

Model Perseverance

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[0 : 00] Please pray with me. Father God, thank you for your word. Thank you that you give it to us by your grace and you teach us by your grace. We pray that you might be proclaimed faithfully this morning.

Amen. Can I also commend everyone to the trivia and talent night last night?

It was amazing. I did think there was a distinct lack of linear algebra and optimisation. Apparently my set didn't make the cut. I was sure I calculated everything properly so that we had the maximum enjoyment for the minimum time.

I spent a while waiting to get the call back, but it never came. We spend a lot of time waiting for different things in our lives.

We wait for the bus to arrive, waiting for our confirmation email, waiting for your kids to put in their shoes. We wait just five more minutes for our spouse to be ready.

[1 : 10] But I want to ask you, what are you waiting for right now? Do you want just a cup of tea and some bickies with some coffee? Do you just want to get home because yesterday you were driving to who knows how many venues, each of them an hour apart, just because your kids had school sports and you're just exhausted?

Are you waiting for the latest IVF round or for God to provide you a spouse? Or are you just waiting until I finish droning on in an hour or two? I hope you don't fall out of your chair.

Now we've seen in the past few weeks of 1 Thessalonians that Paul's been waiting for news of the Thessalonians' faith. Samothys finally got back and we get to hear how they've been travelling in Paul's absence.

But before we get there, we have to note that verse 6 starts with a but. When I went through school, we didn't learn grammar.

Apparently it wasn't a thing we needed. But for those who did learn grammar, you'd usually use but to introduce the next clause by contrasting what came before it. Well, what came before this passage this morning?

[2 : 25] We're just going to look back through verses 1 to 5, just to get a bit of a lead up to where we are. So Paul and his colleagues couldn't bear not hearing from the Thessalonian church anymore.

The group had sent Timothy in verse 2 out to the Thessalonian church to learn of their faith. And as we've heard multiple times in previous weeks, Paul was driven out of Thessalonica after just a handful of weeks.

You want to go to Acts 17 for more info on that. The Thessalonian Christians were just like sitting ducks, just waiting for someone to swoop in and corrupt Paul's teaching.

They faced the threat of the local Jews persecuting them, just as they did with Paul. And Paul had heard no news from them, since they were ejected out of town. He was waiting for them.

Hey, Gillian, here's that fly that you talked about. Now, two weeks ago, we heard about how no news had been heard from the China Inland Mission for 25 years, from the early 50s until the late 70s.

[3 : 29] The missionaries who had been in China didn't know what was happening to the churches they'd helped plant, how their former brothers and sisters they met with regularly were faring in their faith, and the level of opposition against the believers' faith.

The missionaries who had been there wanted news of their Christian family, who they loved very deeply. When was the last time that you couldn't communicate with the family member who you really desperately wanted to?

You just wanted a phone call to know that they'd arrived safe after long travel. Had they just gone through emergency surgery and you were waiting to talk to the doctor? Or did you preach Jesus to someone a long time ago and have since fallen out of contact with them and just wonder how they're faring in their faith?

That's why Paul sent Timothy to hear of the faith of the Thessalonians, and he waited for Timothy to return. What news would Timothy bring? Would it be news of joy that the Thessalonians were holding fast to their faith, or would it be a disaster that through the tempting work of Satan, Paul and his colleagues' work there had been all in vain?

But now Timothy's come back, and we get to hear of how the Thessalonians are going. So we get to verse 6. Timothy's message is one of good news.

[4 : 56] Paul hears that his work wasn't in vain. The Thessalonians have been grounded in their faith, and they've been living it out. And they long to see Paul and his companions and think kindly of him.

And Paul calls that good news. Now when you hear good news, what do you think about? I just want to take a short detour into what Paul actually means by good news.

Paul uses the word 16 times in the New Testament. It's you and Elidzo. I can't speak Greek, but it's close enough.

Now, he uses it 16 times. All of the other 15 times he uses it are referring to preaching the gospel of Jesus. That same word, or one of its derivatives, is used by Peter, the author of Hebrews, to convey the same idea, that someone's had the gospel preached to them.

Both the gospels of Luke and Matthew also use it in this way, that someone has had the gospel of Jesus preached to them, and then more so in Acts.

[6 : 09] Now we know that Paul preached the gospel to the Thessalonians when he was in town, and he reiterated that briefly in chapter 1. So for those who want to flick back there, the Macedonians and the Archaeans reported that after the Thessalonians heard the gospel of Jesus, they turned to God from idols to serve the true and living God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Now that short-form gospel is indicative of the typical events that are usually meant when one speaks about preaching the gospel, that God has shown his immeasurable love by sending Jesus to bear the consequences of the harm that all us humans cause in our relationships with God.

We all turn our backs on God so hard that the consequences are so severe that Jesus had to be killed on a Roman crucifix, a public and shameful death for anyone 2,000 years ago.

And although we know that Jesus was 100% dead in the ground, not coming up, he wasn't dead for long. God raised him from the dead to be the king of God's kingdom.

And with Jesus as his king, we get shown undeserved kindness and given an invitation by faith to take refuge in him and be united with God for our eventual resurrection.

[7 : 35] Just like the Thessalonians 2,000 years ago, each of us who believes in Jesus and turns from our idols to serve the true and living God, we will obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus in the same way.

Our idols might not be pillars of stone or timber, but we still need to turn from them just the same.

The unfortunate flip side of this is that for those who don't believe in Jesus and keep serving their idols, instead of the true and living God, God has those people destined for wrath.

Fifteen years ago, that was me. I was serving my own idols, could not care one iota about God. But Jesus, by his grace, revealed himself to me and by his undeserved kindness brought me into his refuge.

For those people here like me today, for those people here today who were like me then, can I encourage you more than anything to keep investigating Jesus and just how much better life is with him than without him?

That's what's normally meant by good news. So what's Paul talking about when he says good news here? He's certainly not having the gospel of Jesus preached to him by Timothy.

[8 : 55] But instead, the message brought by Timothy was such a comfort to Paul that its effect was like being turned from death to life.

His love for the Thessalonians and his concern for their faith was so great that hearing their steadfastness in Jesus was some of the greatest news that he could hear. We know it's not actually the greatest news that he ever heard because he heard the gospel in Acts chapter 9.

And that news actually turned him from persecuting Christians to proclaiming Christ. It actually turned him from death to life. But Paul's use of good news here is he's emphasizing just how overjoyed he is at the work of Jesus in the Thessalonian church.

It's only a very short message we get of what Timothy brought to them. But then we get more on Paul's response.

So how does he respond to hearing of the Thessalonians' faith and love and their desire to see Paul and his companions again? Well, firstly, it causes Paul to be comforted through their faith.

[10:09] Verse 7. Their inability to continue to wait, not knowing of the Thessalonians, of the Thessalonian state and their distress has caused, has been replaced with comfort and joy.

It's not a mild joy or a timid joy, but it's a joy so abundant that it's like living. In verse 8, for now we live if you're standing fast in the Lord.

Now, you'd usually use if to indicate a conditional statement. And Paul's doing the same thing here. Paul's using if in the same manner he did here as he did when speaking of the fear in verse 5 of the Thessalonians being tempted away.

But by the time Paul's writing this letter, he already knows that the Thessalonians are standing fast in their faith. They're standing fast in the Lord. He knows they've not been tempted away.

So yes, it is a conditional statement that Paul's making here, but one in which his truthfulness is already fully known to Paul. It's like when you've caught your kid drawing on the wall and they've still got the red crayon in their hand.

[11:22] When you ask them, have you been drawing on the wall, both you and they already know what the answer is? We also get some idea of just how great news this is to Paul if we consider the logical inverse of Paul's statement to reveal the distress he was in not knowing of the faith of the Thessalonians.

If you're not standing fast in the Lord, now we are dead. Knowing that his work was in vain would be like dying to Paul.

We saw in chapter 2 how Paul was like a mother and a father to the Thessalonians at different times. He cared for them so deeply like a parent does for their child.

The typical pattern for children is to outlive their parents but it doesn't always happen. My sister died in 2020 and my parents became somewhere the typical pattern doesn't hold.

Their pain and grief were evident for quite some time. It was like a little bit of them died with my sister. That kind of emotion and feeling is how Paul would have felt if the news that Timothy had brought back had been that their work had been in vain.

[12:46] And the second part of Timothy's message is that the Thessalonians remembered their relationship with Paul. They remembered how he served them chapter 2 verse 12 and how he loved them like a parent.

They remembered how Paul brought them the gospel of Jesus and how it took root in them in all power and with full conviction in the Holy Spirit. They remembered the example that Paul gave them.

They remembered their deep relationship relationship with Paul and his colleagues. Their love for each other desires to have them see each other face to face once again in verse 10.

They simply couldn't wait to meet each other again. We get a chance to meet each other face to face on Sundays. But I want to ask you why do you show up?

Did your parents make you at some point and it's just what you do now? Is it because you want to have a laugh with Shem? Is it because you want an easy play date for your kids and for them to have some Bible teaching?

[13:51] Is it because you desire to serve your brothers and sisters in Christ whom you are united with? Now it's nice to see our friends at church but it shouldn't be our purpose for being here.

A significant proportion of my closest friends and some of yours as well they have left our fellowship in the last few months and meeting with them now just becomes harder without a regular time.

I just want to talk personally for a moment but as great as it was to see them every Sunday it's not why you show up to church. God's given me the opportunity to serve you in a plethora of ways.

Roy mentioned some of them before. This week I'm preaching. Last week I was clicking through slides. Two weeks ago I was up here talking to you as a treasurer. Three weeks ago I made the sound work.

Four weeks ago I was up here reading the Bible and praying. For those who remember that thing called COVID I did a lot of stuff as a streaming technician through that time. Now most of my work is in a technical role not seen just silently working behind the scenes and there are many other areas around our ministry where people would diligently serve our congregation week in and week out.

[15:13] Can you work with Dougal to set up and pack up the hall? Or Stuart to set up tea and coffee? Can you welcome people in and check them in with Ian and his team?

Can you work with Jeremy making the sound work or in the band? We always need people to click slides with Simon or can you read and pray? And that's just the visible areas that have some ministry team associated with them.

Can I encourage you to pray about why you actually show up and how you can serve your brothers and sisters in Christ? You may not be able to do that today but use a connecting form one week or talk to Roy or a staff member or elder and they can get you in touch with the right people.

Maybe even more important than serving in a formal capacity is the impromptu conversations that you have around our church service every week either before or after.

We do get those opportunities throughout the week but they're a bit harder. Maybe you called someone up. It's a bit awkward. As Christians we are united to God by his spirit through faith in Jesus.

[16:35] Maybe you've never been in the Brisbane club but we're in God's exclusive club. Exclusive club.

And he's brought us in there through faith. And in Australia we get to meet freely without any fear of persecution. We have the privilege of being able to meet each other face to face, to speak freely of our faith and to serve each other because of our love for Jesus.

every Sunday we have this amazing recurring opportunity to build each other up in love. But our conversations are about the sports team, the latest political blunder or our kids' most recent accomplishment.

Don't get me wrong, there is a place for those types of conversations. But they shouldn't be our focus while we're here. We don't need to be concerned about facing persecution while we meet, at least at the moment.

But the Thessalonian church was something they were acutely aware of every single time that they met. And despite that, they recognised the power that face-to-face fellowship brought that just couldn't be achieved through letters.

[17:57] Now we have several more advanced forms of snail mail that the Thessalonians did have, but there's still a massive gulf in your fellowship potential between a video call and actually sitting across the table from someone.

Do you remember what it was like during COVID when all of your interactions were through a computer and just how inferior it was?

I'd love for your conversations over morning tea to be deeper and more intentional than the score in whoever played at Suncorp last night, or even more close to home, which act you thought was best at the trivia and talent night.

They're fun, but we get a chance to talk about Jesus with people who love Jesus. Now, don't be fooled.

That's going to be easy. It's absolutely not. We also need to be aware of the fact that Satan is lurking and is ready to snatch away every opportunity that we have to build each other up.

[19:08] That's just the spiritual reality that we live in, in addition to the physical reality of the discomfort and anxiety that come from that type of conversation. conversation. It's not easy.

It takes mutual trust, and that takes time to build. But the hardest part of that process is to start. So can I encourage you to start small and grow from there?

This morning, ask, how can I serve? Whether you're on a ministry team, or it's through impromptu service with our brothers and sisters, both are critical for face-to-face fellowship.

Both give you a chance to love your brothers and sisters in Christ. When you arrive at church, are you relieved that your wait is finally over, and now you have the opportunity to serve your family?

Now, I mentioned that the Thessalonian church were going through distress and affliction. So was Paul. And what distress and affliction was Paul going through?

[20:21] Well, I think there's two parts to that. Part of it is a mental distress and affliction from being separated from the Thessalonians. How do you feel when you're ripped away from someone

that you love, and you just simply can't meet them?

And the other part of their distress was the actual physical suffering that they were experiencing. They'd been chased out of Thessalonica, and their pursuers followed them to the next town and chased them out of there as well.

There's a lot of distress Paul is going through, actually in his body and mentally. But Timothy's message, one of love and faith of the Thessalonians, comforted Paul greatly.

His waiting to hear of their faith was over. What type of comfort was that for Paul? Now, I hear that people get a warm and fuzzy feeling deep down inside when they go through a positive emotional reaction.

I don't know if that's all that Paul experienced. I think it went much deeper, but that was probably a part of that. I think we're talking about a comfort that really affected Paul.

[21 : 37] Just imagine with me for a moment. Paul's up late at night. He's stressed about his dear Thessalonian church. He's praying fervently for them to hold fast their faith and to continue in love.

But he still hears nothing from them. It gets too much for him. So he sends Timothy. Timothy's gone a while. He comes back with good news.

And Paul is so overjoyed that he can't contain himself. It's like living. For now we live. Nothing can be better to hear about the Thessalonian state to Paul.

You can just picture them. Timothy's got back. He says they're holding fast to the faith and they're loving each other. And Paul's just bursting out with joy.

He's singing from the rooftops in praise. But Paul, he goes even further. He recognizes that that work had been done by God.

[22 : 41] And the appropriate response to that is thankfulness towards God. Paul's thankfulness is so great that he feels that no amount of thanksgiving is sufficient for the joy that God has brought them.

And he expresses his thankfulness through earnest prayer. It's a prayer that they might see each other face to face and that Paul might supply what's lacking in their faith.

The obvious question here is, well, what's lacking in their faith? We know that they've been saved and we know that salvation is by grace. And they've demonstrated that through their faith in Jesus and putting their faith into practice through love for each other.

We know 100% that they are saved. We know that they've heard the gospel of Jesus and they're trusting him. So what's lacking?

Well, remember that Paul was only in town for a couple of weeks and they likely didn't have time to fully complete his teaching before he was driven out of town. There are some educators among us.

[23 : 53] When you're teaching, you know how long your lesson is going to be and the key things that you want your class to learn. When there's a fire alarm and the class is cut short, they may not have all the information and go away misunderstanding.

Paul's going to go on to provide additional teaching in chapters 4 and 5, which is the component of their faith that's lacking. Now, it's not that the Thessalonians don't have any faith or that their faith is defective in some way, but that they don't have all the information about the greatness of their faith that they already have.

They've understood that they're on their way to heaven, that they're going to be with Jesus forever. But there's some nitty-gritty doctrinal details that just aren't quite fully fleshed out yet.

And we finally reach the finale of Paul's thanksgiving towards God and his mutual encouragement of the Thessalonians.

An author would call it a climax. A musician might call it the crescendo. I'm a mathematician. I call it the supremum. We're also lazy.

[25 : 09] I'm going to abbreviate it as sup. If you're ever asking me what's up, make sure you've clearly defined your partially ordered set. The supremum that we've reached in Paul's letter is prayer.

He knows that prayer is a privilege and that God is his audience. And he asks for just three things. Firstly, that Paul's path would be directed towards Thessalonica so that he could see them and encourage them face to face once again.

Secondly, that the Thessalonians love for each other would increase and abound for one another and be for all people. And thirdly, that the Thessalonians might have their hearts established in blamelessness towards God for when Jesus comes.

Now this prayer shouldn't come as a surprise to us. It's exactly the same things as Paul's expressed when he heard the news from Timothy. He's heard of their faith and love.

He's heard of their desire to see him and he knows his own desire to see them and he's praying that God would make it happen. He recognized the benefit of face to face fellowship over letter writing.

[26 : 26] He certainly didn't have a plane to jump from one side of the Mediterranean to the other just to see anyone he wanted on any given day. The love of the Thessalonians is so reputable that it's known throughout their entire region.

Paul doesn't pray that they'd maintain their current love level but that it would increase and abound. Can you imagine you're so well known for your love throughout the whole region and Paul's asking for more?

And that leads into Paul's final request that the Thessalonians would have their hearts established in blamelessness, in holiness.

Similar to before, it's not a request for salvation for the Thessalonians. We know they've already got that and we know they've got faith but it's that their faith would be more grounded in the truth of Jesus and by their increased love they'll have their hearts established and holy.

That thing that we call sanctification. Well how do you increase in love and abound in it though?

[27 : 45] The hardest lesson that I've had to learn is that you don't do it by trying harder. Our efforts can't increase our love and they certainly don't earn us favour with God.

We increase in love and abandon it by trusting Jesus more and relying on him more deeply and thoroughly. Abounding in love is being tuned into God's wavelength and just noticing the opportunities that he provides us to put our love and faith into action.

Now it can practically play out in an untold number of ways. when you hear of a need do you consider how you can use your abundance to support the cause?

Whether that's an abundance of physical support or an abundance of faith where you respond in prayer. Every week we've got a food box up the back for the Barnabas say.

Is that something that you've considered? When you see someone distressed do you pray with them and pray for them and ensure they have the practical support that they need?

[29 : 00] When you arrive at church are you considering how you can serve those who are here? Whether that's formally on a ministry team or just socially through your conversations.

We know that the Thessalonians deeply loved Paul and he deeply loved them. But we're not waiting for Paul or the Thessalonians.

They've been waiting to express their faith in Jesus through their love for their brothers and sisters and all those in Macedonia and Archaia. Are we expressing our love to St. Lucia and Ironside?

They've been waiting for Jesus to return. Is that what we're waiting for? Are we waiting for Jesus to return? They're waiting for the one who saves them.

The one who has more love for them than they can ever imagine. I hope that's what I'm waiting for. Is that what you're waiting for?

[30 : 13] Please pray with me. Father God, thank you that we are united to you through your faith and through salvation that you offer through Jesus.

Please let us keep looking to him and serving him and loving him as we patiently wait for him to return to us. Amen.