

2/6/18

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

If you have ever watched someone grow up, you know the range of emotions you can feel as you watch her sometimes stumble and fall, but eventually learn and grow from all of the experiences in life.

The apostle Paul had the privilege of watching a group of new Christians in Thessalonica grow up. When he wrote the book of 2 Thessalonians, he had time to reflect on his relationship with them. He actually spent a relatively short period of time with these people in person but made the most of it. He had the opportunity to share the good news of Jesus with them. He taught them from God's Word that Jesus had to suffer and die on the cross to pay for the sins of the world. He proclaimed to them the good news of Jesus' resurrection from the dead and the certain hope of heaven his children have as a result. These people heard and believed Paul's message.

But it was not easy for this young church. Shortly after his arrival, Paul had to leave because of persecution in the city. The Thessalonian church had to grow up in a hurry. Very early in their walk with Christ they experienced firsthand the hate that many have for Jesus and his followers. They were verbally and physically abused. Their community marginalized them. They suffered financial loss. All of these things happened as a direct result of their relationship with Jesus.

But a remarkable thing happened. Instead of abandoning their faith in Jesus, a deeper relationship with Jesus was developed. When just about everything else in their lives was taken away, they realized that what they had in Jesus far outweighed what they lost in the world. Not only did the faith of these individuals survive, it thrived. They took advantage of the many opportunities to show love for God and one another.

In the book of 2 Thessalonians the apostle Paul took a moment to reflect on the journey that these men and women had taken and to thank God for how far they had come. *We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. 2 Thessalonians 1:3.*

As long as we are in the world, each of us is also on a journey of faith. Perhaps yours is just starting. The thought of a loving and just God might be hard for you to understand. It is hard to wrap your mind around the concept of Jesus giving his life for yours. Maybe you are at a time of tension in your walk. You have family or friends who don't seem to appreciate or understand your relationship with Jesus. You feel like you are being pulled in different directions, all of them away from God and his Word. Maybe your walk is nearing an end and you have time to reflect on how God has been with you all the way.

No matter where you are on the journey, may your faith grow and your love continue to increase. Paul prayed this prayer for the Christians at Thessalonica and God answered. God's promises are just as certain today. He will give the comfort, strength and courage you need to face the difficulties of each day and even use them to bring you closer to him.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for planting your Word in my heart. Make my faith continue to grow and let my love continue to increase. Amen.*

(WELS E-Devotion, adapted)

...See you in church.

Keep looking up because the Lord is always looking down – Psalm 121

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