

## SUSTAINED THROUGH ENCOURAGEMENT

**BIBLE BASIS:** I Thessalonians 3

**BIBLE TRUTH:** Jesus wants us to encourage one another to remain faithfully committed to Him.

**MEMORY VERSE:** Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith (I Thessalonians 3:7).

**LESSON AIM:** That your students will begin to understand why and how we encourage one another in the faith.

### TEACHER PREPARATION

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** Quarterly Commentary, Adult Quarterly, Adult resources—charts, worksheets, and other teaching tools, Bibles (several different versions)

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED / TEACHER'S NOTES:

### LESSON OVERVIEW

#### LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

To live a life that encourages other believers.

#### BIBLE LEARNING

Examining Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians and understanding why he sent Timothy to comfort and encourage them.

#### BIBLE APPLICATION

Our disposition, attitude, and behavior should be encouraging to other believers.

#### STUDENTS' RESPONSES

Your students will identify ways to encourage others in the faith.

#### LESSON SCRIPTURE

I THESSALONIANS 3

*1. Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;*

*2. And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:*

*3. That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.*

*4. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.*

*5. For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.*

*6. But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your*

*faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:*

**7.** *Therefore, brethren, we were comforted*

*over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:*

**8.** *For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.*

**9.** *For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;*

**10.** *Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?*

**11.** *Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.*

**12.** *And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:*

**13.** *To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.*

#### LIGHT ON THE WORD

During Paul's second missionary journey, he visited Thessalonica for less than a month. During that time, he was able to preach in the synagogue where Jews, a large number of Greeks, and prominent women became converts (Acts 17:4). Some of the Jews became jealous and stirred up a mob against Paul, Silas, and Timothy; they were sent to Berea for their own safety. While there, Paul again shared the Gospel in the synagogue; "the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica" and many came to believe in

Jesus as the Messiah (verse 11, NLT). Still, he encountered more opposition from jealous Jews who pursued him. Paul escaped to Athens. He stayed there and, while waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him, Paul ministered to the people in Athens.

After leaving Athens, Paul arrived in Corinth where he wrote the first letter to the Thessalonians in A.D. 51. He wrote this epistle to encourage new converts in their trials (3:3-5), to give instruction on godly living (4:1-8), to urge some not to neglect daily work (4:11-12), and to give assurance concerning the resurrection and Christ's second coming (4:13-17).

#### TEACHING THE BIBLE LESSON

##### LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

AIM: That your students will understand the importance of encouraging other believers.

#### INTRODUCTION

##### People and Places You Should Know

Timothy was the son of a mixed marriage. His mother, Eunice, was Jewish, and his father was a Greek (Acts 16:1; II Timothy 1:5). He was a native of Lystra. Timothy became a Christian during Paul's first missionary journey, which included a visit to Lystra. His mother also became a Christian and instructed him in the Word. Paul added Timothy as a member of his ministry team because the apostle felt God had called Timothy to do a special work. Timothy's first journey was to visit Thessalonica to encourage the persecuted church. He also accompanied Paul on other journeys and was eventually given the responsibility to oversee the church in Ephesus (I Timothy 1:3). Paul had to encourage Timothy because he was young

and timid, which could have been a hindrance to his ministry (II Timothy 1:67).

Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. The city was at its southern tip, at the shores of the Gulf of Salonika. Today, the city is called Thessaloniki and is part of Greece. At the time of Paul, Thessalonica had a very large population of about 200,000. It was a seaport and trade center located on the Egnatian Way, which was the most important Roman highway. Thessalonica was a wealthy trade center and was the first city Paul journeyed to where his preaching attracted quite a few prominent members of Thessalonian society. He faced quite a challenge: The people were involved with many pagan religions.

## **BIBLE LEARNING**

AIM: That your students will understand the importance of being faithful in the work of the Lord.

### **I. PAUL LONGS TO SEE THE**

#### **THESSALONIANS (I Thessalonians 3:15)**

Faithful in the Work of the Lord (verses 15)

*1. Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;*

Paul was unable to revisit the Thessalonians, so he sent Timothy as a representative. Beginning from this verse he explains why he sent Timothy, a valuable companion and effective servant as his representative, to serve in his place and bring back word about their afflictions and satanic temptation (3:15). Paul was unselfish. He would rather suffer the absence of a brother so dear, and ever faithful in the work of the Lord, than have the

Thessalonians think that he had forgotten them in a time of trouble.

*2. And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:*

Paul listed Timothy's credentials that qualified him to act as Paul's emissary. This was probably to reassure the Thessalonians of Paul's trust and complete confidence in Timothy as he visited them by himself. Paul called him "our brother," a term of affection and endearment. He was Paul's coworker. Paul went further in identifying Timothy as a minister of God. The word "minister" (Greek, suner gos, soonerGOS) was used for persons who like Paul, were representatives of God in the mission "work" of proclamation (I Corinthians 3:12-14; Philippians 2:30). In Paul's day "minister" was not an official title and did not connote an ordained minister in its modern sense. The word rather designated one who renders a service of some kind to another. It spoke of the servant in relationship to his work, stressing his activity of serving. Timothy was both a minister of God and a fellow laborer with the other missionaries. Paul understood the missionary calling as a form of cooperation or participation with God in bringing people to faith in Christ. Paul's method of ministry was instructive: he did not minister alone, but together with others. Too often churches allow only one person to minister. Churches should be open to a plurality

of ministers who all preach the good news.

*3. That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.*

Timothy's work of confirming and encouraging the Thessalonians would help them to face and endure the persecution and oppression they faced as a result of their conversion to the Christian faith. The word translated "moved" (Greek, *saino*, SAHeeno), literally meant "to shake" or "wag," as a dog wags its tail to allure, to flatter, to fascinate, or to draw aside from the right path. Paul was concerned that the Thessalonians might be lured away from the faith, or become upset due to the afflictions that they were going through. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that their time of present suffering was in God's control. Paul went on to tell his readers that afflictions are part of a normal Christian life: "we are appointed thereunto." They needed to understand that the afflictions they were undergoing were neither arbitrary nor isolated happenings, but part of their God appointed destiny. Thus, the word "appointed" (Greek, *keimai*, Klmahee) carries an association with destiny. Paul did not exclude himself from those sufferings, but indicated in his use of "we" that the sufferings of the Thessalonians were part and parcel of the same sufferings and persecutions that other Christians were going through.

*4. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.*

Paul forewarned them of the inescapability of their sufferings as Christians. Christians suffer and will continue to face trouble, not as an appointment with blind fate; but as something which is an integral part of their faith and calling, something which is permitted in God's good and perfect plan for them. Paul's proclamation was in sharp contrast to most of the gospel proclamation in America today. Too

many preachers are obsessed with a wealth" gospel which teaches people that, if they are faithful, God will shower material blessings on them and having faith means they will not have to suffer. We must understand that Christian suffering is not the consequence of a divine legal decree, but an unavoidable consequence of living godly in an immoral world. We must always bear in mind that the symbol of Christianity is the Cross.

*5. For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.*

Paul explained more fully what he began to speak of in verse 1. He was eager to find out what was happening to the Thessalonians. He sent Timothy to know about their faith; whether they continued steadfast and constant in their adherence to the truth; or whether the tempter has succeeded in overthrowing their faith. Verse 5 revealed an apprehension over what Timothy might discover on his arrival. Paul was concerned that the pressure of opposition might have proven too much for the Thessalonians to resist and their faith might have collapsed. The "tempter" was a clear reference to Satan (see also 2:18), bent on frustrating the work of God by placing hindrances in the path of Paul and his colleagues or setting traps to bring about the spiritual downfall of Paul's converts in Thessalonica. Christian leaders can learn from Paul. He showed a godly vigilance over the spiritual condition of his converts. Paul explicitly measured the success of his ministry with the steadfastness of his converts by saying that their labor would have been in vain, had the Thessalonians abandoned their faith due to their suffering. First Thessalonians 3:5 also

suggested Paul's eschatological (prophetic) understanding of his ministry as Paul looked forward to a reward.

#### QUESTION 1

What lesson can be learned from Paul sending Timothy to encourage the persecuted believers in Thessalonica?

(Answer) We learn the importance of encouraging one another in the faith. Our encouragement sometimes represents strength to other believers. This is especially important for new believers and those who might be experiencing some hardship.

#### LIGHT ON THE WORD

##### Timothy's Encouraging Report

Timothy went to Corinth with a good report for Paul. The Thessalonians were holding fast to the faith, they greatly desired to see Paul, and they walked together in love (3:6). Timothy's visit had encouraged the believers in Thessalonica and his news encouraged Paul. The apostle was encouraged to find out the Thessalonians had not fallen prey to Satan's schemes. Furthermore, Timothy's visit provided the support they needed to help sustain their faith.

##### II, PAUL WAS A TRUE PASTOR (I Thessalonians 3:6-10)

As a true pastor with his flock, Paul was unable to rest until he heard of the Thessalonians' success and steadfastness. Timothy's mission was more than that of a mere observer among them. He was not only Paul's messenger to them, but also had become their messenger to Paul.

##### The Steadfast Church (verses 6-10)

*6. But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:*

The apostle was comforted for two reasons. First, Timothy brought good tidings of their faith and charity. Faith here was more than the act of believing. It also involved the basic values by which Christians live, the choices they made, the hopes they cherished, the basis and source of their very life in Christ. Faith was that which distinguished Christians from all non Christians. The Thessalonians' conversion was not a momentary or fleeting response to the Gospel: it was a real turning to God that brought grace and the power of God's Spirit into their lives and enabled them to stand firm in the face of opposition and persecution. Paul's second reason for rejoicing was the Thessalonians' remembrance of him. It meant a great deal to Paul to know that the Thessalonians had a place in their hearts for Paul, their spiritual father.

*7. Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:*

Paul and his associates were encouraged by the good news brought by Timothy from Thessalonica. The report provided a moment of relief to those in the midst of "affliction and distress," which in the Greek is thlipsis (THLIPsis) and anagke (anangKAY). Paul used thlipsis to refer to the Thessalonians' own "affliction" (1:6; 3:34), and used anagke as a synonym (cf. I Corinthians 7:26). Both words, which can indicate either emotional or physical distress, are used together in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament commonly referred to as LXX (see Job 15:24; Psalm 25:18; 119:143). In the midst of all their

adversity, Paul was able to say that the believers were comforted; that is, they were encouraged. In the midst of their own suffering, the missionaries were encouraged when Timothy returned with good news regarding the love and faith of the Thessalonians. The last phrase of verse 7, "because of your faith" (NIV), picked up the mention of the faith of the Thessalonians in verse 6 and led to the apostle's emotional outburst of verse 8.

*8. For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.*

Paul's words are quite remarkable. His life was bound up with the spiritual progress of those to whom he had ministered, particularly his converts. His life was one that was lived totally in terms of others. Faithful ministers of the Gospel, after the apostle's example, have no higher joy than when they find their wishes, their prayers, and their labors effectual to the conversion of their people, and for their establishment in truth and grace. Paul's love for the church was such that their perseverance in the Lord impacted his very life. "We live, if ye stand fast." The NLT translation "because you have remained strong," sounds like a statement about past perseverance. However, the phrase as it is given in the KJV (see also RSV), is conditional, suggesting a future expectation rather than a statement about the past. The word "stand" (Greek, *steko*, STAYko), denotes continued steadfastness or perseverance (cf. I Corinthians 16:13; Galatians 5:1; Philippians 4:1).

*9. For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;*

The news that the Thessalonians stood firm in their faith was like a gift to Paul and his workers which exceeded all bounds. Their joy was so

great that, on behalf of his coworkers in Christ, Paul essentially asked a rhetorical question: "How can we thank God enough?" Another way to state this is, "What thanksgiving are we able to give?" The words "to give," implied an obligation to repay a debt. The debt is owed to God. It was God who received the thanks, not the Thessalonians. For it was only by the grace and power of God that they were part of the family of faith. Just as it was only by the same grace that Paul became an apostle to the Gentiles and their father in the faith. What thanksgiving could conceivably be adequate repayment for all that God had done? The implication was that any thanks offered to God for this benefit would be pitifully inadequate. That which was the basis of the thanksgiving was the "joy that we have in the presence of our God because of you" (NIV). The phrase "in the presence of our God" was an indication that the giving of thanks envisioned here was in the context of prayer (cf. 1:3), not simply a moment of pleasant reflection.

*10. Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?*

The thanksgiving of the previous verse led up to the prayer report here. This was most instructive. Praise should go along with prayer. Once again, we see the heart of Paul the pastor. He prayed for his converts night and day with a great intensity. The prayers of Paul and his coworkers were extremely intense. Such fervent prayer underscores Paul's continuing and profound concern for the church. Paul's prayer had two main petitions. First, Paul prayed that God would permit that he and his colleagues might see the Thessalonians again. For Paul, "out of sight is not out of mind." Their absence did not mean indifference. Second,

although Paul had rejoiced in the faith and love of the Thessalonians (verses 68), he noted that there were important areas in which they required instruction. Hence, Paul prayed that he might be able to see the Thessalonians someday and be able to perfect that which is lacking in their faith. The Greek word, translated "perfect" here means generally "to adjust," "repair," or, as used here, "to make up for." Paul did not suggest that the faith of the Thessalonians was defective. Because of the short time previously spent by Paul, there was not enough opportunity to impart all the instruction the believers needed (4:13). Thus, Paul considered a second visit necessary.

## QUESTION 2

How does encouraging news from others strengthen your faith?

(Answer) Students' answers will vary. In today's text we find that Timothy's report to Paul (see verse 6) greatly encouraged Paul (see verses 79). "Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith...for what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God" (I Thessalonians 3:79).

## LIGHT ON THE WORD

### Paul's Prayer

The last part of Paul's prayer included a request for God to strengthen the believers, to be "blameless, and holy before God" (verse 13, NLT). During the second coming of Christ, when He establishes His eternal kingdom, all believers including those in Thessalonica (alive or dead) will be with Jesus in His kingdom. Paul would be reunited with the believers for eternity.

## III. LOVE MUST PREVAIL AND BE SHOWN IN PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

(I Thessalonians 3:11-13)

Unless love prevails, selfish motives inhibit ethical development by turning us inward toward ourselves and away from God and blameless living. The holiness that belongs to God is the ideal we must seek (cf. Leviticus 19:2; I Peter 1:16). The church today desperately needs this message. But it is a message the church must see their leaders live, not just hear them proclaim. To be true to the Scriptures, today's messengers (servant ministers) must demonstrate by their actions that Christianity without love is, at best, a contradiction in terms and that a Gospel lacking in love falls short of its name.

### Intercession (verses 11-13)

*11. Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.*

In verses 11-13 we find Paul's intercessory prayer that contains three petitions, which brought the first section of the letter to a conclusion. The section further provided a window into Paul's personal prayer life in which intercessory prayer played a crucial role (5:23; II Thessalonians 2:1f; 3:5, 16; Romans 15:5; I Corinthians 1:8; Philippians 4:9). As in other places, Paul's requests were unselfish. His first request, in today's passage, pertained to his desire to return to the Thessalonians. In this Paul showed his dependence on God in terms of making plans. He recognized the importance of committing his ways into the Lord's hands. So he prayed that the Lord would direct or clear the way for another visit to the Thessalonians. At the moment, there were hindrances (cf.

2:18), but Paul prayed for the removal of the barriers.

*12. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:*

Paul's second petition focused on the spiritual growth of the Thessalonians. It was specifically directly to the "Lord" who, without doubt, is the Lord Jesus referred to in the previous verse. Paul prayed that the church may abound in love. He did so, not because they lacked love, but because continual increase in selfless devotion to others is always a need for Christians. So he prayed that they may "increase" and "abound" or, literally, "overflow." The words "increase" and "abound" are synonyms and together form an emphatic prayer wish for the spiritual wellbeing of the Thessalonians. For Paul, love was the cardinal Christian virtue (cf. I Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:22) from which all other Christian virtues grow. It reflects the character of God revealed in Christ. Paul's converts came from different social and economic strata and therefore did not have very much in common. Thus, love was indispensable in order to create a sense of shared identity and community where none had previously existed.

But Paul did not limit his prayer for love to believers but included all people, even their persecutors. This would fulfill Christ's command in the Sermon on the Mount that Christians should love their persecutors and pray for those that despitefully use them. Love "toward all men" (KJV) "for everyone else" (NIV) was a reference to persons outside the community of faith.

*13. To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.*

Paul stated the purpose of his prayer in the preceding verses. His desire that the church might abound in love was so that the Lord might establish their hearts blameless in holiness (I Thessalonians 3:13). Blameless and holy (sanctified) hearts thrive in the soil of a genuine and abundant love. The reference to the believers' hearts referred to the volitional or intellectual aspects of a person. However, Paul believed that as a person was in the heart so is s/he in the whole person. Paul's prayer envisioned present growth in love, anticipating a future time of judgment (verses 12 13). The two phrases "before God, even our Father" (KJV), "in the presence of our God and Father" (NIV); and "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (KJV), "when our Lord Jesus comes" (NIV) are parallel, both looking to the second coming of Christ. The words Paul used were quite striking. "Blameless" described something or someone judged acceptable before God in sacrificial worship. "Holy" was a noun describing the state or condition of that which was sanctified or consecrated as God's special possession. Both words connote a relationship to God that also had ethical implications. God's saints, or holy ones, are those belonging and are dedicated to Him and His service. They have also been made holy. Thus, holiness is required in their lives. They should reflect the values and character of the Father.

### QUESTION 3

What did Paul pray God would do (verses 10 13)?

(Answer) Paul prayed that he would see the Thessalonians again and that they would be encouraged to increase their faith. He also prayed that they would increase and continue in love toward all people. As a result of this great love, Paul prayed that God would give them "hearts unblameable in holiness before God" (I Thessalonians 3:13).

### **STUDENTS' RESPONSES**

AIM: That your students will identify ways to encourage others.

In today's society, we all are bombarded with demands in our daily life from family obligations, job responsibilities, and church commitments. The pressure can be overwhelming and stressful. Some people are not able to cope with the trials and tribulation they encounter. Therefore, people experience hopelessness and depression which can sometimes lead to them losing faith in God. Every day, people are disappearing from churches and no one knows what happened to them. It is our responsibility as members of the body of Christ to seek them out. One kind word or action can regenerate a person, strengthen their faith, and help them reemerge at church, just as Timothy's words of encouragement helped sustain the Thessalonians through a time of tribulation.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, help me to be a blessing to those around me. Teach me the value of a kind word and a pleasant demeanor. Help me to cease the activities and behaviors that are not reflective of my commitment to You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

### **HOW TO SAY IT:**

Damascus. duhMASkuhs.

Thessalonica. thesuhloNAiku.

### **PREPARE FOR NEXT SUNDAY**

Read I Thessalonians 4:112 and prepare for next week's lesson, "Demonstrated in Action."

### **DAILY HOME BIBLE READINGS**

#### **MONDAY**

"Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:3237)

#### **TUESDAY**

Encouraging New Leaders

(Deuteronomy 3:2329)

#### **WEDNESDAY**

Encouraging the Fearful (Isaiah 35:14)

#### **THURSDAY**

Encouraged by the Scriptures (Romans 15:16)

#### **FRIDAY**

Supported by God's People (Acts 18:111)

#### **SATURDAY**

A Ministry of Encouragement (Acts 18:1823)

#### **SUNDAY**

Encouraged in Distress (I Thessalonians 3)