Grace Fellowship Church Fort Worth, TX Rick Griffith

16 Nov 1986 Message 6 of 10

NIV 30 Minutes

**What Does it Mean to "Really Live?"**

***1 Thessalonians 3:6-13***

**Topic:** Joy

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

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

**Purpose:** The listeners will invest themselves in at least one new person or family.

**Meditation:**

**Reading:**

**Song:**

# Introduction

### Interest: A spa cannot resolve problems.

#### 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 trouble free 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!

### 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.

### Main Idea: That's the message of our text today. *We experience the greatest joy in life when we participate in others' spiritual growth, especially through our prayers for them.*

### Preview: As we dig into 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13 we'll see how people were Paul's most satisfying and greatest investment of his life.

### Background: 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.

### 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.

(So how do we experience the greatest joy in life?)

# 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.]**

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

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

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

##### 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).

##### 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!

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

#### 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)…

##### At Philippi he had been cast in jail and then asked to leave the city.

##### At Thessalonica he had been forced to leave and promise he would not return.

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

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

### 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)

### 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).

#### 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.)

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

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

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

#### He revisited all the cities (14:21)

#### Elders were appointed in each city (14:23)

#### 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).

### 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.

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

#### 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]

#### 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:

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

##### They continue to spend time in intimacy with the Lord

##### They continually reach out to others in spiritual ministry

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

### 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…

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

#### (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…)

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

### 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!"

### 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.

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

#### How often do you thank God for friends at church?

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

#### 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 asks two things: 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…

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

### 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.

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

#### 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.

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

#### 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.

#### 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.

#### 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* ).

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

#### Remember back in 1 Thessalonians 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.

#### 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.

#### 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…)

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

### Notice that we must direct this love towards all men, Christians and non-Christians alike.

### 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?

#### 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?

#### 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?

#### 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!

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

#### 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).

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

#### 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.

#### I think the message for us is clear: we need to be involved in more biblical prayer. This is 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!

(So how do we experience the greatest joy in life?)

# Conclusion

### 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.

### 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:

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

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

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

#### 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.

### 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!

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

#### Our homes will someday burn up.

#### Our cars will eventually break down.

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

### 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."

### 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 Thessalonian church.

### "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."

# Preliminary Questions

**Verses Questions**

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

# Purpose: Why is this passage in the Bible?

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

# Questions

# Tentative Subject/Complement Statements

Text

# Possible Illustrations

### Text

# Possible Applications

### Text

**Title**

***Passage***

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

# *Exegetical Idea*:

# I.

# II.

# III.

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

The listeners will

**Homiletical Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)

# Introduction

### Interest:

### Need:

### Subject:

### Background:

### Preview:

### Text:

(Transition into MPI here.)

# I.

[Restate MP here.]

(Transition into MPII here.)

# II.

[Restate MP here.]

(Transition into MPIII here.)

# III.

[Restate MP here.]

(Transition into the MI here.)

# Conclusion

### (MI).

### Main Points

### Exhortation/Application



**Rick Griffith**

1986

Message of 10

**Title**

***Passage***

# Introduction

Subject with a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ blank answer in hidden text

# I. MP has a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ answer (verses).

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# II. MP has a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ answer (verses).

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## SP has a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ answer (verses).

# Conclusion

### Main Idea has a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ answer (verses).

### Application question

**Thought Questions**

1. Read the passage aloud. Contrast:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issue** | **Contrast** |
| Text | Text |
| Text | Text |
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1. Text-based question

Text

Text

Text

Text

1. Application to your own Christian experience

Text

Text

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