

1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

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Timothy reported to Paul that the Thessalonians were thriving despite their persecution. They continue in faith and love, and they miss Paul as much as he misses them. He is comforted by this news, and declares that when believers overcome suffering, we are living out the fullest, most rewarding life God intended for us.

After months of not knowing the condition of the Thessalonians since Paul left them, he has received word back from Timothy about their status. *Timothy has come to us from you*, Paul writes, with *good news*. The Thessalonians have not crumbled under the “afflictions” they’ve suffered from others, but have persisted in *faith and love*. Paul is glad to hear that they *always think kindly of him and his team*, and that they are *longing to see Paul* just as he and the others *also long to see the Thessalonians*. His deep familial connection to them is reciprocated. They have missed Paul ever since he left Thessalonica, and wish they were able to be with him again in person, to continue learning from him and fellowshiping with him and his team.

Their fortitude in their *faith* is the *reason* that despite *all of Paul’s distress and affliction*, he is now *comforted about the Thessalonians*. Timothy’s good report on how they were doing, despite the persecution, brings relief to his concerns. It is *through their faith* that Paul’s anxiety for them is relieved, as he explains: *for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord*. This is a very important phrase in this letter, and it echoes what Paul stated earlier: “For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy” (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20).

Paul believed in rewards for himself at the judgement seat of Christ. He speaks of this often in his letters. In 1 Corinthians 3, he makes it clear that he will be judged by Christ just like everyone else. So people should not worry about what he or Apollos think, they should focus on pleasing Christ. Later in 1 Corinthians 9 Paul speaks of striving to win the crown of life, which is like a prize won by an Olympic athlete. At the end of his life, in 2 Timothy, Paul says he is confident he has laid up for him the crown of life, because he has endured to the end, and will die the death of a martyr (2 Timothy 4:8).

But Paul has an entirely different type of reward in mind as well. In addition to gaining rewards from Christ, Paul wants to see his children in the faith also stand before Christ and receive rewards. Their reward is his reward, so to speak. Paul is like a proud parent at the graduation, watching their child receive honors and commendations. He wants his disciples to succeed, and considers that their success will be his “glory and joy.”

Paul’s great concern for the Thessalonians was not whether or not they believed in Jesus; that was a given. Rather it was whether they were continuing to live out their faith day by day, no matter the suffering imposed upon them by their neighbors, their government, or anyone else. That they *stand firm in the Lord* is what Paul hoped for them. This is what Timothy reported, that the Thessalonians were indeed standing *firm*, which gave Paul the feeling that *now we really live*.

The word *live* is from the Greek “*zōō*,” from “*zōē*” (life), having to do with the quality of our life, our spiritual health. On the condition that the Thessalonians *stand firm in the Lord*, Paul’s spirit is alive and prospering, because he is succeeding in achieving his goal of bringing people to Jesus.

Paul is not merely trying to convert non-believers into believers; that is just a starting place. Rather, Paul wants all believers in Jesus to *stand firm in the Lord* (Romans 1:17, Hebrews 12:1, Romans 8:35-37, 1 Corinthians 9:27). Paul has taught the Thessalonians that suffering because of their faith was to be expected (v. 4), but that this was a great thing. They got to suffer for Jesus, and through their endurance they gain the great rewards Jesus has for those who serve Him faithfully.

The idea that our greatest reward in life as believers comes through suffering for Christ is found throughout Paul’s writings. Here is a list of some other places where Paul makes this assertion:

- In Romans 8:17, Paul says we can become “fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we **suffer** with Him.”
- In Philippians 1:29, Paul says “for to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to **suffer** for His sake” making clear that it is a privilege to suffer for Christ.
- Later in Philippians 3:8, Paul states “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.” Paul speaks here of the great reward of coming to know Christ intimately, through enduring in faith.
- In Philippians 3:10, Paul adds “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”
- In Colossians 1:24, Paul says “Now I rejoice in my **sufferings** for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.”
- Coming full circle, in Paul’s last letter to his loyal disciple Timothy, Paul admonishes him:
 - “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *mein suffering* for the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Timothy 1:8).
 - “**Suffer** hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:3).”
 - “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).

Paul is grateful that the Thessalonians are doing well, and yet still wishes he was with them and could continue to teach them. He writes enthusiastically *For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account*. The fact that Paul is thrilled that they are persevering in the face of trials demonstrates how thoroughly Paul has adopted an eternal perspective on life. It would be more typical for a parental figure to

fret over the persecution, and pray that they would be delivered from persecution. Paul is more concerned that they endure through persecution. He is full of joy and rejoicing because of it.

However, Paul still feels that his time with the Thessalonians was incomplete, as he persists *night and day* in asking God for a way back to them; he and Timothy and Silas *keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith*. Despite the *good news* that the Thessalonians are persevering against persecution, Paul wants to see them *face to face* and teach them further.

He will correct some mistaken beliefs and concerns that they sent along with Timothy, specifically regarding Jesus's second coming. The Thessalonians worried that those who died before Jesus' return would stay dead, and would miss out on the presence of the Lord, eternity, and glory. Paul will correct those fears later in this letter in Chapter 4. The Thessalonians are doing well in love and faith, but Paul calls for them to increase even more (v. 12).

Even in his encouraging letters such as this one, Paul always pushes for continuation and improvement. He is like a great coach, always pushing his team to improve. As he wrote to the Philippian believers, he lives with a mindset that always looks forward to what lies ahead, rather than rest on past accomplishment (Philippians 3:13). A life of faithful obedience and endurance in the face of suffering is daily and ongoing. It is the means to win the championship of this life.

Biblical Text

6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, 7 for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; 8 for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord. 9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, 10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?