

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

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[0 : 00] So, we're going to open the Bibles to 1 Thessalonians now. I will also have the texts on the screen.

It's nice to have your Bible open, but also it will be there for you. As I get started, I actually want to do something very strange. Those of you who know me are not shocked that I'm going to be doing something strange.

I actually want to take a picture of all of you. So, if you knew me and Lindsay and our girls when we were here, especially, give us a wave. This is a picture, not a video. All right, and I'll come this way because I can't fit all of you into one picture, which is an amazing problem to have.

That's strange, right? Take a picture. Lindsay and the girls are going to love just zooming in and picking out all of your faces. That's also actually related to something that Paul writes to the Thessalonians that we will look at in a moment.

It's one of the warmest, like the relationally warmest letters of any that Paul writes. He adores the Thessalonian believers. And he was only with them for three to five weeks.

[1 : 16] We were with you all for six years, personally. And then we moved to Belfast for three, which meant we came back regularly. And God did some amazing things in our lives through Bon Accord.

Not least, God convinced me through you all that it's really important and joyful and hard sometimes to actually love and serve each other in the body of Christ.

Before that, I was just kind of me and God. And I knew it was important, you know, church and all that stuff. But there was something very fundamental that shifted in me when I got into your all's lives and when you got into our lives.

And so I take this picture because I deeply love you all at Bon Accord. And the half of you that moved up to Inverness. One of whom is back here.

I'm so glad you're here. For multiple reasons. Some other fundamental things happened as well. You all and our wider Aberdonian and Loessach and et cetera friends taught us that the American way of thinking is not the only one.

[2 : 31] And in fact has a lot of flaws and holes. I also learned that, you know, some Scottish ways of thinking have some flaws and holes. But it stretched me in a way that actually has been crucial for the ministry that I do.

Which is serving pastors and others around the world who think differently and have different life experience. So some amazing things happened in me and in our family here.

And I just am filled with true warmth. And even those of you whom I don't recognize, you are blessed to be in this congregation.

And they're blessed to have you here. I know because I keep hearing about it. Meeting with people. There's a question that I do want to start in your minds.

A question that... Oh, I have the clicker. I was wondering why you weren't changing everything, Ian. Yes, there it is. Where do I point this, by the way?

[3 : 33] Because it's not working. Okay, yeah. There's the question. It's actually just a partial question. Now we really live. If. A partial question means you need to fill it in.

Thank you, James, for prompting that. What would you say? If you were prompted with, okay, before not so much, but now. Now we really live.

If. If what? We're going to get to that in a little bit. It's a bit later in our passage where Paul says this. And so that's kind of the theme. Hold that in the back of your mind. Truly answer it. So it's not exactly a rhetorical question. I don't recognize that slide.

There, that's a slide that I recognize. So as we get into this, I do want to... I know some of you are itching to know about my family. So I want to just throw a few pictures out.

[4 : 33] Because they're dear to your hearts, too. That is what my wife, Lindsay, and my daughter, Anya, on the left. And my daughter, Lydia, who her personality still constantly carries a broadsword. That's what they looked like when we left Aberdeen. And that's in Belfast. So to remind you of back then. That was our girls in primary school and nursery in Belfast. Again, right after or shortly after we left here. They don't look like that anymore. We came back six and a half years ago for Ian Smith's wedding. And that's what we were like then. There's Anya. Some of you will remember them fondly. And this is what they look like now. And if you wonder why they have uniforms on, ask me after. Because I'm not going to tell you right now. But that's my two daughters. Anya is 16 and Lydia is 13. And God is growing them in some amazing ways. And they're going through some amazing struggles.

[5 : 37] Ask me more about that later if you want. Lindsay, I'll tell you more about her, too, after. But just a brief glimpse. Lindsay is working now full time for the first time since Anya was born. With a ministry called Together for Good. And you might be able to read what they do. Creating pathways for the church to come alongside vulnerable children and families in Christ-centered ministry. I'll tell you more about that later if you're interested. So remember your questions. Okay, now we're going to get into the text. So that is the ancient Mediterranean world. That's the Roman Empire in orange. And you can see a big box that's zooming in on the area where Acts takes place. And then there's a wee box in the left of the big box. That's where we're going right now. To ancient Thessalonica. You see how, if you can see it, it has like three fingers. This little peninsula. Here's a better picture of it.

[6 : 42] So there are the three fingers. So if you look up at the top right, Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke, and probably others arrived in Neapolis and went to Philippi. Where God opened some people's hearts to know Jesus. To give them life. Because that's what God loves to do. He opened Lydia's hearts and her family's hearts. And then Paul and Silas were falsely accused. Arrested with no trial. Publicly beaten to the place where their backs were bloody and had to be cleaned later. And then thrown in jail. No trial, nothing. No chance to defend themselves. Sat in jail overnight. And God did something. He saved the jailer through them being there. And he saved the jailer's family. So God is doing amazing things in Philippi. Through really hard stuff. The officials kick Paul and Silas. Or they politely ask them to leave immediately.

[7 : 39] So with backs bruised and bloodied, they walk, which you can see. So they walk from here through this mountainous terrain. Through Amphipolis. You heard that in the text. Through Apollonia. And over these mountains to Thessalonica. Where there's just a great reception. They must have been so sore and discouraged. In fact, they mention that they are. But God opens up people's hearts. As we read in Acts 17. He just started blessing people with life in Jesus. Through their ministry. And then things got hard again. As we read. Some Jews got very jealous. And they struck up a whole mob. The city in an uproar. I mean, think about what that would be like. If all of a sudden there was a crowd. A mob.

[8 : 33] Marching angrily. A mob. Shouting down here. And come in to drag you out. And do who knows what to you. It's terrifying. So Paul flees. So he's only with the Thessalonians a few weeks. And he gets sent down to Berea. They chase him. A very long way. They kick him out. And he flees all the way to Athens. So that's the setting. Of 1 Thessalonians. And here's the bigger picture of where he fled. From way up here in Thessalonica. To Berea. And then either 400 miles by sea to Athens. Or 500 miles by land. And now he's in Athens. And he's wondering. What happened. What's happening to the Thessalonian Christians. They're weeks old. Maybe a few months old by this point. Brand new Christians. In a hostile environment. With Jews and city officials.

[9 : 31] And mobs that are angry enough. To do damage and take their money. How are these believers doing? So we're going to pick up.

In 1 Thessalonians. Mainly chapter 3. But I'll read you a verse. Chapter 17. Sorry. Chapter 2 verse 17. First. Paul is writing to the Thessalonians now.

That he's heard from Timothy. How they are. He says. Since we were torn away from you. Brothers and sisters. For a short time. And in person.

Not in heart. We endeavored. The more eagerly. And with great desire. To see you face to face. They weren't able to though. And then he says in. Verse 1.

Therefore. When we could bear it no longer. We were willing to be left behind. In Athens alone. And we sent Timothy. Our brother. And God's co-worker. In the gospel of Christ.

[10 : 27] To establish. And exhort you. In your faith. So that no one would be. Moved. No one would be moved.

By these afflictions. For you yourselves know. That we are destined for this. These afflictions. For when we were with you. We kept telling you beforehand. That we were to suffer affliction.

Just as has come to pass. And just as you know. Right. Notice. Notice that. Boxed in highlighted bit. Paul's hunger. Is that these Christians.

Would be established. And exhorted. And not moved. In the faith. No matter what hit them. Picture. Picture a tree.

I was just in Belfast. Before this. And Storm Ewan. Had gone through. And these aren't from Belfast. But it looked a bit like this. So picture. A tree that does. That is not well established.

[11 : 25] And does not have deep roots. And a storm comes. Out of nowhere. And hits it. And. I mean. That tree is. Going to die. And not just die.

But. But when the tree is uprooted. Because it's not firm. It. It hurts other things too. I'm sure you all know. People who. Who have been hit by a storm.

And they did not have deep roots. And a firm foundation. In the faith. But there are trees. That can. Stand. To stand firm.

And not be moved. No matter what the storm is. That hits them. Like these trees. Are getting battered. The ones on the left. If you look on the right. You see. Why. Those trees.

Tend to fare well. For those. Somebody has gone by. And actually established. A firm foundation. For the trees. They've nurtured the trees. And cared for them.

[12 : 19] And look at the root system. On those trees. They're so deep. And expansive. That no matter what. Comes and hits them hard. They stand firm. Established.

Not moved. By any of these storms. And that's what. Paul. Is hungering. For. These other believers. So he says.

So we sent Timothy. To establish. And exhort you. In your faith. So that no one. Would be moved. By these afflictions. In verse five. For this reason. When I could.

Bear it no longer. I sent to learn. About your faith. For fear. That somehow. The tempter. Had tempted you. Or. And our labor. Would be in vain. Maybe you know.

Some people who. They've professed. Faith in Christ. Things were going well. And now. And now they're not. They were moved. They were crashed down. They were converted.

[13 : 18] So to speak. They prayed the prayer. Even showed some signs of fruit. And they. And they just fell. With a crash. When temptation. And storms hit. And.

Paul can't bear. To. To not know. If that's happening. To these new believers. Or not. And so he writes. Continues. But now that Timothy's come. To us from you.

And he's brought us. The good news. That's the word gospel. He's brought us the gospel. Of your faith and love. And he's reported. That you always remember us.

Kindly. And that you long to see us. Just as we long to see you. For this reason. Brothers and sisters. In all of our distress. And affliction. We've been comforted. About you. Through your faith. I didn't understand. That kind of passion. Before. We. We were here. With you all. And. And I've been changed.

[14 : 11] And this makes so much sense to me. Now. And I'll tell you some stories. In just a few minutes. About why it makes even more sense. Now. Then Paul writes. For now.

We really live. If. You. Are standing. Firm. Or standing fast. In the Lord. Okay. Think. Think about what you answered.

Or what you filled in. To that. To that question. Now. We really live. If. If what? I wonder how many of you.

Filled it in with. Well. Now that I. Have heard. That. That a Christian I know. Is standing firm in the Lord. Now I actually. Really. Live. I never would have filled it in that way.

You know. I probably would have said. Now that I'm in. Or if I'm in Christ. Absolutely true. Now I really live. If I'm in Jesus. Absolutely true. And there might be all sorts of ways.

[15:11] That you might fill that in. I didn't feel alive. I didn't. I wasn't fully alive. Until now. And I might be really good things. I didn't. I didn't. So I'm not saying. To use this.

In replace. In a place of those. But. But I want to. I want to challenge us. With. With what Paul is feeling. I didn't know. How. You were doing.

In your faith. I had no idea. But now I've heard. That you're standing firm. Established. Not moved. Even when the storms hit. Ah. Now.

Now I can truly live. With that knowledge. I put up a little prayer. That. That I've been. Learning. More deeply. All. All the time. Just in that corner. Something like. And. And borrow this prayer. Or something like it. Please let me go. God. And help.

[16:05] That. Young Christian. Train. Help train them. Or. Or. Or. Disciple them. In living. For you. According to your word. Please God.

Let. I mean. Even just. Next to me. Or down the streets. Or in a different country. But just whatever. May. God. Make my orientation. And make my passion be. Let me help that person.

Grow in the faith. So. Before I start. Showing you some pictures. And telling you some stories. About.

Some of the training. That I get to do. I want to give us. Three challenges. And the last of the three. You will launch us. Into the. The final part of this. With a bit of the passage. Coming back in. So. First challenge. What are you doing? And I ask this to myself. What am I doing? To personally press on. In the faith.

[16:59] To. To become more established. So that. So that you are not moved. And so that I'm not moved. When. Afflictions. When hard things happen. When temptations come.

What are the things. That you're actually doing. Personally. To be more established. And not move. Second. Because. So there's.

Belly button gazing. Self analysis. It's an important part. Of the Christian life. But it is. Absolutely not. The only. Stance we take. This is another. Very Christian stance. So the second challenge. Is. For the community. For. Bon accord. Community of faith here. There will be people. That you're connected to. Who have begun.

The journey. With Jesus. And you don't know. How they're doing. What. I mean. Can. Can you really live.

[17:54] Until you find out. I still struggle. To feel that. Passion. But. But I'm convinced. It's a biblical. Christ like passion. So I need to keep asking myself.

And I ask you. Think about that person. That is in your life. In the church here. Or somehow else. In your life. Who has started. With Jesus. But you don't know.

If the roots are growing deep. You don't know. If they're established. Do you feel. Some kind of. Not yet. Aliveness. Until you know. I encourage you to.

To have the conversation. And the third challenge. And this launches us. Into the. Into the rest. Challenge for our action.

What can. What can any of us do. Practically do. If we do know. That a new Christian. Is not. Gaining a firm foundation.

[18:51] Or growing deep. Or being established. So suppose you do ask that friend. And you find out. That they are growing in the faith. And you start celebrating. Or what if you find out.

They're really not. They don't have roots. And there are storms hitting them. And they're. They're kind of tipping. Like that tree. So. So then. What do you do? I get the.

The honor. Of. Going around the world. And basically doing this. Kind of thing. In a lot of places. In the world. So I'm going to tell you.

Show you some pictures. And tell you a few stories. In relation to. What Paul is demonstrating. In 1st Thessalonians 3. So there are a lot of Christians.

In this world. And in fact. There continue to be more Christians. Evangelism is actually going pretty well. In a lot of places in the world. There are pockets where.

[19 : 48] Where evangelism is the big need. But there are loads. Of new Christians. All over the world. How are they. Are they getting established? Are their roots starting to grow down?

How are they doing? Well. Are there pastors? Are there. Are there leaders. Who can help nurture them. Or strengthen them? I don't know if you know this. But.

In the West. I'll say in America. And the UK. Let's call that the West. In general. There is one. Pastor. Who has been trained. How many.

How many people in this room. Have theological training. Raise your hand. All right. We got training. Training. Training. Training. All right. You all are doing really well. That's a lot of folk. Who have studied scripture. And theology. To help nurture you. In general. There's one trained pastor. For every 250 Christians. In the West. Move outside of the West.

[20 : 45] To the rest of the world. To South America. To Asia. To Africa. And it's not one to 250. It's now one trained pastor. For every 450. Thousand.

Christians. 450. Thousand. Christians. And one person. Has been trained. In how to understand. Scripture.

Preach. Teach. Disciple. Who is there to help them. Be established. And the roots grow deep.

There's a huge need. For actually training. Pastors.

And other leaders. To equip them. To help. Those new Christians. And that's what we get to do. At Training Leaders International. And you all have been a key part. A key partner.

With us in this. For eight years now. I don't know if you realize that. But eight years. You've been partnering with us in this. There are a few glimpses. Of our family. Top left.

[21 : 40] When we. When you first sent us. Middle. A few years after. And then. The bottom right. Was just recent. Again. I'll tell you more stories. About our family later.

If you're interested. So I'm just going to. Go through. Just quickly. Some pictures. Of the places. That you've sent me. To train. Pastors. And other leaders. Over the past eight years.

And I'll tell you. A few select stories. But in general. Let me just. Kind of give you an impression. Of what God is doing. Okay. So that's.

North India. I'm going to tell you more stories. About that later. Because they really need prayer. That was eight years ago. One of the men. In the red shirt.

He. He has died. In the past few years. And the boy. Boy. Young man next to him. Has. Has walked away from the faith. Has gone back to. To Hindu. Religion.

[22 : 37] Because it just got too much. The pressure. To be a Christian. He. Didn't want it anymore. But others. Are planting churches now. And preaching.

And teaching faithfully. So that's India. Tanzania. I got to train. Some. Some pastors. And bishops. Of an Anglican church there.

And. I haven't heard many stories. About them. So I kind of have this part. That's not. I don't know. Truly alive. Because I don't know. How they're doing. But they seemed. To be doing some amazing things.

With God's. Power. This is Romania. Romania. Romania has. Some theological training. In different places. Some seminaries. But these guys. Are up. Way up in the north.

And. They each have. Full-time jobs. Like beekeeper. Doctor. Lawyer. Farmer. But they're also. Planting churches. All over. Northern Romania.

[23 : 34] So they have no time. Energy or resources. To go get trained. So we get to go up. To them. And train them. On their own turf. Philippines.

Most of the. Most of the. Men and women. There. And there were actually. About 60. I have a group of 15. Almost all of them. Are Filipino missionaries. To other Filipino tribes.

Up in the mountains. And jungles. And. Oh boy. Do they have some stories. About things God is doing. Through them. Mongolia. They.

They have different struggles. And I never knew. About our Mongolian brothers. And sisters before. And there are some amazing. Open doors. And there are some. Big.

Blockages. And challenges. Again. Ask me more. If you want to know more. That's Romania. Sorry. That's Mongolia. Uganda. I got to train. Some pastors there.

[24 : 32] And now. Those guys. Who are. Finishing their training. There. A three year training. In scripture. Some of those guys. Are now taking. That training. And they are training.

Some South Sudanese. Refugees. Who have fled. South Sudan. And are in. Northern Uganda. So those pastors. Are not just pastoring. But they're wanting to. To strengthen. Other pastors.

Who are in really hard places. Storms hit. In all sorts of ways. This is Brazil. Totally different scenario. But these. These brothers. Are studying to be pastors. And a number of them. Now are pastors. This was two years ago. And yeah. Two years ago. So that's Brazil. Back to North India. But a different. Different group. And this is the group. I'm going to tell you. Give you a little. Zoom in. Story about. In just a moment. And then I was in the Philippines again.

[25 : 25] Different group. And Anya came with me. On this trip. She turned 16. And so I took her along. And there she is. After church. With a teen event. At the Filipino church.

Where I preached. That was right after. She ate a thing called balut. Which a few of you know about. A few of you know about. So again. Ask about that. If you want. Then most recently. I was back in Brazil. But with a different group. And. I just want to tell you. All the stories. I mean these people. They have such interesting lives.

And God saves them. In such interesting ways. And they're doing. Such interesting things for him. And I can't tell you. Because my time's almost out. So ask. Ask about some of them.

After the service. But there's Brazil. And in fact. The places that. That TLI. Training Leaders. International. Goes and trains. Pastors and other leaders.

[26 : 20] Are all of the red dots. There on that map. And the red circles. Over the red dots. Are the specific places. Where the work that I've done.

That I've done. Specifically. In developing curriculum. Like what to train. Is in all of those places. Right now. But I mean.

What kind of dent. Is it. When there's one trained pastor. For every 450,000 Christians. So. Please keep. The world. The pastors.

And leaders. In your mind. In your prayer. How are they doing? Okay. Am I bothered. That I don't know. How our brothers and sisters. In these places.

All of the world. Are actually doing. Are they. Are they being rooted. And grounded. In faith. Or not. Let me. Let me finish.

[27 : 15] By telling you about. Ian. It says please. Pause the recording please. You don't need to. Because I'm not going to mention names. I can mention the names after. In the next.

Section. This church is in. North India. Though. So I was just there. Last January. One year ago. And. The size of that church. I don't know if there are.

200 people in there. Packed in. Most of them. Are relatively. Recent converts. Because. The Indian believers. In that place. Are.

Are evangelizing. They're. Telling people about Jesus. And people are coming to faith. And that church is flourishing. And they do have pastors. That. Have training. And are pastoring.

And guiding them well. And. And we helped those. Leaders start a seminary. So they can keep on training. More and more. They were in that room. Renting that room.

[28 : 09] For about three years. Perfect. For them. It was. It's in this. Compound. Owned by. A catholic ministry. And so the. The hindu government. Or hindi government.

Hindu government. Sorry. It's kind of like. Okay. Catholics have been here a long time. Let's. Let's just not bother them too much. Well these. They're just. Evangelical. But are. Renting space. In this. Catholic compound. And the father. Who's in charge of all of it. It's just a great guy. He wants the ministry to go forward. So he creates space. Well two weeks after I was there.

A different group of Americans. Missionaries. Came and were on the same. In a different building. Not connected to them. Not connected to TLI. Just arrived.

And they decided. Like. Like Americans do sometimes. We know best. So we're going to go out. And do some street evangelism. Which is illegal. And not knowing.

[29 : 04] That there is a vibrant church. Who is evangelizing. But they know how to do it. In their own setting. And people are coming to faith in Christ. So these Americans go out. Start telling people about Jesus. They get arrested.

And then the police arrest the father. Because he owns the property. And then they kick. They didn't arrest our folk. But they kick them out. They have no church building. They have no place to go now. Because of.

Because of this arrogance. Thought they were doing well. And just did not listen. To what God is already doing. And join that. So the church.

For a year. Has been hopping. Place to place. Like a week at a time. Three weeks maybe. They met out in fields. During the summer. They would meet in another church. But then that church would get pressure.

So that other church would say. Nope. You're out. We don't need that. Random buildings. They could be in three weeks. And then the police would come. And started to get violent.

[29 : 59] At one point. They came out of one church service. And they sent us videos. Of what was going on. The town had gathered. A bit like. Paul and Silas experienced. The town around. Had gathered.

And were shouting. And picking up rocks. Starting to push the folk. As they came out. But then it calmed down. But it might not have. So. How are our brothers and sisters doing?

We live our lives. There are people right next to us. Who need. To be asked. If their. If their foundation is getting firm. If their roots are growing deep.

And there are a lot of other brothers and sisters. In this world. That could really use your prayers. And so what I challenge you with. Is kind of in the heart. Like underlying.

Whether you pray. Or whether you go somewhere. Whatever you do. Underlying that. Is this passion. That Paul demonstrates. If I don't know.

[30 : 56] That a certain brother or sister. Is actually growing in the Lord. Firmly. With deep roots. Am I bothered? Can I really live?

Without knowing? And what might I be able to do? I'll tell you a story. After.

In the coffee time. About. Two of the particular guys. In that. Indian church. But right now. Let me close. With. The prayer. That Paul wraps up. This passage.

With. And I want to. I'll read it. But I'll kind of convert it. Into a prayer. For you. And for. These brothers and sisters. I just showed you. So. Listen.

Pray with me. As I. Use these words. Now. God. Father. Would you. Yourself. And Lord Jesus.

[31 : 54] Would you. Direct. Our way. To. The people. Who need you. To the people. Whom you have started. On the journey.

But they aren't. Firm. Would you. Please. Direct. Our way. To them. And Lord. Would you. Please. Make. Make. Make. Make. Bon Accord. And make. These brothers and sisters.

Around the world. Increase. And abound. In love. For one another. And for everyone. Just as. As you've helped me do. For Bon Accord.

And for these. Family members. Around the world. And would you. Please. Do that. So that. So that. They. Bon Accord. And others. Are established.

Would you. Establish. Their hearts. Blameless. In holiness. Before you. God. Our father. At the coming of. You. Lord. Jesus. With all of us.

[32 : 49] The saints. Please. Father. In Jesus's name. Amen. We're going to sing now. But I didn't bring. The name of the song.

What are we singing? And. Thank you. The song that's on there. Please. Rise and praise the Lord. Amen.

I was made to walk with him Yet I look for worldly treasure And forsake the king of kings But my lips open, my redeemer Though I fall, it's all unsure For Christ has paid for every failing I am his forevermore Thine are tears in times of sorrow Darkness not yet understood Through the valley I must travel

Where I see no earthly good But by his peace that flows from heaven And the strength entails me I know my pain will not be wasted Christ completes his work in me Mine are days here as a stranger Pilgrim on a narrow way One with Christ I will encounter Harm and hatred for his name But mine is armor for this battle Strong enough to last the war And he has said he will deliver

Safely to the cold shore And mine are keys to Zion City Where beside the king I walk For there my heart has found his treasure Christ is mine forevermore Christ is mine forevermore Christ is mine forevermore Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ And the love of God And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be yours both now and forever Amen And the love of God