

Encouraged  
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## 1 Thessalonians 3

Think about yourself as a parent. If I surveyed your kids, would they describe you as “a cheerleader,” a “taskmaster,” or a little of both, depending on the situation? At work, would people see you as a positive force or a “water cooler critic?” Some people are “glass half full” and some “half empty.” The “balanced” follower of Christ has the right mixture of firmness on biblical truth, encouragement for growing disciples, and praise to God when they see Him changing lives.

This book is a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to this little congregation he planted in Thessalonica. Though he longed to stay and nurture these “baby Christians,” we’ve learned that violent opposition to the gospel drove him out of town. This little band of new believers was out of sight but not out of Paul’s mind and heart. He knew those same opposing forces would be used by Satan to try to derail this church and he wondered if the seeds he planted were still growing.

We think of Paul as a “tough guy” but it’s clear from this chapter he was praying daily for this church like a parent prays when their young person starts driving alone. Paul was afraid their faith had been “shaken” (3:3.) The word means, “wag the tail.”<sup>i</sup> He worried that persecution might cause their faith to waver back and forth. There were no cell phones, texts, or email, so Paul sent Timothy to check on them, to report back to Paul, and to stay and “strengthen” this church. In Athens, Paul anxiously awaited Timothy’s letter. When the news came it was better than good. Then news about this church was thrilling and Paul rejoiced!

**1 Thessalonians 3:5–6 (ESV) — 5** ...when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. **6** But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—**7** for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith.

- The good news was their “faith and love.” They had remained solid in their faith in Christ, and His love overflowed from them to others far and wide.
- Faith and love. When trouble-makers in Galatia tried to force religious rituals on the church, Paul wrote in Galatians 5:6, it’s not about “religion,” *“What matters is something far more interior: faith expressed in love.”*<sup>ii</sup>
- Paul already alluded to this good news in chapter one. He was thanking God for their *“work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”*<sup>iii</sup> In this chapter he’s explaining the effect this good news had on him, how much it encouraged him as their “spiritual parent.”

- How relieved was Paul to hear this news? <sup>8</sup> For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.<sup>iv</sup> My translation: *“I can breathe easier now because you are still following and imitating Christ!”*
- In verse 10 Paul expressed his desire to come back and help them grow.  
**1 Thessalonians 3:10 (ESV) — 10** *as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?*

- This is a beautiful picture of Paul’s relationship with this church, how does it apply to you and me as we sit in the pews and work in service?
- As a Christ-follower, how excited am I to see how He is changing lives?
- When the baptismal waters are stirred by a new believer, am I as enthused as I am when a touchdown is scored by my favorite team?
- As a church member, do I “dig” for good news like mining for gold or shovel around criticism about my church to anyone that will listen?
- At the risk of over-generalizing, I thought of several personality-types in the church. Do you recognize any of these? Starting with the negative:
  - The **“Frowning Pharisee”** – The self-appointed critic with folded arms thinking: *“These people have no clue how messed up things are and I need to straighten them all out!”*
  - The **“Stressed-out Steward”** – *“I have to do it all in this church. If I don’t do it who will? I can’t sit around and rejoice, I’m busy, busy, busy!”* I hear Jesus saying, *“Chill out Martha! Be more like Mary!”*
    - Good intentions but distracted even by ministry.
  - The **“Sentimental Saint”** – *“I’m not a naysayer, I just wish it was like it used to be.”* Do you also long for outdoor plumbing?
    - Am I cheering what God is doing or muttering: *“Give me that Old Time Religion?”* If lives are being changed, to quote Carly Simon: *“THESE are the good old days.”*
  - **“Redeemed with Rose Colored Glasses”** - *“Isn’t it all great? God is love so let’s not talk about anything challenging or convicting!”*
  - The **“Oblivious Observer”** – *“What time is lunch?” “When will this be over?”* They don’t see life change because they’re unplugged.
- From negative to clueless to apathetic ever met any of them?
- Let me offer one more personality-type right in the middle:
  - **“The Balanced Believer”** – This one is “wise as a serpent” when it comes to biblical truth and doctrine, but a massive encourager of lives being changed by Christ. They seek to help others grow spiritually; then celebrate that growth by encouraging the disciple and praising God.
- I see the “Balanced Believer” like a balanced parent, teacher, or coach.
- What does the conduct of a balanced parent, teacher, or coach look like?
- Based on Paul’s letters, how was he a “balanced” spiritual parent? I see three ways Paul was balanced:
  1. Paul was tough on sin in the church: Don’t even *“associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or*

worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don't even eat with such people."<sup>v</sup> (1 Cor. 5:11)

2. Paul could be tender: He wrote to the Philippians, "God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus."<sup>vi</sup> To this Thessalonian church (2:20), "you are our glory and joy."<sup>vii</sup>

3. When Paul witnessed changed lives, his rejoicing was enthusiastic: "...[W]e give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>4</sup> For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people..."<sup>viii</sup> (Col 1:3-4) To the Philippians again, "<sup>6</sup> And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns."<sup>ix</sup> (Php.1:6)

- When it came to correcting doctrine and calling out sin, Paul was tough.
- When expressing love and appreciation for God's people Paul was tender.
- When celebrating lives changed by Christ, Paul praised God lavishly.
- I want to be a balanced believer like Paul!
- At this point in the letter Paul broke into prayer for his "kids" in this church:

**11** Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, **12** and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, **13** so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

- He cheered their progress and longed to see them keep growing.

Here's the Takeaway:

- In the world of movies there are critics and there are fans. Often, a movie is "panned" by the critics and embraced by the fans that buy tickets.
- When it comes to the work of the Church, am I a critic or a fan?
- I want to be a "balanced believer" like the Apostle Paul was. Tough when it's called for, tender in relationships, lavish in praising spiritual progress.
- I also want to be an encourager and discipler of growing Christ-followers.
- Finally, I pray I will be less of a critic of God's church and more of a FAN.
- You might ask, "*What if I'm really troubled by something in the church?*"
- Here are some advice I would give based on scripture:
  1. Ask yourself, "*Is this a biblical issue or a personal preference?*"
  2. Ask God to give you wisdom about that question.
  3. If still bothered, speak with some trusted fellow followers. "*Am I off base?*" "*Is this worth being concerned about?*" Again, ask God.
  4. If it really is a biblical concern, don't gossip, consult Matthew 18:15-17 on how to go to church leadership in the proper, respectful way.
  5. If after that you still can't feel good about that church, don't stay and be a cancer, go somewhere else where you can be a blessing.
- The good news about THIS GROUP is it is filled with balanced believers who are quick to praise God and encourage others! You are "firm" in your faith and loving to those around you. May your "tribe increase!"

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<sup>i</sup> **4525. σαίνω sainō**; a prim. vb.; *to wag the tail, ...to disturb*:—disturbed(1).<sup>i</sup>

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- <sup>ii</sup> Peterson, E. H. (2005). [\*The Message: the Bible in contemporary language\*](#) (Ga 5:6). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- <sup>iii</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#). (2016). (1 Th 1:3). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- <sup>iv</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#). (2016). (1 Th 3:8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- <sup>v</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [\*Holy Bible: New Living Translation\*](#) (1 Co 5:11). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- <sup>vi</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [\*Holy Bible: New Living Translation\*](#) (Php 1:8). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- <sup>vii</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#). (2016). (1 Th 2:20). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- <sup>viii</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [\*Holy Bible: New Living Translation\*](#) (Col 1:3–4). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- <sup>ix</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [\*Holy Bible: New Living Translation\*](#) (Php 1:6). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.