

Explore the Bible: How can I love more?

March 14, 2022

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for March 27 focuses on 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13.*

In the animal kingdom, a predator always looks for the weakest and lonely herd member. The predator looks to isolate its prey to attack.

Our adversary—the devil—behaves like a predator. The believer begins to feel alienated from the community of faith. The temptation to be separate from those with whom we used to worship and serve appears easier than finding peace and harmony.

The Lord never works in isolation, but he works in the community. Isolation is fertile ground to fall into Satan’s temptations. Church and family are where each of us should find love and friendship, and sadly at times, we fail to provide the love all of us need.

Ministry of Presence (1 Thessalonians 3:1-5)

Paul, Silas and Timothy are suffering from persecution in Athens. Satan hinders them from going to encourage the church in Thessalonica. Paul sends Timothy, whom he describes as a brother, a true believer and a minister of God—an impressive description.

There is an urgent need in our churches for God’s people to encourage one another. Social media and technology help make social interactions more

accessible, but they do not provide fellowship and friendship. People want to belong and to feel connected. Technology provides a platform but does not provide connectivity.

Under the power of the Holy Spirit, the church stands in a unique place. In the church, we belong to God and can love one another.

The ministry of presence is when you show up and endure the storm with those suffering. None wants to be alone during suffering. Paul sent Timothy to encourage and establish the Thessalonians' faith during a tribulation period.

Ministry of Encouragement (1 Thessalonians 3:6-9)

There is an illness filling up the minds of believers. You and I know a person who is always thinking about the negative around them. They call themselves realists, but it is a self-defense mechanism to avoid failure and problems. They do not try anything new to avoid failure. Faith calls for optimism in the face of tribulation.

Paul asks Timothy to report back, and he brings back good news. They were an example of love and faith. Paul hears the report from Timothy that the church in Thessalonica is standing in the faith. That news makes Paul rejoice.

How can I encourage those struggling? Two key elements are prayer and presence. Leadership is celebrating with those who are going through suffering. Paul lets them know that he wants to be with them to add to their faith what could be lacking. Paul, without a doubt, has a pastoral heart. He knows that there are more things to learn to grow in faith as believers. All believers, not just leaders, should never stop learning. We are all lifelong

learners. Sadly, we get too comfortable with our level of faith. Hard times will challenge us to know God differently and more personally.

Ministry of Care (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13)

We will always be moved to pray for those things about which we care. Therefore, we can begin to see what we care about from the content of our prayers. In this chapter, Paul opens his heart for the church in Thessalonica. He is concerned for this new church.

First, Paul prays for God to allow him to see them again. In life and ministry, personal relationships are essential. This pandemic caused people to feel more isolated and alone. God called the church to represent his presence and share his love with the world.

Second, Paul prays for their love to abound toward one another. Families, as well as churches, become dysfunctional when there is no love. How can we love this way? “God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (Romans 5:5). This is the kind of love that grows and increases.

The world will know the living Christ when the church loves abundantly. There is a need to learn to love as God loves. There is a need to know that love is not just getting all we want. God’s love will sustain us in the middle of a storm, but it does not mean that there will be no storms.

Third, Paul prays for them to be established until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian life should not be a period of our life. It is an enduring journey in which we are always learning and growing in faith throughout our lifetime, until we meet our Lord.

In 2020, more people abandoned their churches than at any other time in

the last two decades. The pandemic accelerated the change of human behavior. Pre-pandemic, there were “essential activities” that we thought we could not live without—for example, attending a birthday party or a celebration. Due to the pandemic, birthdays and celebrations became a video call.

Please do not forget to encourage and love believers, especially those new in Christ. Learn to love increasingly and abundantly.

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