

**September 3, 2023**

**1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 ESV**

*11* Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, *12* and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, *13* so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Scriptures for further study:

Matthew 6:5-13

John 17:1-26

Ephesians 1:15-22

Ephesians 3:14-21

Philippians 1:9-11

Colossians 1: 3-14



**Paul's Prayer**  
**1 Thessalonians 3:11-13**

**BIG IDEA:** Because God is Almighty and Active in our lives, then we are to pray to Him for direction and growth.

**OUTLINE**

1. The Object of Christian Prayer
2. God's Directing Hand (3:11)
3. God's Growth Plan for Christians (3:12)
4. God's Resemblance in Christians (3:13)

"Thus, in Paul's prayer we see a theology that is essential to Christian faith and life. There is one God in three persons, God is the Sovereign to whom we may pray, and God receives believers in Jesus as dearly beloved children who may refer to Him as "our God".

-Richard Phillips

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“...[Paul] relied on God to orchestrate ministry opportunities that Paul himself could never produce”

- Richard Phillips

In the year 49 the Edict of Claudius commanded that all Jews leave Rome. Paul and Silas traveled to southern Galatia through Asia Minor, on to Macedonia, which included Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea and then Achaia, where they visited Athens and Corinth. In 1 Thess. 3:11-13, Paul concludes his thanksgiving and encouragement described in 1 Thess. 1:3-3:13, with a pastoral prayer for his converts. He prays that he may be able to revisit the community and that the Thessalonians will abound in love, with the result that they will be blamelessly holy at Jesus’ second coming. The fact that holiness will characterize those who participate in the second coming lends urgency to Paul’s teaching in 1 Thess. 4 & 5.

- ESV Study Bible (1 Thessalonians, 2023)

“The Thessalonians were working hard at loving one another (1:3). However, you never reach a point in your spiritual journey where your love stops growing (1 Cor. 13:8,13).”

- Mark Howell

***Praise to Jesus.*** Praise God this week that He desires for us to talk with Him in prayer. Praise Him that He is in control of all things, and He invites us to approach His throne of grace with confidence (Hebrews 4:16).

***Repentance through Jesus.*** Ask God to show you how you should repent this week. Perhaps it is for a lack of love or a lack of holiness. Perhaps it is for your prayer life. Or maybe it is for your view of God.

***Consecration for Jesus.*** Ask God to give you the grace this week to pray for your family, friends, and your church based on what God taught you from this passage. Ask God to remind you of who He is and for you to be in awe of Him and His love for His people.

## DISCIPLESHIP DURING THE WEEK

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. What did you learn about God from this passage? How can our knowledge of God’s sovereignty increase and deepen our prayer life?
2. What did you learn about prayer from this passage?
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:18 and 3:11. What does this teach us about God and Satan? Is God prompting you to pray to Him for direction currently? If so, what is He directing you to pray about?
4. If Paul got the good report that the Thessalonians were showing love for one another (1: 3 and 3:6), why does he pray for “the Lord make you increase and abound in love” (3:12)?
5. What is the relationship between Christ’s Second Coming and our growth in holiness?

## FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. What is prayer? How did Jesus teach us to pray? (*Prayer is talking to God. The Bible teaches us to praise God, thank God, confess our sins to God, and to bring our requests to God in prayer. We are taught to pray to God our Father, through the name of Jesus Christ, in the power of the God the Holy Spirit. Jesus taught us to pray by giving us the model of what we call “The Lord’s Prayer”.*)
2. To whom does Paul address this prayer? (*He prays to God and Father and our Lord Jesus.*)
3. What is Paul’s request in verse 11? What does this teach us about God? (*He prays for God to direct him back to Thessalonica. This teaches us that God is the One who can direct our paths. He is active in our lives, and He is Almighty and in control.*)
4. What is Paul’s request in verse 12? What does this teach us about our spiritual growth as Christians? (*He asks for God to cause the Thessalonians to grow in their love for each other and for all people. This prayer request reminds us that we will always have a need to grow in our love until we are with Jesus in eternity.*)
5. What is Paul’s prayer request in verse 13? What does this teach us about our Christian life? (*Paul prayed for God to move in us in order that we would be holy as God is holy. This teaches us that our lives as Christians should be marked by holiness. We will never be perfectly holy until we are with Jesus in heaven, but God can lead us to grow in our holiness.*)
6. Take time today to pray as a family for God to cause your love to increase and your growth in holiness to continue.

Scriptures for further study:

Matthew 6:5-13

## FOR STUDENTS

1. Paul ends this chapter with a prayer. What specifically did he ask God to do in verses 11-13?
2. Does this sound like a prayer you might pray for those you love?
3. Read vv. 11-13. What does this prayer teach us about God's character or actions? How does seeing God this way give you confidence in Him as you carry a burden for others?
4. From this prayer, what do you notice about what spiritual maturity looks like?
5. Two identifiers of spiritual maturity: love for others and holiness (love for God revealed in a set-apart lifestyle). What are the implications of these two things for your own life?
6. God is the one who "causes" us to increase and overflow with love for people and God is the one who "makes" our hearts blameless and holy through Jesus. He is the one who does the transforming work that we could never do. The passage from this week is a prayer, so spend some time praying that God would grow your love for Him and for ALL people and that He would help us truly surrender our lives to Him.

## FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. These verses (3:11-13), represent a powerful multi-faceted prayer of the Apostle Paul. And looking back on verse 10, we can also see there just how fervent Paul is in his prayer life.

**Question:** How is your own prayer life at the moment? If prayer is not something you regularly practice, don't worry that you are not praying as often as Paul. Just start by praying a short prayer each day. Even just a few minutes a day will often lead to meaningful growth in your relationship with God.

2. The following are some specific ways you should pray based on Paul's prayer here:

- **Pray against the Enemy (3:11)**

Paul prays that God will clear the way. He is referring to the fact that Satan has thus far stopped him (2:18) from coming to Thessalonica. We too must learn to pray against Satan and be aware of his evil tactics.

- **Pray for spiritual enlargement (3:12)**

Of all the characteristics we should have as Christians, we should especially exhibit love. And not just love for each other (which is fairly easy), but also love "for everyone," which is harder to do because many people are difficult to love. But God also grants supernatural power to love everyone if we will ask Him.

- **Pray for your heart to be strengthened (3:13)**

The "heart" represents the whole of your inner nature, thoughts, feelings, will. The heart equals your whole personality. Pray for your heart, especially that your heart will be a heart of love!

- **Pray for holiness (3:13)**

Pray that you will become blameless and holy. By holy, Paul means that we are totally and completely set apart for God. May this be the desire of our hearts. Know that if you are a believer, God already sees you as holy in His sight, having been justified by Jesus Christ. But we also should desire to be sanctified, and to more and more live holy lives, as those set apart for God.

## A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica



*Sunflowers*, Vincent Van Gough, 1888

**About the artist and painting:** In 1888, the Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh moved to southern France with a dream. He wanted to establish an art community where painters could live, work, and inspire one another. One of his mentors, a man he deeply respected, Paul Gauguin, agreed to come and live in this community. As a symbol of his thankfulness and happiness, Van Gogh painted a series of sunflower paintings and hung them in his room. The sunflower meant to reflect his surprising joy towards achieving a dream.

The apostle Paul was probably not an artist but he did produce a letter expressing his surprising joy, his thankfulness, and happiness. This letter was his “sunflower” to the church Thessalonica. It’s Paul’s verbal painting of Gospel Gratitude. What are things you a most grateful for in your life? Has the Gospel taken root in your heart? If so, what fruits of gratitude are being produced and overflowing in your life as a result of Jesus?

In his opening words from Paul to the Thessalonians, he writes:

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,  
3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. The same faith, hope, and love that made a difference in the lives of believers then can make a difference in your life now. **“I’m excited for what God has in store for us First Presbyterian Church, as the Spirit washes us in these words of Gospel gratitude. May Christ be our hope for the world to come, our faith for today, and our love for a lifetime”** Pastor Bill Pardue



## **The purpose of 1 Thessalonians:**

“A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica”

"The purpose of 1 Thessalonians is for Paul to convey to the Thessalonians how encouraged he is by the good report about them and to deal with other aspects of the news brought by Timothy." - Cara, 1 and 2 Thess. 22-23

Paul writes to express his GRATITUDE for the firm faith of the church and their expression and commitment to brotherly love. At the same time, he desires to see the church grow in holiness and provides information and encouragement concerning the hope we have in the certain and imminent return of Jesus Christ.

"The concern Paul had for this congregation was so overwhelming he decided to send Timothy back to the city to 'strengthen and encourage' the believers in their faith and to 'find out about' their faith...1 Thessalonians was written after Timothy arrived in Corinth to report his findings to Paul...He brought good news of the faith, love, and steadfastness of the congregation despite hardships. - Green, PNTC, 52.