



A People Who Love Deeply

(1 Thessalonians 3:9-13)

In Acts 17 we read of the brief evangelism and church planting work of Paul and his companions in Thessalonica. Though Paul's time in the area was shortened by intense opposition to the Good News, Paul's affections for the new Christians in Thessalonica were deep and passionate (1 Thessalonians 2:17,3:15).

In a Greek region with serious devotion to the Roman Caesar, to hail Jesus as King was high risk behaviour. For that reason, young followers of Jesus in that setting, would have been tempted to walk away from their new-found faith. Paul's concern for them compelled him to send Timothy to check on their welfare, to minister to them, and to bring a report back to Paul. This letter was written, in part, as a response to Timothy's report that even in their sufferings they were not pulled off course as disciples of Jesus. It is in this context that we read this prayer of Paul for the church in Thessalonica.

Read Together

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 (NIV)

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? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 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.

What an example! Paul has a deep love for this church and he is exuberant, even "over the moon", because of their steadfast faith.

Explore Together

1. Abundant Prayer (3:10) Paul's deep devotion to the Thessalonians regularly drove him to pray for them. Consistent with Jewish customs, those in the early church had appointed times for prayer. From the expression "night and day" we learn that Paul prayed more frequently than those established times. And the word "Earnestly" means extremely fervent praying. NT Wright explains that it means "even more exceedingly than you can imagine."

Discuss: What can we learn from Paul's deep love for people with whom he had spent only limited time? In what ways could we become frequent and fervent prayers?



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2. Overflowing Love (3:12) Paul prays that their love, together and to everyone, would reach the same level of love that Paul has for them. "And may the Master pour on the love so it fills your lives and splashes over on everyone around you, just as it does from us to you. (MSG)" Notice: it is the Lord who is the source of power for any increase in godliness. (See also, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.)

Discuss: How does thankfulness increase our love for others? When desiring to love others well, how crucial is surrender to Jesus and why? Share some practical examples of how God has increased your love for someone who was difficult to love.

3. Strengthened hearts (3:13) This word "strengthened" means to firmly fix, to fasten. Remember, Paul prays this for an entire group of believers - together. He is praying that each person's core would be, individually and collectively, fastened firmly to allegiance to Jesus.

Discuss: How does the concept of togetherness make the word "strengthen" even stronger? Does that describe who are we becoming? If not, what changes do we need to make?

4. Holy lives (3:13) Paul's main desire and theme throughout this letter is that these brothers and sisters in Christ, a family of believers he deeply loves, would "keep blameless in holiness" (a paraphrase by NT Wright). This is crucial as they, and we, live in the now and the not yet - between the first coming and second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Discuss: In what ways can we help each other live holy lives, lives of purity that are set apart in full devotion to Jesus? How do we balance the "now and not yet" in our pursuit of holy living? How is surrender/re-surrender involved?

Pray Together

Lord God, we are so grateful to be a part of our local family of purpose filled Jesus followers. Thank You, Holy Spirit, that You empower us to grow into these qualities for which Paul has prayed. Together and as individuals, we surrender to you, Jesus. Cause our love to increase and overflow for each other and for others. Strongly fasten our hearts to You so that we will be made holy as we live in the now and the not yet of Your kingdom.

Amen.

Suggested Resources

- **Book: Tom Wright** - Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians
- **Book: D.A. Carson** - Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation
- **Book: Tyler Staton** - Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools