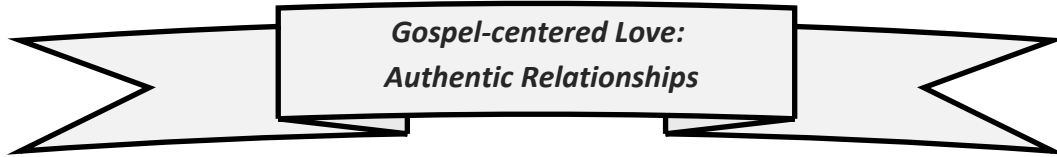


# AUTHENTIC: REAL FAITH IN REAL LIFE

## 1 Thessalonians – Lesson 4



When Paul came to Thessalonica, he was fully committed to preaching the gospel, as well as teaching and serving new Christian believers. However, the reality of mob violence forced him to leave after a very short stay. Paul was compelled to flee for his life, but he continued in his faithful prayers for the Thessalonians and in his ongoing strong desire to return to them and to help them in their spiritual growth.

### *Examine the text:* **Timothy reports on the Thessalonians' welfare**

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13
  - a. Why was Paul intensely concerned for this newly-formed church that he had been forced to leave so suddenly? (3:1-5)
  - b. What course of action did Paul take to help this fledgling community of faith? What was the purpose of Timothy's assignment? How was this decision costly to Paul? (3:1-2)
  - c. When Timothy returned to Paul after his visit to Thessalonica, what was his report about the welfare of the church? (3:6-8)
  - d. How would you describe Paul's emotional responses to Timothy's good report? (3:9-10)

- e. Notice that Paul's gospel-centered relationship with the Thessalonians was undergirded by prayer. What specific requests did Paul make in his prayer for them? (3:11-13)
  
- f. What is striking to you about the nature and the content of Paul's prayers for the Thessalonian believers? (3:11-13)

### *Explore the concepts:*

2. Consider the hardships and opposition faced by these front-line missionaries and also by this early church. How do you reconcile the reality of their suffering with the fact that they were engaged in doing God's will? (see John 15:18-20, and also James 1:2-4)
  
3. In our 21<sup>st</sup> century culture, we often consider our relationships to be transactional and conditional—
  - *"I will be a good friend to you as long as you are a good friend to me."*
  - *"I will help you with your children as long as you help me with mine."*

Or more tragically,

- *"I will be a good wife to you as long as, and to the extent that, you are a good husband to me."*

This is a far more self-serving and guarded perspective than the gospel-empowered commitment we see in Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians. Paul was a mentor, counselor, and spiritual parent to the believers in Thessalonica.

What evidence do you find of Paul's authentic heartfelt love for the Thessalonians? (3:7-10)

4. *For personal reflection:* Paul's sincere and steadfast commitment to the Thessalonians is a reflection of God's steadfast love for His children. Paul's service to them was costly and one-sided. He served them; they did not serve him; and yet, the spiritual joy he gained through his service to them was priceless.

We all have relationships that are costly to us at the transactional level—we must “give” far more than we may ever expect to “get” from these relationships. Are you willing to be a model of grace in order to promote the welfare of the other person? As you think about the relationships in your life that are difficult, consider how you may reflect the grace and forgiveness that you have received from Jesus. Jot down your thoughts.

5. Paul has expressed his joy at receiving the news of the Thessalonians' authentic, tenacious faith. Nevertheless, Paul prayed that God would enable him to see them *face to face* so that he would have the opportunity to “supply what is lacking” in their faith. As you consider the history of this young church, what is likely to be lacking in their spiritual foundation? What would be helpful about a visit from Paul? What does this reveal to us about our need for spiritual teaching and spiritual growth?
6. What event is Paul referring to in 1 Thessalonians 3:13? How does an awareness of this future event help to motivate us to live for Christ today?

## *Exalt the Savior:*

The gospel-centered authentic relationships we enjoy in our lives have been made possible by Christ' sacrifice on our behalf. Because Jesus died for us, we have a new quality of life through the Holy Spirit. Because Jesus died and rose again, we have His presence in us to guide us and promote godliness in us.

God's glorious plan for us is that we now have the privilege being adopted into God's *family*. We are not merely servants; we are children. If we have become followers of God's Son, then we have all been embraced by God as adopted children into God's household.

Romans 8:15 says this:

*"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by which we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'"*

Just as parents want their children to love one another and to be forgiving and gracious to one another; in the same way, God desires that we, His children, be loving, encouraging, and united in purpose.

The gospel calls us to nurture authentic gospel-centered relationships.

Consider Ephesians 4:1-3.

*"...I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."*

Take a moment to pray that God will strengthen your relationships so that others will see the grace of Christ in you.

***The Gospel brings the power of God for authentic life change***