



**“Help for the Homesick:
Homesick But Hungry”**

1 Thessalonians 2

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If you’ve ever been away from home for any extended period of time, you know that the longing to *be* at home can sometimes be softly assuaged by at least making your surroundings *feel* more like home. During World War II, as millions of America’s young men were shipped to the other side of the globe to engage in what would become the deadliest conflict in the history of the world, leaders realized they had to do something to make that very foreign place feel just a little bit like home. National WWII Museum Curator Meg Roussel recounts the unlikely but profound importance of a certain drink in making the very foreign war front feel more familiar to our fighting men:

For the men serving overseas . . . a soda fountain had become a foreign concept; foreign, that is, until 1943 when Gen. Dwight Eisenhower sought to make the soda available to his soldiers as close to the battle front as possible. In an attempt to raise and maintain morale, Eisenhower sent an urgent telegram to the States requesting 3 million bottled Cokes to be shipped to North Africa—where at this time he was serving as Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force—along with the equipment and supplies needed to wash, refill, bottle, and cap that same amount twice monthly without, of course, displacing necessary military cargo. Once approved by Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, the Coca-Cola Company was more than happy to comply with Eisenhower’s orders (You can access the full article here: <https://bit.ly/37GikUy>).

Can you imagine Gen. Eisenhower’s rationale for such a request? He needed to boost morale, and he concluded that the best thing he could do to accomplish that task and fortify his soldiers was to get them a Coke. What’s amazing is that it worked. Men wrote their loved ones that they were so thrilled to have that taste of home, and they were encouraged in the fight.

I think the homesickness we experience as followers of Christ can also be softly assuaged by at least making our surroundings *feel* more like Home. We do that by seeking to bring heavenly reality into our earthly moment. Like a cold Coca-Cola in a hostile foreign land, we have been sent to give the world a taste of Home. We do that by living our faith before a watching world, being intentional about showing the love, kindness, and compassion of Christ in all we do. God cultivates in us a hunger to see His will be done—on earth as it is in Heaven—and as that hunger intensifies and propels us to action, this old world feels just a little bit more like Home.

Big Idea – *I’m Homesick, but in Christ, I’m hungry.*

1. I'm hungry for the gospel to transform (2:1-8).

¹ For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³ For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us (1 Thessalonians 2:1-8).

Paul, Silas, and Timothy put their lives on the line to deliver the gospel message. They endured hardships, beatings, imprisonments, persecution, the threat of death, and all sorts of mistreatment for the sake of the gospel. Why? Because seeing people's lives transformed by the power of the gospel is worth it. Seeing people's lives transformed by the power of the gospel is the ultimate way in which followers of Christ can usher in heavenly reality into our earthly moment. These men were hungry for gospel transformation, and they went to amazing lengths to pursue it.

Life in a fallen world is hard and often heartbreaking. There's a harshness to life that, try as we might to avoid it, comes crashing down on all of us in various ways and to varying degrees. Some people experience harder moments than others, but suffering is universal in the scope of a Genesis 3 world. Everybody hurts sometimes, and pain drives those of us who trust and follow Jesus to long even more intensely for the world described in the penultimate chapter of the Bible:

Revelation 21:1-5 - Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

We long for that experience, and we wait for it with eager expectation as we proclaim with the Apostle John, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). But we also know that there's only one way anybody can experience that great reality someday—by trusting and following Jesus Christ as Lord (see John 14:6). We watch people grope around in the dark for hope, trying so many different and completely ineffective ways to ease the pain of their brokenness, and we long to see them come to the light of Christ. They can't drink enough, snort enough, consume enough, escape enough, or find enough pleasure to take away the pain, and we see the destruction their efforts bring. We know that pursuit. We've lived it. It doesn't work. We are driven by compassion to help people find hope—true, lasting, eternal hope—in the One who calls Himself the "light of the world" (John 8:12). When we help them find it, this world feels a little bit more like Home.

Questions for Reflection / Discussion:

Have you ever considered evangelism as the fruit of compassion? How does that view change yours?

2. I'm hungry for the Word to be lived (2:9-16).

⁹For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹²we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

¹³And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. ¹⁴For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind ¹⁶by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last! (1 Thessalonians 2:9-16).

Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians about the way they lived their lives before them in Thessalonica, emphasizing that they walked in a manner worthy of God. He reminds them that they were diligent, holy, righteous, and blameless in their conduct. They exhorted them and encouraged them and charged them to walk in a manner worthy of God—in short, to emulate the behavior they were seeing lived before them. Paul urged the Thessalonians, as he urged the Ephesians, to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Ephesians 4:1).

Paul also reminds them of his gratitude to God that they received the Word of God as what it is—the Word of God. They received the Word of God to the degree that they patterned their lives after its teaching and endured suffering for standing in its truth. Their faith was more than a thought in their minds or a feeling in their hearts; it was the foundation upon which they built their lives and the motivating factor by which they lived. God had called them to this life; He calls us to the same.

What does it mean to accept the Word of God as the Word of God? It means that when you and the Bible disagree, the Bible wins. It means that you live your life by the *a priori* assumption that if there is a disagreement between you, God is right and you are wrong. It is not your job to get God on your side; it is your job to get on God's side. Every time.

To do that, you have to read the Word of God, accept it as the Word of God, and live your life based upon its truth. It means that you embrace the admonition of James:

James 1:22-25 - ²²But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

The sermon of your life will out-preach the sermon of your lips, every time. When you live your faith, the world feels a little bit more like Home.

Questions for Reflection / Discussion:

Do you believe the Word of God? Are you building your life accordingly? How can you grow in this pursuit?

3. I'm hungry for the community of Christ to encourage (2:17-20).

¹⁷ But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy (1 Thessalonians 2:17-20).

Paul, Silas, and Timothy longed to be reunited with their Thessalonian brothers and sisters in Christ. They missed them. Their hearts' desire was to be with them. They had "great desire" to see them face-to-face, and Paul referred to their being apart as having been "torn away . . . for a short time." He further says that it was Satan who kept them apart. They wanted to be together. Perhaps you can identify with that longing.

This study is being written during the COVID-19 pandemic, when so much of what is normal in our world has had to be changed. In our church, for example, we went from gathering several times a week to "stir up one another to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24) to being completely separated from each other. We have endured months and months without being able to gather collectively as a complete body, and although we are so blessed by the ability in 2020 to gather virtually, it's just not the same. We miss hugs and handshakes, shared meals and fellowship gatherings, serving alongside one another, and just being able to see each other's unmasked, smiling faces. Honestly, this separation has heightened our sense of Homesickness.

What's even worse is when our brothers and sisters in Christ endure suffering during this time. We are so accustomed to going to each other, being with each other, and journeying alongside one another in the face of life's deepest struggles. We have had to maintain appropriate distance to ensure the safety of those who are more vulnerable to the most negative effects of COVID-19, and we have therefore had to be creative and innovative in the ways we find to care for one another.

Bottom line, church family is called church *family* for a reason. Theologically, we who trust and follow Jesus are united as brothers and sisters in Christ as we have all been adopted by grace into the family of God. In that sense, we are truly brothers and sisters, and our bond goes deeper than DNA. Practically, we live our lives as brothers and sisters, too. We love each other, we support each other, we sometimes don't get along with each other, we forgive each other, and we build life together.

The church is the body of believers who will one day gather around the throne of God in worship. We are the foretaste of the future, and God had placed us here to build up and encourage one another in love along the way. We are to model heavenly reality in this earthly moment. We are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We are to be a peculiar people who live differently, love differently, and face life differently.

One of the greatest gifts God has given us in Christ is the gift of each other, and the longer we live, the more we realize that we need each other. When the community of Christ embraces and lives out its calling to love one another, this world feels a little bit more like Home.

Questions for Reflection / Discussion:

Are you part of a local church family? Are you currently building healthy relationships with others who trust and follow Jesus? How could your life be better if you more intentionally cultivated meaningful relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ?

Final Thought

This world sure doesn't feel much like home, does it? Our Homesickness can lead us to interesting places as we seek to somehow make this strange, foreign land *feel* a little more like Home. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown, I was scrolling through Facebook one day and came across a video of a sweet lady making homemade biscuits in an old flour bowl. Since those sorts of scenes don't pop up on my feed regularly, I was intrigued and stopped to watch. I'm so glad I did.

What I was viewing was a 73-year-old lady named Brenda Gantt in Andalusia, Alabama. Her husband passed away in 2018, and since then, she has single-handedly run their bed and breakfast, and she has remained active with her family, in her church, and in her community. She is a member of Bethany Baptist Church in Andalusia, where some of her church family asked her if she'd teach them how to cook. On March 29, 2020, just weeks into the COVID-19 shutdown, she posted a video on her Facebook page about how to make homemade biscuits, and it went viral. As of this writing, the video has 4.4 million views, and her page ["Cooking with Brenda Gantt"] has well over a million followers. A wonderful grandmother giving cooking lessons in her own kitchen and recording on her own cell phone (that sometimes rings and interrupts the video) has nearly 1.2 million followers. That's viral!

You know what I love the most about Brenda Gantt? She regularly references her church, and she often invites her followers to tune into Bethany's worship services on Sunday mornings. What's even more important is that she regularly talks about her faith in Jesus Christ. It is obvious that Jesus is more than some sort of dry doctrine to Mrs. Brenda. Jesus is her Lord and Savior, and Jesus is her friend. Jesus is living and active in Mrs. Brenda's life, and even when she's just showing how to pull the strings out of a stalk of celery or teaching her followers how to make chicken and dumplings, the light of Christ radiates through her.

What God has brought about through the cooking ministry of Brenda Gantt is amazing. From her kitchen in south Alabama, she shines brightly the light of Jesus Christ. She makes this world *feel* a little bit more like Home, even though we know it isn't. She encourages as she instructs, and she makes the world a better place to be.

How might God use you and me to make this old world *feel* a little bit more like Home? We can't bring an end to pain and suffering, and we can't prevent the brokenness caused by sin. But I believe God desires to cultivate in us a hunger for the gospel to transform lives, a hunger for the Word of God to be lived, and a hunger for the community of Christ to encourage. As we engage with the Holy Spirit to pursue these longings, I believe we'll help bring heavenly reality in our earthly moment, and we'll make this world *feel* a bit more like Home. Let's give it a try.