

Part 2 - *I Sent to Know Your Faith*

“For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, **I sent to know your faith**, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and **brought us good news of your faith** and love...**we were comforted concerning your faith.**” 1 Thessalonians 3:5, 6a, 7b

“For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly **that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?**” 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10

In Part 1, we started to look at the way Paul uses the word *faith* again and again in these verses. Paul wanted to know the status of the Thessalonians’ faith so much that it was like a burden he “could no longer endure.” In our care for people, may we also have such a feeling.

In this Part, we’ll talk about what Paul did in order to know their faith--what actionable steps Paul took to care for the Thessalonians. Our care for someone should also be actionable. Paul had a strong feeling inwardly, but let’s also look at what he *did* as a result.

Paul sent Timothy to “know [the Thessalonians’] faith.” This word “know” is so significant. The word in Greek is γινῶναι (gnonai), and its general meaning is “to learn to know, come to know, get a knowledge of” (Strongs). Paul sent Timothy to γινῶναι (gnonai) the Thessalonians’ faith. This is a common verb for “to know,” but it also implies *learning, acquiring* knowledge, *coming into* a state where you have knowledge you previously hadn’t. It even carries the thought of knowing “through personal experience (first-hand acquaintance)” (HELPS). We can imagine Timothy going to the Thessalonians, having meals with them, talking to them in groups and one-on-one, and living life among them for a few days. Paul didn’t say, “When I could no longer endure it, I wrote advice to you,” or “When I could no longer endure it, I asked you to write to me how you were doing.” He sent a brother to physically be among them.

The same verb “to know” is used in Paul’s prayer that the Ephesians would “know the love which surpasses all understanding.” There in Ephesians, Paul was talking about knowing God’s love. He wasn’t talking about knowing God’s love at a surface level and being done with it. He was talking about an experiential discovery that requires time spent in God’s presence, involving Him in our life,

walking closely with Him. In the same way, our seeking to know *people* is involved, invested, and experiential. It takes time spent with them, talking to them, living life with them. Christ moves in people, some less at times and some more at times, and this moving can be hidden and inward. Even the person He is moving in may not be able to put into words their own experiences of Christ. In order to go further than “yeah, I’m doing good,” we need to delve a little into their life.

It’s easy to forget about this step of *finding out their faith* and go straight to assuming that we know their faith already. We might assume their level of faith based on a struggle they’re going through in life, their attendance (or absence) at meetings, or our own projected experiences. If Paul had assumed about the Thessalonians in this way, he may have assumed that they weren’t doing well because of the persecution that was going on around them at that time. Paul could have prayed for them to be brought close to the Lord, or for endurance in this struggle. Or, Paul could have written them a letter exhorting them to stand firm or warn them about the dangers of falling away. None of these prayers or exhortations are wrong, but the Thessalonians *were* enduring the hardship; they were even doing well. By finding out their faith, Paul could more accurately respond to it.

Sometimes, there is a place for prayer without knowing someone’s situation. When the church gathers together to pray, often the prayers are about people or events that not everyone knows, and many will faithfully jump right in to pray. Additionally, the Lord often reveals what’s on His heart for someone when we pray about them. But He has also chosen to limit Himself to our physical realm, our minds, and our wills. He chose to give us the Bible so that we could use our minds to understand the facts instead of getting knowledge automatically when we are saved, and then this knowledge allows us to interact with Him on a heavenly level. In the same way, He chose to give us our minds and bodies to go out and learn about our friends and families, then bring what we’ve learned before Him in prayer. Situations always differ. But we can ask ourselves, “can I visit this person, have a call with them, even send them a text, to start to find out more about what the Lord is doing in them?” If the answer is yes, let us go out and engage our minds to shepherd, and our prayer for them can become so well-informed and in-real-time, just as the Lord is working in real time. There is value in bringing a name in prayer before the Lord, but how much richer that prayer can be if we’ve sought to be informed, we’ve learned of their faith, and we have given time to find out what the Lord has already been doing.

From this phrase, *I sent to know your faith*, we learn from Paul that a big part of shepherding is discovering the moves and interactions with the Lord that are happening inside someone. May we be willing and eager to take time out of our lives to talk with people, ask them questions, and get to know them, just like Paul took action to know the Thessalonians.