i) In our walk with God, there are times when we have “had it”.
 - ii) We may have been praying for a situation or someone for years, and not see any results of that prayer.
 - iii) We may have been in physical pain about something for a long time, and feel “forgotten” by God because we don’t see any results.
 - iv) This is about dealing with the difficult times. Those periods where we don’t feel God’s presence and contemplate quitting what God calls us to do.
 - d) It is at that moment, were Proverbs 25:25 often kicks in.
 - i) It is about “receiving good news from afar”.
 - ii) Yes that happened in the literal sense for Paul in this chapter, but that Proverb has broader applications.
 - iii) It is a reminder that God does not forget us. God promises, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (e.g., Deuteronomy 31:6, Hebrews 13:5). If we trust in the promise that God will never forsake us, then we have to remember that for those who trust in God, there is “good news on the way to refresh us.”
 - iv) For what it is worth, I have had “amazing little coincidences” of good-news events happen to me when I was down. Maybe it was a matter of perspective, but I just “knew” God was watching out for me and sent me, in one form or another good news of encouragement.
 - v) Note that this is not a guarantee. There have been other times where God wants me to walk by faith and simply trust Him during the difficult times.
 - e) Remember that when we are down and discourages, God is not up in heaven going “Oh well, too bad for him or her. Better go focus on someone else.” ☺
 - i) A loving God cares for us. A loving God wants to pick us up and encourage us the same way we want to encourage others when they are down.
 - ii) In that sense, you can count on the “good news from afar” Proverb.
 - a) It may not be a messenger from Thessalonica, but you get the idea. ☺

- b) Do you really think that a God who unconditionally promises to never forget us nor forsake us to leave us alone after we are saved?
 - c) Do you think God is big enough to handle your problems?
- f) During those times, it is best to turn to God to prayer.
 - i) A type of prayer is for us to remind God of His promises. Not that He has a memory loss, ☺. The bible is filled with prayers of people reminding God of His promises. A purpose of those prayers is to remind us that God's promises are unconditional. That gives us the strength to move on during those difficult times and know that God is going to act in these situations.
 - ii) If God promises never to leave us nor forsake us, and that promise is unconditional, then His reputation is on the line, not ours!
 - a) Therefore, it is not a matter of "I have sinned too much and God can't help me!" That is putting "the ball back in our court" to use a tennis cliché.
 - b) This is about unconditional love on God's part to those who choose to follow Him!
 - c) This is about those times when we begin to doubt, "Is this really what God wants me to do right now?" or some equivalent thereof.
 - iii) One also has to remember that God works on His timing and not yours.
 - a) You can't pray, "OK God, you promised never to forsake me, please fix the problem in the next five minutes!" God does work, but He works best when we fully surrender the situation.
 - b) A better prayer is, "Lord, I'm really down right now, and I don't know what to do next. You promised you would never leave me nor forsake me." I'm trusting in that promise despite all I'm going through right now. Lord, this is your problem. Please help in whatever way you see best, Amen". God hears prayers like that, where people fully turn a situation over to Him and then He works best!
- 2. Getting back to 1st Thessalonians Chapter 3, there are actually other lessons to this chapter. ☺
 - a) We are going to get into the specifics about the Thessalonians and their issues and what Paul is going through.
 - b) The "big picture" idea to about our maturity in trusting God.
 - i) The idea of surrendering the situation to God during those discouraging times is one big aspect of growing in one's faith toward God the Father.
 - c) One of the interesting things about 1st Thessalonians is that every chapter has a reference to Jesus Second Coming. Each reference has a different aspect to that future event.
 - i) This one in Chapter 3 has to do with our maturity as believers in God.
 - ii) The reference for this chapter is as follows: "May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones." (Verse 13)
 - iii) A key phrase in Verse 13 is about being "blameless and holy".
 - iv) Without getting into the theological details, the main thing to get out of that verse is that Paul wants the Christians of Thessalonica to be mature in their faith when Jesus comes back for the church.
 - v) Paul lived his life as if Jesus could come back at any moment.
 - vi) That should be the same attitude for us as well.
 - vii) What Paul wanted that when Jesus returned, he would find the Thessalonians mature in their faith and trust in God. The same goes for us.

- d) Paul's heart was not that, "Well, those people in Thessalonica are saved. Time to move on elsewhere." Paul wanted to see them grow and mature in their faith.
 - i) The main difference between Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 is in Chapter 2, Paul is concerned that they are still "saved". Chapter 3 focuses more on their maturity as believers in Christ. That is about trusting Jesus during the good and bad times.
 - e) Which leads back to the times of discouragement. The good news that this church was going strong. That news revived Paul. We as humans, desire feedback.
 - i) Paul needed to know this church was thriving. Not so his ego could say the church he planted was growing, but out of a love for those people. That is the heart of a Christian. One who desires feedback not for our ego's sake, but out of God's love driving that desire.
 - ii) I believed God responded to Paul's desire to know about the Thessalonians to encourage Paul to keep moving. Paul's "heart was in the right place". Paul worried about the Thessalonians for their sake and not for his. That type of love for one another got God to "respond". That brought the "good news from the distant land". It is another proof that God never leaves nor forsakes us.
 - f) There are some "specifics" that Paul was worried about, and we'll talk about that in a moment. At this point, I better stop and actually get to Verse 1.
3. Chapter 3, Verse 1: So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens.
- a) One has to remember that when Paul wrote this letter, there were neither chapter breaks nor verse numbers. Those were added in the 12th-13th Century AD, for reference purposes.
 - b) I state that because this chapter opens with the phrase, "We could stand it no longer".
 - i) The first question one needs to ask is, "What was it they could stand no longer?"
 - ii) The answer is to look back at the last few verses of Chapter 2:
 - a) "For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory". (1st Thes. 2:11-12 NIV)
 - iii) What Paul is saying is he spent some time with them. Paul encouraged them as a father would his own children. Now that Paul is away from them, he "can't stand it anymore" and had to send someone to see how they were doing.
 - iv) A modern equivalent might be a parent sending a child off to college. When the parent hasn't heard from the child in awhile, he or she calls or writes to see how they're doing. It is that love for another that desires a verbal or physical "connection". Our love for them desires to know their well being.
 - a) There is an old joke for parents that when you send your kids off to college, don't give them all the money they need on day-one. That way, they have to stay in contact with you in order to get financial support! ☺
 - b) God does the same with us. He doesn't supply all our needs for say, the next twenty years all at once. He wants us to stay in contact with Him.
 - v) Remember what God desires from us more than anything else is a personal relationship. When we break off that relationship and not communicate with God for a while, it is as if "God misses us". A God of perfect love desires a relationship. At the same time God won't violate our free-will choice to ignore Him. He might send a "messenger or two" to see how were' doing. ☺
 - vi) Sometimes I think when trouble comes and we turn to prayer, God says, "Hey, good to hear from you. I thought a little trouble might bring you my way." ☺

- c) OK, let's talk about the historical references to this verse. Luke, who became a traveling companion of Paul later in his life, wrote the Book of Acts. Acts gives us the background as to why Paul left Thessalonica and when he next heard from them.
 - i) Paul had to leave Thessalonica because his enemies ran him out of town. (Ref.: Acts 17:10).
 - ii) Next Paul went to the nearby town of Berea. He started a church there. After that, the same group who ran Paul out of Thessalonica also ran Paul out of Berea. (Ref.: Acts 17:14).
 - iii) In Acts 17:15, we learn that Paul was alone in Athens while his two missionary companions, Silas and Timothy, stayed and helped the new church of Berea.
 - iv) The remainder of Acts 17 is Paul giving a sermon in Athens. Reading between the lines, you get the impression that only a handful of people became Christians in Athens because of that sermon. Athens was not as successful to start a church, as was Thessalonica or Berea.
 - v) In Acts 18:1, Paul moves on to the City of Corinth.
 - vi) In Acts 18:3, we read of Timothy and Silas rejoining Paul in Corinth.
 - vii) 1st Thes. 3:6 says, "But Timothy has just now come to us from you." Comparing that to Acts 18:3, we see Paul wrote 1st Thessalonians from the City of Corinth.
 - viii) Acts 18:5 says, "When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ."
 - a) You get the impression that when Silas and Timothy came back to visit Paul again, it "charged him up".
 - b) Remember that Paul worked as a tentmaker to support the ministry (Acts 18:3). In 18:5, you get the impression Paul threw away his tent materials and focused on preaching. My impression of this text is that Timothy and Silas's return did fire up Paul.
 - d) With all of that in mind, let's look at Verse 6 of this chapter of 1st Thessalonians:
 - i) "But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you."
 - ii) This ties back to the opening Proverb of "good news from afar".
 - iii) Timothy's return and good news about Thessalonica encouraged Paul.
 - e) Now let's get back to Verse 1: "So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens."
 - i) In Verse 1, Paul is recalling the rough moments in Athens.
 - ii) Paul had just been run out of two towns (Thessalonica and Berea) and was now in Athens, not planting churches. You get the impression he was discouraged.
 - iii) The purpose of the opening verses of this part of the 1st Thessalonians is to describe how Paul was down and when he received the good news of the church's survival in Verse 6, that fired Paul back up again.
 - f) Here's the lesson for us. (Time to pay attention ☺): The important thing to remember is not the historical details of what happened to Paul, it is to learn from Paul's experiences so when we go through times of discouragement, we can learn that God can (and does) bring us "good news from afar" to keep us going in whatever God called us to do!
 - g) What do you say we actually move on to Verse 2? ☺
4. Verse 2: We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith,³ so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them.⁴ In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.
- a) First of all, notice Paul refers to Timothy as "our brother and God's fellow worker".

- i) This shows that Paul thought of Timothy as an equal, not as one inferior in rank.
 - ii) We get clues in the bible that Timothy was much younger than Paul (1st Timothy 4:12). One of the reasons Paul brought Timothy on the mission trail with him was that Paul needed to train younger, future missionaries to continue the work.
 - a) There is a classical Christian expression that goes, “Every Paul needs a Timothy and every Timothy needs a Paul”.
- b) In Verse 2, we discover the specific reasons of why Paul sent Timothy to visit them.
- i) It was to strengthen and encourage them in their faith. Further, Paul warned them that trials were coming and he wanted to make sure the Thessalonians survived and thrived despite those trials.
- c) The last sentence of Verse 3 has the word “we”. It says we will be going through these trials.
- i) It is important to understand that when Paul says “we”, he was not only referring to himself, Paul and Silas, but also the Thessalonians as well.
 - ii) Paul is talking about the physical persecution suffered by the early church.
 - iii) Imagine telling a stranger: “Hey, let me tell you the Good News about Jesus. Oh, and by the way, to believe this means persecution for the rest of your lives! ☺”
 - a) Somehow, we forget that part when we tell people about Jesus. ☺
 - iv) Jesus himself taught the same principal in a parable: “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? (Luke 14:28 NIV) That parable ends with Jesus making the statement: “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”
 - v) Let me paraphrase what Jesus and Paul are saying:
 - a) To follow Jesus is not just to verbally state that as fact and go on your merry way. To follow Jesus means to make Him a priority in every aspect of your life. You have to be willing to obey every and all commands that the bible teaches. Stop and consider that cost before making your commitment to follow Him.
 - vi) I state that because for the Thessalonians, that cost was physical persecution and life threatening situation.
 - vii) The only reason to go through that is because it is truth.
 - a) I don’t like pain. I’m not too crazy about persecution either. ☺ The only reason to put up with that is because it is truth and our eternal salvation depends upon it.
 - viii) Americans are a privileged bunch in that we don’t have to suffer the persecution for our faith that the majority of Christians have had to suffer through the centuries. The tough part is Jesus said, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded” (Luke 12:48). This means because God has spared us persecution, He demands more of us as believers.
- d) Let’s get back to the verses themselves. Paul says we are destined for these trials and he told them in Verse 4 in a sense, “You see, it happened just as we told you”.
- i) Paul said in another letter, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12 NIV)
 - a) Now there’s a promise you don’t see emphasized in sermons. ☺
 - b) Even if we don’t face life-threatening situations, we still suffer in many ways if we are willing to take a stand for our faith.
 - ii) Remember that Satan doesn’t want you to be a witness for Jesus.
 - a) If you are running for your life or are in a lot of physical pain you are less likely to be passing out leaflets for Jesus. ☺

- b) Satan knows that and therefore, he persecutes those who are actively trying to win new converts or are helping others to mature in their faith.
 - iii) If we are destined for these trials, then we have to expect them.
 - a) It doesn't mean to be living in paranoia. Sometimes what we think is persecution is simply due to sin-in-the-world and its affect upon us.
 - b) Sometimes factors such as lack of sleep can cause bad behavior.
 - c) To combat this force against us, we pray. The last part of Ephesians Chapter 6 is a good daily checklist of how to pray to combat that force.
 - iv) This concept simply means that sometimes during our lives bad things are going to happen and we have to expect them. Actually, the trouble is a little less bearable knowing there is a purpose behind it.
 - a) Suppose I said, "Sometime in the next three years, you are going to be in a car accident. You will live, but it will be painful. When it does happen, you can then say, "Oh yeah, I knew this was going to happen." It doesn't mean you run a stop sign the next day, just that sometime in the future it will happen.
 - b) Also remember that all pain we experience in life is "God-filtered".
 - (1) He allows these things happen, eventually for His glory.
 - (2) We may not understand the pain we are going through, but eventually it will help us to grow, or as an experience that we can use to help minister to others.
 - v) One last difficult thing to consider: Does Satan have the power to kill believers?
 - a) The sad answer is yes. It has been true throughout history.
 - b) God allows this as those killings have often led others to Christ or have strengthened others in their faith. Some of the best Christian conversions and maturity in people have come from the death of other believers.
 - c) Again, it doesn't mean we "look for it". Further, we pray for deliverance so it won't happen. We just have to understand that this is a possibility.
 - d) On that happy note, ☺ we can move on to Verse 5.
5. Verse 5: For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.
- a) Verse 1 of this chapter says, "So when we could stand it no longer."
 - i) Verse 5 of this chapter says, "when I could stand it no longer".
 - ii) Remember Silas and Timothy co-wrote this letter. I hear Silas and Timothy saying, "What's this "we" business? You're the one who couldn't stand it!" ☺
 - iii) By the way, give Timothy some credit for traveling alone from Corinth back to Thessalonica. That's a long journey to do on foot by yourself! A reason Timothy was sent was Paul was still a "wanted man" in that town. It was safer to send Timothy than for Paul to go himself.
 - b) In this verse, we have the term "tempter". This is a nickname for Satan.
 - i) Paul used the term "Satan" in chapter 2. Paul specifically picks the nickname "tempter" here to help the Thessalonians understand that Satan not only persecutes Christians, but also tempts them as well.
 - ii) Satan's "arsenal of weapons" is pretty well known. If he can't persecute you into being a bad witness for Jesus, he tempts you with other desires.
 - iii) This leads to what Jesus taught about the "4 types of soils". (Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8). To summarize, Jesus describes people as four types of soil. In that soil, the word of God is planted. The word of God is compared to seed. One type "soil" (person) simply doesn't get it. Another type of person gets it and produces a good crop, which refers to a mature, "blooming" relationship with God.

- a) What is interesting are the other two types. One type of person fails to be a mature Christian due to persecution. (See Matthew 13:20-21).
 - b) The other bad type of soil is one that cares about other things:
 - (1) Jesus said, “but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.” (Matthew 13 22b, NIV)
 - c) I stated a page or two ago that to follow Jesus means He becomes a priority over every aspect of your life. If you start caring more about wealth or the worries of life, you are not making God a priority in your life.
 - (1) Time for a disclaimer: I’m not anti-hobby or interest. If you love God with all of your heart, soul mind and strength, your interest in other things will be limited. God gives us other interests. Therefore He wants to be part of our life within those interests.
 - iv) Which leads us back to the “tempter”. I don’t know if Paul knew about the four types of soil parable, but he did understand how Satan works. He understood that once Paul left, he works by persecution and by temptation.
 - v) What Paul is saying is, “I understand how Satan works. I planted this young church and I care for this church like a loving parent. I can’t stand not knowing how they are doing, I have to find out”.
 - a) That is an example of Christian love. It’s not to be nosy in other people’s business, but to have a love for them and want the best for them.
 - b) God calls all of us to help mature others in their faith. If you don’t have anyone like that in your life, pray. God wants all us to be dependant upon each other. We should pray and have good Christian role models as well as others who are young in the faith who we can help mature.
 - vi) Remember the important aspect of these lessons is what we can model from them.
 - a) Paul had a great Christian love for other believers and wanted to help them grow in their faith. That type of love comes out of the text of this letter. Paul’s concern for other Christian’s maturity and growth is what Christian love is all about.
6. Verse 6: But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you.
- a) Now we’re back to where I was a few pages ago. Paul is now describing that Timothy came back from Thessalonica with a good report card.
 - b) In the same way it was important for Paul to know the church is doing well, I believe it was important for the church to know Paul was doing well. That Christian love was now part of the Thessalonica church. They had that love for Paul and was concerned for his well being.
 - c) The verse says that the Thessalonians longed to see Paul just as Paul longed to see them.
 - i) Christian love is not just “let’s pray about them and then we can get back to our lives”. God desires that we work together in unity.
 - ii) If we really love someone, we long to be with them. A sign of true love is a desire to see them again.
 - iii) This is why getting together with other Christians is so essential.
 - d) This verse gets back to the opening Proverb of “Good news from afar”.
 - i) Without doing my whole introduction again, the point is that God gives us good news which can motivate us to keep moving on in whatever God calls us to do.

7. Verse 7: Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith
- a) Remember when Paul came to Thessalonica, his back was covered in whip marks.
 - i) Paul was kicked out of the next town he came to (Berea).
 - ii) Next Paul went to Athens. He didn't get a lot of converts and went to Corinth.
 - iii) Now, being "down" in Corinth, the good news that the Thessalonians were surviving and thriving despite the persecution charged up Paul.
 - b) This is a reminder that we don't know who we are influencing as believers.
 - i) We may believe we are just going to church on Sundays and moving on with our lives. We don't know what affect we are having on others around us.
 - ii) The Thessalonians were busy going to church and staying alive. They didn't realize that the affect of that would encourage Paul to go on being a missionary.
8. Verse 8: For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.
- a) First of all, Paul is not saying we fail to "really live" if this church fails.
 - b) To "really live" in a Christian sense, is to be living to do God's will as opposed to our will.
 - c) I am convinced there is no greater happiness in life than to live for God.
 - i) The reason the bible is a thick book is that it full of instructions on how to live our life here on earth. Ever notice that there is very little discussion about what heaven is all about? That is because the bible is primarily an instruction book for our life here on earth.
 - ii) What God desires of us is to live a life for Him throughout our day.
 - a) It's not just praying "Your will be done", although that doesn't hurt. ☺
 - b) It is to regularly check your life and say, "Is what I am doing right now pleasing to God?" Technically, the question as Christians is not so much "What would Jesus do?" as it is "What would Jesus want me to do at this moment?"
 - d) Which leads back to Verse 8. Paul says "we" really live, since the Thessalonians are standing firm in the Lord.
 - i) First of all, Paul's purpose was to lead new people to Christ and see them mature in their faith. Paul "really lives" in the sense his specific purpose was fulfilled in the church in Thessalonica.
 - a) It is not that Paul was going to commit suicide if he failed or go into a deep depression. Remember that God calls us to "bear fruit" for him. Therefore, we are to look back at what we are trying to accomplish. A way of knowing whether or not we are doing God's will is to look back at our lives and see just if God's will is being accomplished.
 - (1) Yes there are missionaries who die suddenly and others must take up their work. But for the most part, God does want us to model Paul and monitor our past work to see if say, others we nurture are actually growing in their faith.
 - b) Not all believers are called to hit the road and become missionaries. Some are called to serve in the church down the street or help out a particular neighbor or just to immediate family.
 - ii) Paul "couldn't stand not knowing" what happened to the Thessalonians.
 - a) That's a good example of knowing God's will for your life. You "can't stand" not doing whatever God called you to.
 - b) For me, I get depressed and grumpy when I'm not writing these studies. ☺
 - c) For you, it may be some other aspect of ministry. God gives each of special gifts and desires, and He expects us to use them for His glory.

- e) Last, let's talk about "standing firm" in the Lord.
- i) Remember this church is being persecuted. There are also temptations all around them. Despite that, their faith is strong.
 - ii) "Standing firm" is keeping your faith in God despite whatever trials and temptations come your way. Jesus compares "standing firm" to a good building foundation:
 - a) "But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." (Matthew 7:26-27 NIV)
 - iii) So how we stand firm?
 - a) Notice Jesus said above, "does not put them into practice"
 - b) Its not just about hearing God's word, it is about applying God's word.
 - c) This is a good time to explain the difference between "intelligence, knowledge and wisdom". Here is an illustration:
 - (1) "Knowledge" is if you are hungry, and there is a sandwich in front of you, you "know" that eating that sandwich will help.
 - (2) "Intelligence" is how fast you figure out that eating that sandwich will take away your hunger.
 - (3) "Wisdom" is applying that knowledge and eating the sandwich.
 - d) Of those three, the least importance is intelligence. Even the slowest people will eventually figure this out. The most important is wisdom, which is the application of knowledge.
 - (1) "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." (Proverbs 4:7 NIV)
 - iv) Which gets us back to "standing firm in the Lord".
 - a) This is about staying focuses on whatever God has called us to.
 - b) This is about making God a priority in life despite any other distractions and/or suffering in our lives.
 - c) This is about applying God's word to our lives and not just reading it.
 - d) When I think of ""standing firm in the Lord", I think of running toward a spot and not getting distracted along the way. It is being focused upon a goal and not letting other distractions get in the way.
 - e) More disclaimers: ☺ It is impossible to be 100% focused on God all of the time. I find if we make time daily for God in prayer and in the Word, the rest "falls in place". Again, this is about loving God with all of our hearts souls, mind and strength" (Matthew 22:37, et.al.) That is something God commands us to do and therefore pray about! If you are shooting for that goal, your interests in other things are limited and at the same time, you will focus on God despite any persecution.
 - f) This reminds me of a proverb about bible reading: "Sin will keep you from this book and this book will keep you from sin."
9. Verse 9: How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?
- a) The first thing to notice is the word "God":
 - i) Paul didn't thank the Thessalonians for the Thessalonians.
 - ii) Paul didn't thank himself nor his teammates for the Thessalonians.
 - iii) Paul thanked God for the church of the Thessalonians.
 - iv) Paul received joy for the blessing of the church and thanked God for it.
 - v) Paul understood that all blessings come from God and Paul expresses his gratitude to God for this church.

- b) We serve God. We serve God by serving others.
 - i) It is through God that we get the strength to serve others.
 - ii) Since we are serving God, we give Him the glory when we see the victories.
 - c) This prayer gives Paul joy.
 - i) Joy is different from happiness. Happiness is based on the circumstance of any given moment.
 - ii) Joy is an inner peace that one has no matter what the situation. The word “joy” is closer to “contentment” than happiness, but happiness is also part of joy.
 - iii) Joy is knowing that God is working and the happiness of seeing God work.
 - iv) “Joy is not about getting rid of problems, but of getting rid of the fear of those problems.” Anne Robertson
10. Verse 10: Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.
- a) The term “night and day” does not mean “once during the day and once at night”. Nor does it mean to pray continually all the time. It means that Paul prayed for them a lot.
 - b) This leads to the discussion of how often should we pray for a situation?
 - i) I believe the correct answer is “Pray until you get an answer, but we have to accept that sometimes the answer is no.”
 - ii) Jesus prayed three times to avoid the cross if there was any other way for people to get saved. (Matthew 26:44, et.al.) Notice Jesus accepted God’s “no” answer and then did God’s will.
 - iii) Paul prayed three times for some unnamed pain to go away (2nd Corinthians 12:8) and then accepted the fact that God wanted him to live with that pain.
 - iv) This does not mean we are pray three times and that’s it.
 - a) Jesus taught, “And so it is with prayer – keep on asking and you will keep on getting; keep on looking and you will keep on finding; knock and the door will be opened.” (Luke 11:9, The Living Bible”.
 - b) Jesus wants us to be persistent in our prayer life. At the same time, we have to learn to accept God’s will when the answer is no.
 - c) There are people I have been praying for, for years. This is especially true in praying for the salvation of others. I pray for certain people’s hearts to be open to the Gospel and that God may bring witnesses into their lives. I never know when it is “too late” for someone, so therefore I keep praying.
 - c) Let’s get back to Paul’s prayer. His specific prayer is that he may see them again and supply what is lacking in their faith.
 - i) This is the prayer of someone who has the heart of a missionary or a pastor.
 - a) Paul can’t stand not being with the Thessalonians as he has a love for them. Therefore, he is praying hard to find a way to see them again so he can help them grow in their faith.
 - b) Historically speaking, we don’t know if Paul ever made it there again. We do know that on his next missionary journey, Paul met with some representatives from the Thessalonica church (Acts 20:4).
 - ii) The important point for us is what can we learn from Paul’s behavior?
 - a) I’m so glad you asked that question. ☺ Remember that a big-theme of this section is for us to love-one another. God’s love pours through us and we in turn show that love to others. If you desire to serve others through God’s love, then you “can’t stand” not being with that person. You want to spend time with them and minister to their needs.
 - (1) That is the heart of any missionary or pastor. Further, it should be the attitude of all Christians in whoever God has “assigned” to you to minister to.

11. Verse 11: Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.
- a) Remember Paul was run out of Thessalonica. I suspect there were “wanted posters” of Paul posted around town and as a warning for the guy never to return. ☺
 - i) For Paul to return was not possible without his life being in danger and thus the lives of the church in Thessalonica.
 - ii) Paul understands that God is bigger than those who kicked him out of town.
 - iii) Therefore Paul prays to God to make a way for Paul to return to town.
 - iv) Hopefully we understand that God is bigger than any obstacle that we face!
 - b) Notice God the Father and the Lord Jesus are connected in this sentence by the word “and”. There is an implication of equality between the two. It implies that somehow, “both are in charge” of making this possible.
 - i) We pray to God the Father through Jesus.
 - ii) Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” (Matthew 28:18). All means all. That means one cannot do an end-run around Jesus to approach God the Father.
12. Verse 12: May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³ May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.
- a) The last few verses of this chapter would be a wonderful end to the letter. If you just read Verses 11-13 together, it reads like the letter should end right here.
 - b) In fact, the next two chapters actually get into some negative things about the behavior of the Thessalonians that Paul has to comment upon.
 - c) I was thinking about this section of the letter in context of the whole letter.
 - i) What is interesting is the priority of the “love one another” theme over the specific conduct issues that are brought up in Chapters 4 and 5.
 - ii) If you go through the entire New Testament, there are lots of “do-this to one another” commands for Christians. God calls us to pray for one another, encourage one another, etc. John MacArthur’s commentary counts 30 different “...one-another’s” for believers.
 - a) Of those different “do-this to one another”, the most common command given and the strongest is to love one another.
 - iii) My point is Chapters 2-3 focus on loving one another and Chapters 4 and 5 getting into specific behavior problems that Paul wants to fix.
 - a) First of all, if you want to help someone, first you need to show that you care for him or her. No one is interested in your help if they don’t believe you care about their lives.
 - b) Second, there has to be a willingness on their part to want to be helped.
 - c) One of the reasons Paul was joyful was the love Paul had for them was mutual. Trying to “fix someone” who doesn’t want to be fixed won’t work.
 - d) Remember that Paul’s goal is to help them grow in their faith in God and not their faith in Paul. You are not reading this bible study to be more like me, but to find out how to please God. ☺ That should be the attitude of all Christians in service for others.
 - e) One has to establish Christian love before one can get into Christian doctrine. If there is no love, there is no doctrine. This is why Chapters 2-3 focuses on Paul’s love for them, is a priority of the specific problems that are discussed in the next two chapters.

- d) Now we get back to the 2nd Coming issue again:
- i) Paul is praying that God the Father strengthen the Thessalonians hearts so they will be “blameless and holy” when Jesus comes back (Verse 13).
 - ii) Paul realizes that God is the one who does the “maturing” to people’s hearts and not Paul. At the same time, God works through people to help mature others.
 - iii) What Paul is praying is that, “If I myself can’t personally help you, may God send someone else, or each-other to help the Thessalonians grow in their faith.”
 - a) Paul understood the importance of teamwork for Christians to grow.
 - b) For those of you who ever started a BBQ with charcoal bricks, you will understand this illustration: A bunch of charcoals together stays hot and support each other. If you put one lump of charcoal by itself, it gets cold and “goes out”. The same with Christianity. It is meant to be a team effort. Like charcoal, we “grow cold” if we are separate from other believers.
- e) Remember that every chapter in 1st Thessalonians has some reference to Jesus’ Second Coming. Each reference has a different purpose. The purpose of reference in this chapter is to urge us to grow in maturity at the Second Coming.
- i) I believe the subtle difference between the references in Chapter 2 versus Chapter 3 has to do with “salvation versus maturity”. Chapter 2 focuses on being “saved” prior to the Second Coming, while chapter 3 focuses more on maturity. There is some overlap of this issue between the chapters, but you get the idea.
 - ii) Paul’s specific request is that the Thessalonians’ hearts be “blameless and holy” at Jesus Second Coming.
 - a) First, let’s discuss the “heart”. A bible “word-picture” is that God gives us a new heart when we commit our life to serving him.
 - (1) “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36:26 NIV)
 - (2) The “heart” here does not refer to literal blood-pumping organ. The “heart” is used as a word-picture of life as the heart pumps “life” into our body and keeps us alive.
 - b) With that said, Paul wants the Thessalonians to grow and mature in their relationship with God the Father. Therefore Paul focuses on their hearts as opposed to their minds or body.
 - (1) If Paul said “May God make your minds blameless and holy”, we would think it is a matter of self-discipline or “mind over matter”.
 - (2) It is not up to “us”, it is up to God working through us and thus Paul specifically uses the term “heart”.
 - iii) Finally, let’s talk about “blameless and holy”.
 - a) To be blameless is not about being perfect. That is impossible.
 - b) To be “blameless” before God is to trust in Jesus as full payments of our sins, past present and future. There is a mistaken idea that Jesus just died for our sins past-tense, and the rest is up to us. That is nonsense. Jesus died for all of your sins, even the ones you will commit in the future.
 - c) That is not a license to freely sin. If anything, that payment for sins should drive us closer to Jesus in gratitude.
 - d) Which leads us to “holy”. Holiness is about living our lives for God. It is about living in obedience of what He commands us to. It becomes part of every aspect of our life.
 - e) “Holiness and blameless” go together. If we commit and dedicate ourselves to serve God, we become “blameless” as we focus our lives upon serving God and this all of our sins are taken away.

13. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, help us to live a live separate for you. Help us to understand that "holy" is simply to dedicate our lives to serving you and not some pious, unattainable term. Help us to live a blameless live. Help us to remember that this is only possible through you and not our own efforts. Further, help us to love you with all of our hearts, soul, mind and strength so that Your love flows through us (like a heart organ!) so that Your love can be expressed upon others. Finally, show us the specific person or people that you have called us to minister to. Help us to show that love to them as well as others who interact with our lives. Also bless those who minister to us. Give them wisdom and help us to show gratitude for how You have used them to help us grow and mature in our relationship with You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.