

Observations from Week 3

Paul, Silas and Timothy imitate Christ. They share in his suffering and persecution, yet respond with acts of great love and sacrifice, giving their lives to grow others for the sake of the Gospel. In doing so, they become models for the Thessalonians, who also endure great suffering, and become models to the whole region of Macedonia and Achaia.

Paul, Silas and Timothy don't deny that with suffering also comes fear, despair, and separation, - yet they also experience the great joy of being encouraged through the faith of others whom they spend time with.

Paul is likely to be in his mid -late 40's; Silas' age is unknown, but tradition has his death around the year AD50 in Macedonia (as a martyr—not long after this letter); and Timothy is probably in his early 30's. These were not old men who had years and years of wisdom, life and experience—they were men living life with everything they had, despite hardship, suffering and self doubt. They invested in others because they understood what it is to love and live the for the sake of the Gospel.

In our times of suffering, persecution and doubt –whether from external sources, or internal talk, we could forget about others and focus on self. Yet Paul, Silas and Timothy demonstrate that a 'cure' to the despair was the joy of investing in, and encouraging others. They received back what they poured out.

Perhaps you have thought that the time to get alongside someone else would be too costly; or that your struggles are too great to help others; or that you don't have it together enough. Consider how Paul, Silas and Timothy could have focussed on themselves and where they were at, but instead they lived their life alongside the Thessalonians. Consider how young the Thessalonians were in their faith—just one year old, yet by imitating Paul, Silas and Timothy they were changing a whole region for the sake of the Gospel. Your sacrifice through mentoring one person, could impact a family, a community—even a nation!

Week 3: Suffering and Joy

Were there points to discuss from last week?

Does anyone want to share about their personal reflection?

Briefly recap thoughts to date.

1. When you are picturing Paul, Silas and Timothy—what age do you give them? What struggles do you think Paul, Silas, Timothy and the Thessalonians may have faced?

If practical, listen to 1 Thess 1-3. If time is short—listen to 1 Thess 2:17 -3:13. As you're listening jot down phrases, or words, that indicate struggle.

2. What is the biggest surprise to you in these passages?
3. What were Paul, Silas and Timothy's major concerns for the Thessalonians? Why do you think they may have been so concerned?
4. In 1 Thess 3:5. Paul expresses the personal fear 'that our labours might have been in vain'; then in v6, 'you have pleasant memories of us'... Explore what Paul might have been feeling...

5. Paul, Silas and Timothy speak of suffering and persecution. In 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4,7 they speak of the suffering and persecution experienced from external sources. What helped them?

6. When you are suffering, who do you look to? What helps you through?

7. What about self-doubt and fear? (ie fear of 'labouring in vain', being in distress) How do you deal with them?

8. Notice that Paul, Silas and Timothy, despite their suffering, are encouraged and uplifted by encouraging and thinking of others—mentoring them. Have you ever thought about how your suffering, doubts and fears might be used to help others, and in doing so, bring you encouragement? How does this alter your view of suffering, doubt or persecution?

Read 1 Thess 3:6-10

Paul, Silas and Timothy had been concerned for the Thessalonian believers—new believers who had turned from idols. Paul sends Timothy for an update. Timothy returns to Paul and Silas with great news—the Thessalonians are growing in faith and love! In fact, so great is their reputation, that churches throughout Macedonia and Achaia are modelling their lives after the Thessalonian believers. This brings great joy to Paul, Silas and Timothy as well as encourages them in their walk.

9. Is there anyone whom, when you think of them, you are so concerned for, that your heart aches? What do you do with that concern? Can you see the potential for good in them?

10. What time have you spent with that person(s)? What have you modelled to them? What do you think that they think you will say? What holds you back from sharing with them how much you love them, and how they encourage you?

Read 1 Thess 3:9-12

11. What motives and sustains Paul, Silas and Timothy? How is this demonstrated? How would you feel if you received this letter from someone?