New Covenant Bible Church, Cedar Rapids (4 services)/CIC Dr. Rick Griffith

25 July 2010 & 8 Aug 2010 Single Message

NIV 30 Minutes

**How to Strengthen Others**

Title

***1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:13***

**Topic:** Encouragement

**Theme:** Strengthen others

**Thrust:** to show you care for them

**Purpose:** The listeners will strengthen the faith of at least one person in a specific way

**Closing Song:** “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”?

# Introduction

### Interest: [Suzuki instructors teach by encouragement.]

Suzuki

#### Have any of you attended a performance of schoolchildren trained in the Suzuki method of learning to play violin? I hear it is amazing! Imagine children as young as four, three and even two years old playing the violin—one of the most difficult musical instruments!

#### How do the instructors do it? Well, the first thing the kids learn is a proper stance. And the second thing they learn—even before they pick up the violin—is how to take a bow. One instructor notes, “If the children just play the violin and stop, people may forget to show their appreciation. But when the children bow, the audience invariably applauds. And applause is the best motivator we've found to make children feel good about performing and want to do it well.”

### Need: Adults need applause too.

Black

#### Affirmation makes us feel wonderful because we all need encouraging. Don’t you need encouragement?

#### Mark Twain said, “I can go for three months on one genuine compliment.”

#### Who do you know that needs encouragement? Raise you hand if someone comes to mind—so how can you do it better?

### Subject: How can we strengthen others? How can we *infuse strength* into people by what we do?

Subject

### Background: Paul was once in a really tight spot. He had planted the church in Thessalonica, but was forced out. Those who expelled him then turned on the new believers and applied intense pressure on them too. So what should Paul do?

Map

Down!

Map

### Preview: He traveled to Berea and was kicked out there, then went to Athens and finally to Corinth. From Corinth he sent a letter back to them with his plan. Looking at how Paul strengthened them will reveal *three ways we can encourage others* too.

### Text/Transition: The first way to strengthen others in 1 Thessalonians 2:17 is to…

# I. Go in person (2:17-20).

MP

[You best encourage others when you are *physically there*.]

## [Paul tried to strengthen the church as his greatest blessing in a *personal visit* (2:17-20).]

### Paul first priority to encourage the church was *through a personal visit* after he was forced out of Thessalonica (2:17-18).

17-18

#### Paul knew that the best way to help establish them was for them *to see his face*—so he tried repeatedly to return to them.

#### However, he attributed to Satan the *opposition to him getting back* to Thessalonica.

### Notice that Paul wanted to visit them because *they were the greatest blessing* he could possibly receive at the judgment seat of Christ (2:19-20).

19-20

#### Paul was a people person who saw these new believers as his hope (his future, like a parent lives to see his kids grow into maturity), his joy (what greater satisfaction is there than seeing people become all God wants them to be?), and his crown (the symbol of God’s blessing on his life).

#### In other words, Paul had not returned because he didn’t care for them—he *really* cared!

## The best way to show others how valuable they are is *in person*.

Person

### Too often people are “out of sight, out of mind.”

SBC

#### I have taught at Singapore Bible College now for nearly 20 years—basically all of my adult life after receiving my PhD at age 32. God has blessed me with thousands of students in over 20 countries.

9 faces (auto)

#### So about 3-4 times each year I visit my students in ten other countries outside Singapore. Emails are great, but nothing beats a personal visit.

Map

### We visit US churches every two years to try to strengthen them too.

Black

### In our increasingly impersonal age where we are tempted to use email, facebook, Twitter, or any other connection method besides a personal visit, let’s not forget to just simply “be there”!

MPI

(As I noted earlier, today’s passage shows us three ways that Paul strengthened the church as a model for us. First, we saw we must *go in person*. But sometimes that’s not possible—as in Paul’s case—so another way we can encourage people is to…)

# II. Bring others into their lives (3:1-9).

MP

[When you can’t be there yourself, *show your care through a messenger*.]

## Paul strengthened the church by *sending Timothy* (3:1-9).

### Paul sought to encourage the church during their separation by sending Timothy to remind them that all Christians suffer persecution (3:1-5).

4-5

1-3

#### Paul could have just written a letter, which he was obviously doing in this epistle, but he always carefully chose the men who carried the letter.

#### Not “just anybody” could accomplish a mission such as this one to encourage these suffering Christians—but Timothy fit the bill.

##### Timothy was with Paul when they planted the church.

##### Timothy was also a sensitive man who could genuinely feel for these persecuted believers.

### In fact, Timothy’s report of their steadfast faith encouraged Paul himself (3:6-9).

6-9

## If you can’t strengthen others in person, then send someone else!

Ladies

### The phone is great, email and facebook work too, but next to being there yourself, sending someone else to “be there” for you is second best.

### Another way to have others “be there” is to give them good books. Sometimes an author can say what you want to say better than you can.

Books

### You can also send them website links. This is one reason I have developed a new website called “Bible Study Downloads Dot Com.” I can’t be there personally for my students and others, so I have uploaded almost 5000 pages of class notes and hundreds of PowerPoint presentations my students and I have developed over the years. So if you can’t send someone else to help ground them biblically, let me be that “someone else” in your life.

MPI

MPII

BSD 4 slide auto

(So one key way we can strengthen people is to *go in person*. When you can’t do that, *bring others into their lives*. Now for the third and probably the best way we can encourage people…)

# III. Pray for them (3:10-13).

MP

[Probably the best way to encourage others is to *uphold them before God*.]

## The way Paul encouraged the church was by praying for them (3:10-13).

### Paul prayed for God to allow him to visit them (3:10-11). He knew that he needed God to clear the way for a visit to happen.

10-11

### Paul also prayed for their growth in love and purity (3:12-13).

12-13

#### Pray for love: “The greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13). Love should be our highest goal, so we made love our mission statement for our church that we planted in 2006 in Singapore: to love God, to love the church, and to love the nations. We often pray that our worship will be motivated by love!

CIC: Love

#### Pray also for purity: The purity that we will have at the return of Christ noted in verse 13 should also be our experience now, so Paul also prayed that they would be “blameless and holy” until then.

CIC: Pure

## Never neglect to build others up through prayer!

Black

### Prayer has no boundaries. It works anywhere, anytime. When you can’t encourage others yourself, when you can’t send someone else, and when *any* hindrance comes—prayer is your best method of encouragement.

### Susan and I can’t be with our two older sons in Seattle now, so we pray for 30 minutes each morning for them to excel in these two areas—that they would be men of love and purity. We also pray for love and purity for others.

Family

### Are you encouraging others by consistently praying for them?

(So what is this passage telling us through the example of Paul? How can we sum it up?)

# Conclusion

### Strengthen others to show you care for them (Main Idea).

### And how can we encourage them (Main Points)?

#### *Visits:* Go in person (2:17-20).

#### *Co-laborers:* Bring others (3:1-9).

#### *Prayer:* Pray for them (3:10-13).

MI

MPs

• Person

• Others

• Pray

### Application: Who do you know that needs encouragement today? Which of these three ways can you infuse strength into that person?

### Exhortation: A Catholic nun named Sister Helen P. Mrosla shared this story about one of her students named Mark Eklund:

Eklund

He was in the first third grade class I taught at Saint Mary's School in Morris, Minn. All 34 of my students were dear to me, but Mark Eklund was one in a million. Very neat in appearance, but had that happy-to-be-alive attitude that made even his occasional mischievousness delightful.

Black

Mark talked incessantly. I had to remind him again and again that talking without permission was not acceptable. What impressed me so much, though, was his sincere response every time I had to correct him for misbehaving - "Thank you for correcting me, Sister!" I didn't know what to make of it at first, but before long I became accustomed to hearing it many times a day.

One morning my patience was growing thin when Mark talked once too often, and then I made a novice-teacher's mistake. I looked at Mark and said, "If you say one more word, I am going to tape your mouth shut!"

It wasn't ten seconds later when Chuck blurted out, "Mark is talking again." I hadn't asked any of the students to help me watch Mark, but since I had stated the punishment in front of the class, I had to act on it.

I remember the scene as if it had occurred this morning. I walked to my desk, very deliberately opened my drawer and took out a roll of masking tape. Without saying a word, I proceeded to Mark's desk, tore off two pieces of tape and made a big X with them over his mouth. I then returned to the front of the room. As I glanced at Mark to see how he was doing, he winked at me. That did it!! I started laughing. The class cheered as I walked back to Mark's desk, removed the tape, and shrugged my shoulders. His first words were, "Thank you for correcting me, Sister."

At the end of the year I was asked to teach junior-high math. The years flew by, and before I knew it Mark was in my classroom again. He was more handsome than ever and just as polite. Since he had to listen carefully to my instructions in the "new math," he did not talk as much in ninth grade as he had in third.

One Friday, things just didn't feel right. We had worked hard on a new concept all week, and I sensed that the students were frowning, frustrated with themselves—and edgy with one another. I had to stop this crankiness before it got out of hand. So I asked them to list the names of the other students in the room on two sheets of paper, leaving a space between each name. Then I told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and write it down.

It took the remainder of the class period to finish the assignment, and as the students left the room, each one handed me the papers. Charlie smiled. Mark said, "Thank you for teaching me, Sister. Have a good weekend."

That Saturday, I wrote down the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper, and I listed what everyone else had said about that individual. On Monday I gave each student his or her list. Before long, the entire class was smiling. "Really?" I heard whispered. "I never knew that meant anything to anyone!" "I didn't know others liked me so much!"

No one ever mentioned those papers in class again. I never knew if they discussed them after class or with their parents, but it didn't matter. The exercise had accomplished its purpose. The students were happy with themselves and one another again.

That group of students moved on. Several years later, after I returned from vacation, my parents met me at the airport. As we were driving home, Mother asked me the usual questions about the trip - the weather, my experiences in general. There was a slight lull in the conversation. Mother gave Dad a side-ways glance and simply says, "Dad?" My father cleared his throat as he usually did before something important. "The Eklunds called last night," he began. "Really?" I said. "I haven't heard from them in years. I wonder how Mark is."

Dad responded quietly. "Mark was killed in Vietnam," he said. "The funeral is tomorrow, and his parents would like if it you could attend." To this day I can still point to the exact spot on I-494 where Dad told me about Mark.

I had never seen a serviceman in a military coffin before. Mark looked so handsome, so mature. All I could think at that moment was, Mark, I would give all the masking tape in the world if only you would talk to me.

The church was packed with Mark's friends. Chuck's sister sang "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Why did it have to rain on the day of the funeral? It was difficult enough at the graveside. The pastor said the usual prayers, and the bugler played taps. One by one those who loved Mark took a last walk by the coffin and sprinkled it with holy water. I was the last one to bless the coffin. As I stood there, one of the soldiers who had acted as pallbearer came up to me. "Were you Mark's math teacher?" he asked. I nodded as I continued to stare at the coffin. "Mark talked about you a lot," he said.

After the funeral, most of Mark's former classmates headed to Chuck's farmhouse for lunch. Mark's mother and father were there, obviously waiting for me. "We want to show you something," his father said, taking a wallet out of his pocket. "They found this on Mark when he was killed. We thought you might recognize it." Opening the billfold, he carefully removed two worn pieces of notebook paper that had obviously been taped, folded and refolded many times. I knew without looking that the papers were the ones on which I had listed all the good things each of Mark's classmates had said about him.

"Thank you so much for doing that," Mark's mother said. "As you can see, Mark treasured it."

Mark's classmates started to gather around us. Charlie smiled rather sheepishly and said, "I still have my list. It's in the top drawer of my desk at home." Chuck's wife said, "Chuck asked me to put this in our wedding album." "I have mine too," Marilyn said. "It's in my diary." Then Vicki, another classmate, reached into her pocketbook, took out her wallet and showed her worn and frazzled list to the group. "I carry this with me at all times," Vicki said without batting an eyelash. "I think we all saved our lists." That's when I finally sat down and cried.

### Prayer

“Father, how much we need to strengthen the people we love and care about. We often tend to forget the importance of showing our affections and love. Sometimes the smallest of things could mean the most to another. Help us to respond to your promptings today. For Jesus’ sake, Amen.”

# Study Questions (Step 1)

# Context: What did the author record just prior to this passage?

### Paul has just reviewed the history of how the church started and then expressed his care for the church (2:1-16).

# Purpose: Why is this passage in the Bible?

### Paul models genuine care for others.

# Background: What historical context helps us understand this passage?

### Paul planted the church but was quickly forced out of the city (Acts 17).

# Questions

### Does 2:19 support a pretribulational rapture?

**Outlines (Steps 2-5)**

**How to Strengthen Others**

***1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:13***

**Exegetical Outline (Steps 2-3)**

# Exegetical Idea (CPT): The way Paul strengthened the Thessalonians during his absence was by sending Timothy to remind them that all believers suffer persecution and by praying for them.

# I. The way Paul tried to encourage the church as his greatest blessing was through a personal visit (2:17-20).

## The way Paul tried to encourage the church was through a personal visit after he was forced out of Thessalonica (2:17-18).

## The reason Paul wanted to visit them was because they were the greatest blessing he could possibly receive at the judgment seat of Christ (2:19-20).

# II. The way Paul encouraged the church was by sending Timothy (3:1-9).

## The way Paul tried to encourage the church during their separation was by sending Timothy to remind them that all Christians suffer persecution (3:1-5).

## The way Paul himself was encouraged was through Timothy’s report of their steadfast faith (3:6-9).

# III. The way Paul encouraged the church was by praying for them (3:10-13).

## Paul prayed for God to allow him to visit them (3:10-11).

## Paul prayed for their growth in love and purity (3:12-13).

**Purpose or Desired Listener Response (Step 4)**

The listeners will strengthen the faith of at least one person in a specific way.

**Sermon Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)—Steps 5-6

# Subject: How can we strengthen others?

# Introduction

### [Suzuki instructors teach by encouragement.]

### Need: Adults need applause too.

### Subject: How can we strengthen others? How can we *infuse strength* into people by what we do?

### Background: Paul was once in a difficult situation. He had planted the Thessalonian church, but was forced out. Those who expelled him then turned on the new believers and applied intense pressure on them too. So what did Paul do?

### Preview: Looking at how Paul strengthened them will reveal *three ways we can encourage people* too.

### Text/Transition: Let’s see the first way to strengthen others in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20.

# I. Go in person (2:17-20).

## [Paul tried to strengthen the church as his greatest blessing in a *personal visit* (2:17-20).]

### Paul first priority to encourage the church was *through a personal visit* after he was forced out of Thessalonica (2:17-18).

### Notice that Paul wanted to visit them because *they were the greatest blessing* he could possibly receive at the judgment seat of Christ (2:19-20).

## The best way to show others how valuable they are is *in person*.

### Too often people are “out of sight, out of mind.”

### So about 3-4 times each year I visit my students in ten other countries outside Singapore. Emails are great, but nothing beats a person visit.

### We visit you every two years to try to strengthen you too.

### In our increasingly impersonal age where we are tempted to use email, facebook, Twitter, or any other connection method besides a personal visit, let’s not forget to just simply “be there”!

# II. Bring others into their lives (3:1-9).

## Paul strengthened the church by *sending Timothy* (3:1-9).

### The way Paul tried to encourage the church during their separation was by sending Timothy to remind them that all Christians suffer persecution (3:1-5).

### Paul himself was encouraged by Timothy’s report of their steadfast faith (3:6-9).

## If you can’t strengthen others in person, then send someone else!

# III. Pray for them (3:10-13).

## The way Paul encouraged the church was by praying for them (3:10-13).

### Paul prayed for God to allow him to visit them (3:10-11).

### Paul prayed for their growth in love and purity (3:12-13).

## Never neglect to build others up through prayer!

### Prayer has no boundaries.

### We pray for people for 30 minutes each morning.

# Conclusion

### Strengthen others to show you care for them (Main Idea).

### And how can we encourage them (Main Points)?

#### *Visits:* Go in person (2:17-20).

#### *Co-laborers:* Bring others into their lives (3:1-9).

#### *Prayer:* Pray for them (3:10-13).

### Exhortation/Application: Which of these three ways can you infuse strength into someone else?

# Tentative Theme/Thrust Statements (Step 5)

Text

# Possible Illustrations (Step 6)

#### The verb (*aporphanisthentes*) means literally “to be orphaned” and is used only here in the New Testament. To Paul it was as though his family were being **torn** apart when he left them. He hoped the separation would be brief, but it broke his heart to leave them as infant babes in Christ. Though he had left them physically, they were still prominent in his thoughts; they were not “out of sight, out of mind.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

# Possible Applications (Step 6)

### Text

EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE WITH BOB WESTFALL & JAMES WARTIAN

Rick,

Thank you for your willingness to preach on July 25. I am excited to go through 1 Thessalonians this summer. I am sorry that you have to cover more verses than the sermons you sent me covered. However, in order to get through the letter in 8 weeks I needed to break it into larger sections. I hope the below information helps.

God bless! Bob

**Stay on Target – a study of 1 Thessalonians**

**Central theme:** Continue to grow in the likeness of Christ as you wait for His coming

**Key verse:** 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Now may the God of peace himself make you completely holy and may your spirit and soul and body be kept entirely blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23 NET)

**Purpose:** To encourage us to stay on target as we wait for Christ

·         To affirm them in their relationship with Christ (Chapter 1)

·         To defend the Gospel from those who were discrediting Paul and thus the Gospel he preached (Chapter 2)

·         To encourage them while they suffered persecution (Chapter 3)

·         To exhort them to resist the temptations of sexual impurity and lazy behavior (Chapter 4)

·         To clear up confusion concerning Christ’s return (Chapters 4-5)

·         To instruct them concerning how to live as God’s family (Chapter 5)

**Outline:**

Paul pours out his heart concerning his relationship to them. (1:1-3:13)

·         Paul affirmed their response to the Gospel and their growth in the Lord (1:1-10)

·         The Gospel Paul preached is true as evidenced by its work in their lives. (2:1-16)

**o**   Paul defends the Gospel by his actions (2:1-12)

**o**   Paul defends the Gospel by their actions (2:13-16)

·         Paul strengthened the church by sending Timothy (2:17-3:13)

**o**   Paul’s forced absence from them (2:17-20)

**o**   Timothy sent to strengthen them by reminding them that as Christians they will suffer persecution (3:1-10)

**o**   Paul’s prayer for God to allow him to visit and for their growth (3:11-13)

Paul gives them practical instruction in how to live and experience the believer’s hope amid the pressures of life. (4:1-5:28)

·         Instructions for growth (4:1-12)

**o**   Live holy lives in a sex-saturated culture (4:1-8)

**o**   Live lovingly and productively (4:9-12)

·         Live with hope knowing about the Rapture (4:13-18)

·         Live soberly in light of the Day of the Lord by putting on faith, love and hope. (5:1-11)

·         Live at peace among yourselves. (5:12-28)

**From:** James Wartian  **Sent:** Thursday, June 03, 2010 4:31 PM **To:** Rick Griffith ([drrickgriffith@gmail.com](mailto:drrickgriffith@gmail.com)) **Cc:** Bob Westfall **Subject:** passage for July 25

Rick,

Here is the info you needed: You will be preaching 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13 on July 25. You have 30 minutes. Can you do it? J You will also have 4 to 5 minutes to give a family / ministry update, so your total sermon time will be 35 minutes INCLUDING your ministry update.

Bob sees the purpose as “To encourage us to stay on target as we wait for Christ.” The short theme is “Stay on Target.” Key verse is 1 Thess. 5:23.

He will have some additional ideas of where he is headed in regards to your passage soon if that is of help to you. His preliminary idea for this particular passage is “strengthening of the church.”

Hope that helps. Let us know if you have any questions or have any special needs/requests for the service.

**James Wartian**

Mature Adult / Missions Pastor

[James.Wartian@NewCovenantBible.org](mailto:James.Wartian@NewCovenantBible.org)

319-395-0021

PREVIOUS SERMON MSS ON 2:17-20

A. Paul led through a pastoral concern despite separation (2:17).

1. For the Apostle it wasn't "out of sight, out of mind!" He deeply missed the Thessalonians even though he'd only had less than a month with them initially and then been separated from them for less than a year when he wrote this letter.

a. If you have an NASB you see that Paul says he was "bereft" of them for a short time. The KJV is a bit better with "taken away from you," but I like the NIV the best. It says, "…we were torn away from you."

b. You see, the original word here is that word from which we get our word for "orphaned." It's the kind of distress that a mother would feel to have her children forcefully ripped from her arms.

c. Paul, their spiritual father, hoped the separation would be brief, but it broke his heart to leave them as infant babes in Christ. He couldn't forget them and made every effort to return to them as quickly as possible.

d. I'll never forget the day that Susan and I left the Philippines to return to the states for seminary. We had ministered there for two and a half years and developed some very close relationships. At the Mainila airport to say good-bye were Jun and Teng, two Christian men that I had poured my life into (who now serve as pastors). As their spiritual father I felt like I was being ripped away from them when we had to leave. For the first time in years, the tears welled up in my eyes and fell down my face.

2. I don't know about you, but for me even though separation from dear people is tough it's easy to get caught into the "out of sight, out of mind" mentality.

a. I wonder, is there someone whom you used to lead spiritually but for some reason now have little or no contact? A younger brother or sister in Christ? Someone from another church? Someone you lead to Christ before?

b. It's important to recognize that the Lord sometimes brings people into our lives for a period of time and then discontinues these ministries. But maybe the Holy Spirit is nudging you today to make that phone call or visit, to write that letter, to demonstrate a pastoral concern which Paul had for the Thessalonians.

c. If you don't know what to say or write, how about using 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 for starters?

(Paul not only lead through a pastoral concern despite separation, but secondly…)

B. Paul lead in a constant pursuit despite Satanic opposition (2:18).

1. You and I have seen it again and again - Satan seeks to isolate new believers. Paul knew the devil's strategy and so, even though he couldn't make it himself, he sent Timothy to encourage them in their new faith. We take a closer look at this next week in chapter 3.

2. We need to recognize that we are engaged in a spiritual warfare.

a. Ephesians 6:11-12 says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood [human beings], but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

b. It's obvious from this passage in Ephesians that Satan has different levels of evil, demonic forces that seek to thwart the work of God. Paul recognized this in His relationship with the church. That's why he was so committed to follow-up.

c. Please let me ask the question again, "Is there anyone whom Satan is seeking to isolate from your spiritual leadership?" Do you need to write a letter like Paul did? or send someone else like Paul did?

d. Anyone who abandons babies is inhumane. Yet I know of too many times in my own ministry that I have abandoned spiritual babes.

(All this Satanic attack gave Paul and his companions plenty of opportunities to get discouraged, depressed and lose their joy. They didn't though. The last two verses in this chapter show that…)

C. Paul lead with a joyful hope despite problems (2:19-20).

1. Paul's affection for his disciples at Thessalonica moved him to refer to them as his hope, his joy, his crown, and his glory.

2. One commentator notes,

"He voiced a rhetorical question to heighten the intensity of his fervor. In effect he asked what would be the greatest blessing he could possibly receive at the judgment seat of Christ. They were! They were everything that was worth anything to Paul. They were his **hope**; their development was what he lived for as a parent lives to see his children grow up to maturity, to produce and reproduce. They were his **joy**, they filled his life with sunshine as he thought of what they used to be, what they had become, and what they would be by the grace of God. They were his **crown**; they themselves were the symbol of God's blessing on his life and ministry. They were his **glory and joy**, and not only his but also the glory and joy of his companions in labor" (Constable, *BKC*, p. 697).

3. In verse 20 the word "you" is emphatic: "**You** are the reason we glory in the Lord and have such joy!"

4. Note also in verse 19 that he fully expected his ministry to end not by death, but by the imminent return of Christ - a pretribulational return with nothing needing to occur before Christ came back.

SBC Evening Chapel Floor Captain Appointments Dr. Rick Griffith

12 November 1998 & IBCH 6 June 2010 Single Message

NIV 8 Minutes

**The Encouragers**

***1 Thessalonians 3:1-5***

**Topic:** Encouragement

**Subject:** Let’s encourage one another

**Complement:** like Timothy did.

**Purpose:** The students will encourage their floor captains and vice versa.

# Introduction

### [Suzuki instructors teach by encouragement.]

#### Have any of you attended a performance of Japanese schoolchildren trained in the Suzuki method of learning to play violin? I hear it is amazing! Imagine children as young as four, three and even two years old playing the violin—one of the most difficult musical instruments!

#### How do the instructors do it? Well, the very first thing the children learn is a proper stance. And the second thing they learn—even before they pick up the violin—is how to take a bow. One instructor notes, “If the children just play the violin and stop, people may forget to show their appreciation. But when the children bow, the audience invariably applauds. And applause is the best motivator we've found to make children feel good about performing and want to do it well.”

### Adults need applause too.

#### Affirmation makes us feel wonderful because we all need encouraging. Don’t you need encouragement?

#### I need encouragement, you need encouragement—why don't we do it more often?

### Paul once was in a difficult situation needing to encourage the Thessalonian church but he couldn't go in person. So he sent Timothy, his faithful traveling companion. This is recorded in 1 Thessalonians 3:1.

### Subject: Let’s take a look at Timothy to learn from him how we also can encourage… What qualities did Timothy have that we should emulate? From this text I see three principles on how we can encourage others. The first is…

# I. Minister as a peer with people.

## Timothy was a brother in Christ to Paul (3:2a).

### This suggests equality in God's work with Paul and Silas (which might have been necessary to point out since Timothy was apparently much younger).

### Imagine the great apostle referring to shy Timothy as “brother”—not even assistant, son, or church worker!

## Remember that the floor captains minister to you as equals.

### Lecturers are also peers in the sense that God has no grandchildren.

### Floor captains must remember that they aren’t the big bosses and you the servants—but students must remember not to abuse the floor captains’ servant leadership too.

# II. Minister as a partner with God.

## Timothy was a fellow worker with God (3:2b).

### A mouse and an elephant developed such a close relationship that the elephant let the mouse ride on top of his head. Once the elephant decided to make a new trail through the forest, so, starting on the edge of the trees he began plowing his way through the forest—the whole time with the mouse hanging on for dear life. The huge feet smashed plants, the strong trunk uprooted trees and tossed them aside like used toothpicks, the massive weight of the animal knocked down anything in the way through the length of the forest until it came to the clearing on the other side. Then the elephant turned around and faced the forest. At this point the mouse pulled himself out from behind the elephant's ear and exclaimed as he eyed the clearing through the forest, "Wow! Just look at what we did!"

### We are fellow workers with God. We look at the great things He's done in our midst and exclaim, "Lord, look at what we did!" God doesn't rebuke us by saying, "No, it was all Me." He says, "You're right! We have accomplished much for eternity, haven't we?" God delights in our partnership with Him in His service!

## Whether floor captain or floor private, we all partner with God.

### If God was your partner in cleaning the toilet, how would you clean it?

### If God was your room partner (roommate), how would you treat Him?

(So we can imitate Timothy’s attitude as a peer and partner. Once we have these qualities, then…)

# III. Minister as an encourager during other’s trials.

## Timothy was an encourager of the church during difficulty (3:2c-5).

### "Encourage" means comfort or help—it's two words together: *para* means "alongside," and *kaleo* means "to call." So it means calling alongside to help someone in trouble.

### Trials are the normal experience for the Christian (3:3b-4)—and SBC student!

### Paul wanted Timothy to check up on the church because he cared for them (3:5a).

#### I once had an investment in Kemper Mutual Funds. Do you think I looked them up in the newspaper? You bet I did! If you purchased stocks or mutual funds you're constantly checking on them to see how your investment is doing.

#### If we show this care towards worldly things, how much more so when we make investments in people! That’s why…

## SBC appointed floor captains to check up on the spiritual well-being of students.

### This shows not so much distrust in you—it shows how valuable you are!

### You can help these captains by encouraging them and allowing them to encourage you.

# Conclusion

### Let’s encourage one another like Timothy did (M.I.).

### I wonder if you know of someone who is going through the crucible like the Thessalonians were. Who do you know right now who's struggling in his walk with Christ? Perhaps someone who has come to one of our services but hasn't returned yet?

### Get that person clearly in your mind. Now what is the Lord telling you to do for him or her? How can you be a Timothy to that one, sent by God with the express purpose to encourage? What would you want someone to do for you if you were in that person's shoes? A visit? A card? A letter? A call on the phone just to say, "I care about you. How have you been doing?"

Grace Fellowship Church Series on 1 Thessalonians Rick Griffith

November 16, 1986 Message #6

What Does it Mean to "Really Live?"

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

**Subject:** We experience the greatest joy in life

**Complement:** when we participate in others' spiritual growth, especially through prayer

**Introduction**

1. On the LBJ Freeway in Dallas just above a large retailer of spas stands a large billboard overlooking each commuter who has nothing else better to do than to read the billboards en route to work. The huge billboard shows a man and woman (presumably his wife!) relaxing inside a hot tub with foam, bubbles, and steam rising from the beckoning water. It even has large specks of glitter placed over the water which sparkles as you drive by. Then there's the captivating caption: "Morgan Spas: Bubble Your Troubles Away!"

The message is obvious: If you just buy a Morgan Spa then life will better. Life will even be troublefree since all those cares which press against you will magically be lost in a sea of hot foam, bubbles and steam. If you have your own spa, then you're really living!

Let me set the record straight. Putting a spa in your backyard is the *beginning* of woes! I know since my parents put one in our backyard while I was in high school. After eight straight weekends of digging through grass, weeds, dirt, and rocks the hole was finally big enough for that monstrous bathtub. Then came weeks of installing pipes, the gas line, the electrical line, pump, heater, filter and gadgets *ad nauseum*!

"Ah," but you say,"But then it's installed! The real life begins!" Again, not so. After this comes the increased insurance rates, water rates, gas and electricity--not to mention the cost of the spa itself. Besides that, my parents decided to put it up at four feet above the ground to build a large deck around it (which still hasn't been built). Our spa broke down repeatedly and over the past ten years has had about eight hours of usage. Is that what you call really living? No, that's real life!

2. The point of all this is not an inditement upon spas. Our first baptismal service as a church will be held next week in Art and Norma's spa. My point is simply this: Real living can't be found in things or anything else this world has to offer, but only in being involved in what really matters in life. What really matters? Those things which last beyond this life into the next, people in particular.

M.I. 3. That's the message of our passage for today. We experience the greatest joy in life when we participate in others' spiritual growth, especially through our prayers for them. As we dig into 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13 we'll see how people were Paul's most satisfying and greatest investent of his life.

4. Last week we left off at 1 Thessalonians 3:5 where Paul had just explained his reasons for sending Timothy to the Thessalonian church: to encourage and strengthen the church during its time of affliction.

5. This week we pick up the story at verse 6 where he switches from discussing what had happened in the past few months to talking about the present.

**I. We really live when we participate in others' spiritual growth (3:6-9).**

**[The most fulfilling enjoyment in life stems from spiritual ministry in the lives of others.]**

A. Participation in others' spiritual growth gives us the greatest encouragement (3:6-8).

1. When Timothy reported back to Paul about the church he gave two items of good news about their faith and love:

a. They had pleasant memories of the apostles (3:6).

1) The verb for "brought good news" here is the normal term meaning "preach the gospel." Here we see the only place in the New Testament where it refers to something other than God's saving work (Morris).

2) This shows how significant it was to Paul to receive such good news: the news that the church still remembered him was as good of news as the precious message of the gospel!

3) Hardly anything is more encouraging than being around new Christians. "When the sheep begin to stink, go hang around some lambs!"

b. Their faith in God remained strong which encouraged Paul in his persecution (3:7-8). He needed this encouragement (KJV, NASB "comfort") because he had suffered four successive experiences of apparent defeat since he set foot in Europe (Ryrie)…

1) At Philippi he had been cast in jail then asked to leave the city.

2) At Thessalonica he had been forced to leave and to guarantee that he would not return.

3) At Berea he had been pursued by the Jews from Thesslonica and barely got away to Athens by the skin of his teeth.

4) At Athens he had little success debating the philosophers of the city who publicly scoffed him.

2. By the way, how do you handle times when you feel like your ministry to other Christians isn't bearing fruit? Do you ever feel like you're only treading water in your outreach to others with no significant results? I want to encourage you to begin an "Encouragement File…" (explain)

3. So the good news was that the church had remained strong, but why was this so significant? What could have happened to the Thessalonians instead of remaining close to the Lord? The same thing which happened to the churches of Galatia three years earlier (as recorded in Acts 13 and 14).

a. These churches started off well with many people coming to know Christ, even a whole city showed up for one of Paul's talks (Acts 13:44ff.)

b. The word of God spread through the whole region (13:49)

c. Signs and wonders were performed among the people (14:3)

d. Paul was stoned and left for dead (14:19)

e. He revisited all the cities (14:21)

f. Elders were appointed in each city (14:23)

g. Yet Paul wrote them a few months later and scolded them for turning away from the simplicity of the gospel (Gal 1:6; 3:1-4).

4. Having this kind of thing happen with the Galatians you can imagine how Paul must have feared the same thing with the Thessalonians, as well as how wonderful it must have been to hear the good news of their steadfast faith.

a. That's why in verse 8 he says… (3:8).

b. The "if" (NASB, KJV) does not indicate any doubt in the Greek but really has the force of "since" (NIV). [i.e., indicative, not subjunctive]

c. Remember my question posed earlier, "What does it mean to 'really live'?" Here's the answer in verse 8. We really live when we invest our lives in people and see the return: seeing people we have ministered to stand firm in the Lord:

1) They haven't lost their first love (cf. church of Ephesus in Rev 2:4)

2) They continue to spend time in intimacy with the Lord

3) They continually reach out to others in spiritual ministry

4) All this impact comes because it's not done in the flesh, but "in the Lord."

5. I know firsthand what it means to hear good news like this from people who mean much to me. Let me introduce you to some very special friends in my life…

a. (Slides of Jun and Teng, sharing how they came to know Christ)

b. (Letters from Jun and Teng, sharing how well they were doing in Christ)

(You can't imagine the encouragement it is for me to see Jun and Teng continue to walk on with Christ unless you've also made some spiritual investments in other's lives. Paul told the church how he was encouraged in verses 6-8. Now notice in verse 9 how the church not only encouraged him but gave him immense joy. I believe the principle here in verse 9 is that…)

B. Participation in others' spiritual growth gives us the greatest joy (3:9).

1. The obvious answer to Paul's question is, "There's no possible way I can thank God enough for all the joy you've brought into my life!"

2. Paul, in the midst of persecution and defeat, did not lose his joy. He didn't let circumstances dictate what his attitude towards life would be but counted his blessings--people who are dear to him like the Thessalonians.

3. Perhaps you are going through the deep waters right now and also need to thank God for His blessings in this Thanksgiving season.

a. How often do you thank God for friends at church?

b. How often do you thank God for family members who **do** follow the Lord?

c. How often do you thank God for opportunities to invest your life in others' growth in Christ?

(So far in this passage we have seen in verses 6-9 that we really live when we participate in other's spiritual growth. In the remaining verses in this chapter we'll now observe one **specific** way that we can participate in the growth in Christ for other people--by praying for them. That's the idea behind verses 10-13 where we see that…)

**II. We really live when we participate in others' spiritual growth through prayer (3:10-13).**

**[We experience the greatest joys in life when we uphold others before God.]**

In these final verses Paul's petition is twofold: that he might have further ministry in Thessalonica and that the church might increase in love. The first principle we can draw from verses 10-11 is that…

A. Participation in others' spiritual growth causes us to pray for further ministry in their lives (3:10-11).

1. Notice that Paul prayed for the church night and day. He doesn't say that he prayed all night and all day, but **by** night and **by** day.

a. His private prayer life was characterized by frequently petitioning God and thanking God for His work among those in the church.

b. How much do you pray for other members in our church? Do you have a system to aid you such as cards or a prayer notebook? Maybe this will help.

2. Paul prayed that he might "supply what is lacking" in their faith. What does this mean?

a. This word for supply we find in Ephesians 4:11 where Paul writes that the role of the professionals in ministry is to "equip" the saints.

b. Paul is saying here that although the church was doing well like tender, young shoots in the storm of persecution, growth and maturity was still needed and he desired to continue equipping them towards spiritual maturity.

c. Here's the first hint at any weaknesses in the church which we've discovered in this letter. One commentator writes,

"This is the first explicit reference to deficiencies in their spiritual condition--deficiencies due more to immaturity than to waywardness. Up till now Paul described them as having the characteristics of new Christians. Now he said they were deficient on some respects, as a child is deficient in comparison with an adult. In chapters 4 and 5 Paul ministered to these deficiencies" (Constable, *BKC* ).

3. In verse 11 Paul doesn't just talk about future ministry in their lives but actually prays that this may become a reality.

a. Remember back in 1 Thesssalonians 2:18 how Paul commented that Satan had thwarted his efforts to return to the church? Here he asks God to direct their way, or remove all the obstacles which Satan put in his way as he tried to see them again.

b. I wonder whom the Lord wants you to see for follow-up right now, but your efforts keep getting thwarted. I can think of at least one person in my experience (Willard at the VA).

c. Let's continue to pray for that future opportunity to minister.

(Participation in others' spiritual growth causes us to pray for future ministry. There's another request involvement in individual's lives produces…)

B. Participation in others' spiritual growth causes us to pray for their abounding love (3:12-13).

1. Notice whom this love was to be directed towards--towards all men, Christians and non-Christians alike.

2. Can I ask you a personal question? When was the last time you prayed for another believer to increase in love so that it abounds and overflows and gushes onto everyone else?

a. What do we pray for in our Christian circles? Don't you find that more often than not we pray for release from difficult circumstances?

b. Where did we learn to pray that we might escape trials in life? Hoe did we learn to request God to help us to get out from under persecution?

c. We didn't learn to pray for these things from the Bible! Where in the Scripture are we ever encouraged to pray that we won't experience difficulty? The Biblical emphasis is not on **escaping** trials but **persevering** through them!

3. Notice the purpose of this kind of abounding love in verse 13: that we might be strengthened to live a holy life (3:13).

a. The literal word for "heart" here refers to the whole being, one's entire personality--not just emotions but "the whole of inner states, thoughts, feelings and will" (Morris).

b. "Paul is saying that our whole personality is established on a firm foundation when there is a basis of abundant love" (Morris).

c. The next chapter deals with this issue of holiness in greater depth so I'll address it when we discuss Paul's comments in chapter 4.

d. I think the message for us is clear: we need to be involved in more Biblical prayer--prayer for genuine spiritual ministry in the lives of others, and prayer for an abounding love which results in a holy life! That's the kind of prayer we know is God's will!

**Conclusion**

1. This morning I've been talking about how to "really live." We "really live" when we make a spiritual investment in the lives of people, not spas, not our businesses, not our own selfish pursuits.

2. I want to get a bit more practical now as we close. How can we really make this kind of spiritual investment in other people? Here's some suggestions:

a. Adopt another person or family in this church to be a spiritual ministry to:

1) Call him or her once a week and pray together on the phone (or better yet in person).

2) Go through a Bible study series together (contact me for suggestions).

b. If you can't make that commitment to adopt another person on an ongoing basis just begin a new habit of calling people just to find out how they're doing.

3. Why is it important to make a spiritual impact in others' lives? Because people are the only thing on earth which will outlast this earth. The influence we have on the spiritual lives of others is the only true, lasting influence in this life! Think about it!

a. Most material things we invest our time into will not even outlast us.

b. Our homes will someday burn up.

c. Our cars will eventually break down.

d. Every earthly treasure will be left behind when we depart this earth.

4. However, people won to Christ and people ministered to in genuine, sincere ministry will be laying up treasure in heaven. That's why Christ said in Matthew 6:19-21,

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

5. Do you want a 100% return on your investment? Do you want to put your time and energy where you're guaranteed a no-risk return? Invest in people. Be active in leading others to Christ. Disciple others here in this church. Place your time and energy where it will bear the greatest fruit for eternity, then reap the harvest of encouragement and joy which Paul experienced with the Thessalonican church.

6. "We can turn to You in prayer, Lord, only because You considered people the highest priority on Your agenda. You have set the example for us by valuing the individual in that You demonstrated Your concern for each person on the cross. We thank you that Christ would have died for each one of us even if we were the only individual who needed salvation, but we realize that we all need You. We especially need You to enable us to invest our lives into this pursuit which has the greatest impact on eternity, the priority of making people our first concern in life--of being others-centered rather than self-centered. This is our prayer. This is our commitment. Guide us in specific ways to demonstrate this commitment this week. For Your sake, Amen."

Bulletin Outline with Blanks Completed

# Introduction

### Subject: How can we strengthen others?

### Preview: Paul’s pattern of strengthening the suffering church at Thessalonica will reveal *three ways we can encourage people* too.

# I. Go in person (2:17-20).

## Paul tried to strengthen the church as his greatest blessing in a *personal visit* (2:17-20).

## The best way to show others how valuable they are is *in person*.

# II. Bring others into their lives (3:1-9).

## Paul strengthened the church by *sending Timothy* (3:1-9).

## If you can’t strengthen others in person, then send someone else!

# III. Pray for them (3:10-13).

## The way Paul encouraged the church was by praying for them (3:10-13).

## Never neglect to build others up through prayer!

# Conclusion

### Strengthen others to show you care for them (Main Idea).

### Which of these three ways can you infuse strength into someone else?

Bulletin Outline with Blanks

# Introduction

### Subject: How can we \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ others?

### Preview: Paul’s pattern of strengthening the suffering church at Thessalonica will reveal *three ways we can encourage people* too.

# I. Go in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (2:17-20).

## Paul tried to strengthen the church as his greatest blessing in a *personal visit* (2:17-20).

## The best way to show others how valuable they are is *in person*.

# II. Bring \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ into their lives (3:1-9).

## Paul strengthened the church by *sending Timothy* (3:1-9).

## If you can’t strengthen others in person, then send someone else!

# III. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for them (3:10-13).

## The way Paul encouraged the church was by praying for them (3:10-13).

## Never neglect to build others up through prayer!

# Conclusion

### Strengthen others to show you \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for them (Main Idea).

### Which of these three ways can you infuse strength into someone else?

1. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary., The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 2:697. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)