

# Praises for a Healthy Church

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[0:00] I think it is. I'm getting some hand signals. Is that better? Okay. I got tail into some crud here,!

And served one another. What a perfect coordination and timing of God's good work in the church. So hopefully this, what I'm talking about today is a barometer of our church, not a call to do something maybe that we're not doing.

So what a perfect, this just worked out so nicely together. Let's pray real quick, church. Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for this time to meet together. Thank you for bringing us all together in your name.

Thank you for those who call this church family home and come to worship with us. Thank you for the guests here today. Pray, God, that the words coming out of my mouth will be yours and not mine, and that your scripture will be edified, and we will glorify you today in this.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. So a couple weeks ago, I was coming off the tail end of the Good Samaritan. I was searching around for something to work on next, and my lovely bride recommended, well, how about 1 Thessalonians?

[1:31] And I started reading through it and like, you know what? That's just about right. So over the next few times that I'm up here, I'll be going through 1 Thessalonians.

This time, we'll take a small chunk of chapter one this time, and then next time I'm up here, we'll continue to work through chapter one and then Lord willing, beyond. So again, with the idea of a barometer in mind of what Paul's talking about here and what he's writing about encouraging the Thessalonians, keep that in mind as we go through this.

So what's the ideal church? What makes a good church? I know these are broad questions here, but what makes a good church? Does it have to be full of believers?

A little inflammatory there. Have we considered that as we go through life and have the opportunity to pick a church? Is it the number of programs the church has? The fancy building, a coffee bar, or maybe the seemingly well put together preacher?

So Jessica, I've moved around a fair bit in our life. We've been in the military for a long time, so we've had our opportunity to move and see different churches. And even in the same area, God's worked on our heart and moved us in some areas differently.

[2:42] So we have gone church shopping quite a bit. I readily admit, especially when we were younger, we were not always grounded in Scripture when we were looking for a new home. We were looking for those things that look kind of cool on the outside.

Like, oh, that's got to be a good church and well put together. It's nice. Got a beautiful building. Coffee bar's good. They serve Starbucks. I'm in. We know that's not right. We know that's not the, does not discount by any means that church that has that may be preaching soundly and wholesomely.

But often things I've previously mentioned, right, that would not be the deciding factor. Oftentimes for us, location would play a big role. Not wanting to have to drive more than 15 minutes. And then we moved to New Kent and everything's a 30 minute drive.

So all New Kenters know it doesn't matter anyway. So we weren't looking for the right things. We were looking for external things, not the heart of the church. Who is the church?

Who are the people in that church? Taking it a step further, instead of church shopping, we've got many people grounded here, been here a long time. How about the church that you're in?

[3:47] Hopefully that's this one for everyone here. Hopefully nobody's church shopping. Unless guests, you're welcome. Is this the ideal church? How about being a church worthy of accolades and praises?

Is this church worthy of praise and accolades from our leaders? That begs the question, what makes a church worthy of praise? Not for the sake of praises, not because that's the reason we shouldn't be getting praises, but knowing how a believing church should be conducting themselves to be that church that honors God and its leaders.

What causes that to be so? What causes a church to be worthy of praise that's glorifying God? Paul tells us some of these characteristics that we can latch onto for the confirmation of our church or things to be striving for.

So the bottom line up front today, closer to the front as opposed to last time, a true and believing church that causes one to pause and give thanks to God is one that has visible works from faith, labor from loving hearts, and endurance as we hope in Christ's return, knowing he chose us to be his church.

So we're going to break this down in three sections. First, kind of just a brief background. Like I said, I won't spend too much time in the background, but as I move through 1 Thessalonians, this will kind of lay the foundations of where Paul's at, why he's saying these things, kind of the region they're in.

[5:05] And it helps with the context a little bit. Secondly, we're going to spend some time going through these characteristics of believing church. And lastly, we're going to talk about why we should be striving for these characteristics.

What does Paul tell us is the reason for that? So for those that are less excited about history lessons and didn't stand it and couldn't stand it at school, bear with me.

This will be painless and quick. So Thessalonica or Thessaloniki or Salonika, depending on what you're reading, your translation or the historical name or the time in history that the city was named, could all be how your Bible calls it.

Or your footnotes might say it in that way. So it was a city in northern Greece. At the time, it had an estimated population of 100,000. Something in the region, maybe if you expand outline theories, up to 200,000.

So a decent population center. So considerably. Nowadays, it's still a city. It's still there. You can see a lot of the ruins that were there in Paul's time are still scattered throughout the city. Now it's closer to about 800,000, maybe over a million if you consider the outlying areas.

[6:11] It was situated on the intersection of two major Roman roads. And this was important. A lot of trade came through there. You know, a lot of trade comes through there. Money comes through there. So it's going to be the hub.

It's going to be a center of cultural activity, a center of all things going on. If you wanted the news or the media, you wouldn't simply scroll. This is where you would go to catch up on the latest and greatest.

It was also on a major harbor in the Aegean Sea. So a lot of trade moved in there via the roads, via the harbor, and then in and out via there. During the later part of the Roman Civil Wars, the city, you don't need to know this, right?

Don't camp out on this, but there's a point to this. The city sided with Octavian in the fight against Mark Antony. You know, there's that famous battle, Mark Antony and Cleopatra. And as a result of that victory, the city was designated a free city.

So it was largely free from Roman rule. It enabled a form of self-governments that kind of kept them free from military occupation, allowed them to set up their system of government and city structure how they saw fit.

[7:18] And kind of much like our nation, liberty enables prosperity. So this society was well off compared to many in the region. There was a lot of money through here. A lot of people were very wealthy.

Well off. This was a comfortable place to live. This freedom also allowed them to worship many gods. Mostly Greco-Roman gods, but there's some evidence of Egyptian gods and also various cults through here.

So this was not a godless culture, but not the one true god culture. They were worshiping things that were not real. These were not real gods. So much of the church, the future church at Thessalonica, which happened at the time, they were worshiping other gods.

They were worshiping Egyptian gods, cults, all the various Greco-Roman gods and other different things. So think of that change and think of now as we go through this, the praise Paul is pushing out and reaping on this church.

Think of that, where they came from. Comfortable life, great place to live, not worshiping God, worshiping God. They were worshiping other gods.

[8:24] So enter Paul. So we find the account of his time here in Acts 17, 1 through 9. I've got a lot of material, so I'm not going to read that. We'll skip it. But for your notes, 17, 1 through 9.

Honestly, if you come back and study on this later, start like the later end of chapter 15, go through 16, you'll kind of see where Paul was at. But we know, remember, he was on his second missionary journey.

He got the Macedonian vision. He got this vision when he was dreaming, and he felt God led him to go into Macedonia and preach the word there in Macedonia. So coming from Philippi, remember, got driven out of Philippi.

That's where he was in jail, the earthquake. The jailer saw his righteousness staying in jail. He didn't flee from the man. His house was brought to the Lord at the time. And then Paul left, and here he is now in Thessalonica.

So we know he arrived here with Silas and Timothy and preached the gospel on three Sabbaths at the synagogue. We don't know if he was there longer than three or maybe less, you know, if you go three, think of three Sundays.

[9:27] So it could be less than even three weeks, but it could be more. We don't know. We know it does tell us he taught on three Sundays or three Sabbaths. So who was attending the Sabbath at the time?

This included some Jews, Greeks, and also it mentioned some prominent women in the community. This is a diverse section of society that made up this early church. Greeks, Jews, all unbelievers, as best as we can tell.

But this teaching angered the Jews who were in turn stirred up a mob in the city. Paul and his companions were quickly whisked away at night to Berea, which the Bible tells us had a more noble-minded people than Thessalonica.

The angry Jews in Thessalonica, not being satisfied with driving Paul out of the city, followed him all the way to Berea, down to the south in Berea. Showed up there, rallied some crowds, and drove Paul out again with Timothy and Silas following Paul at a later time.

We're almost done with the history lesson, I promise. Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica where he stayed for a time. And this is where we get much of this information from that Paul references.

[10:35] So before returning to be with Paul in Corinth, where this letter was written, dated around potentially AD 51, Timothy was up there.

Timothy was sent back up there, spent time with the Thessalonians, with that Thessalonian church, learned their behavior, encouraged them, taught them, and lived with them for a while.

Timothy's report was largely positive. We'll see here in the first few verses. The letter primarily addressed Paul's integrity as when he left, he was accused of being selfishly motivated, often by the Jews that were not in the Thessalonian church.

They were being selfishly motivated, accused by those outside of the church. He encourages the church in their persecution and commands them to live a holy life. Finally, he encourages readers that those dead and alive in Christ, they will see him upon his return.

It was a point of concern for the Thessalonians at the time. And Lord willing, we'll get more into that as we go through Thessalonians. But that's largely big breaststroke of what 1 Thessalonians is about.

So we're going to read 1 Thessalonians 1, 1 through 10. We're only working through 1 through 5, but it's all one thought. That first chapter is all one thought of Paul's. We're going to work through verses 1 through 10 just so you can kind of see the context of that paragraph.

[11:50] And then we'll start working through 1 through 5. So 1 Thessalonians, starting in verse 1, go through 1 through 10. Paul and

Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

Give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers, constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren, beloved by God, His choice of you.

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. Just as you know what kind of men we prove to be among, sorry, just as you know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sake, you also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth so that we have no need to say anything.

For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

[13:27] So all one thought, you can see Paul's gratefulness to his church here, to this church here, and his gratefulness to God for giving this church the heart to believe and the heart to act on that.

So starting out in verse 1, Paul uses what we know to be a standard greeting that he uses in other letters introducing himself and both Silas or Silvanus, depending on your translation, and Timothy. The Thessalonian church knows of these two men who were with Paul when he was there.

As I mentioned above, remember Timothy returned here from Athens for a time. Paul mentions this later on in chapter 3, verse 1 and 2. He says, Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it best to be left behind alone at Athens, and we sent Timothy, our brother, and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ to strengthen and encourage you for the benefit of your faith.

So we know why Paul sent Timothy back there and why he went back there and he was there, which is, again, where this came from. Including these two in the introduction, though, strengthens Paul's letter and informs them he has spoken with Timothy recently.

Thereby, Paul's caught up on this information. It adds validity to this because remember, there's some of those outside that are the church that are attacking Paul, saying, You don't know what you're talking about. You're here for selfish gain.

[14:39] This is ridiculous. Paul is there by telling them by this, saying, Yeah, I'm caught up on events. I know what's going on. Timothy was just there. He's with me now. I'm writing this letter. Sorry, guys. I get what's going on.

I'm in. I'm in the know. This also shows the three of them are in unity in the letters contents, being early leaders of the church. This is very important. Something important to capture out of this greeting is Paul using the term church to refer to the readers and calling them in God.

This is important. Don't let this escape your attention as we move through this. There's meaning here. This supports Paul's thanksgiving for a believing church by referring to the church of the Thessalonians He is asserting his belief that these people, most of whom were Gentiles, are a true believing group of people.

Take a look at his intro in a few of his other letters just for comparison to get some context. So in Colossians, he starts out by saying, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae.

Ephesians, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus. And to his letter to the Philippians, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.

[15:54] So he addresses some of his letters as in Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians and some others by referring to them as a church. There's a point to that. There's a point that he does this.

There's some language nuance involved in the word church that further shows that Paul uses this word purposefully. He purposefully is using this letter. I'm not going to go too far into it, but there's a reason for it and that word has meaning and has depth.

So what are many, if not most, of Paul's letters written for? Oftentimes, what does Paul do in some of these letters? Often he is admonishing the church, right, for sinful behavior. And then he

encourages them to get out of that behavior, shows them what right living is like and what serving the Lord is like and talks about their salvation.

Or because of this, because you've been saved by so great a God, therefore, you ought to, whatever, move on to the next thing. Getting them out, putting off whatever that sinful behavior is, moving them on to what that thing is.

So he's admonishing the church for an unbelieving type of behavior, sinful behavior. He's acknowledging this largely Gentile church, though, is part of God's people, having believing hearts.

[17:03] That's why he's saying this right off the bat. Is there such a thing as an unbelieving church to counter this, to find the other side of this? We see Paul address his letters in different ways.

I don't think much has changed in 2,000 years. Just like he addressed issues of immorality in the church at Corinth and other problems in churches in other letters, we see the same thing now, don't we?

By no means am I bashing any church. That's not the point. But you can quickly see the difference in a church that is grounded in God's Word. Great example. Again, this was not planned. Great example is the vignette.

That was just so perfect. It just played so nicely into this. God truly worked all this out just for His glory. But you can see the difference in a church that's grounded in God's Word and a church that's grounded in doing church things.

Just being there, doing the thing, checking the block, showing up on Sunday. Yeah, I worked in the thing, did the thing last Sunday. There's a big difference there. And those who attend here regularly know this.

[18:04] They see this in our church. So I don't think much has changed. Paul said there's the same thing. 2,000 years ago, I think it's the same thing. There's a church of believers maybe who are struggling and needing encouragement and needing the Word.

And then there's stronger churches who are serving God with everything they have. We can see a difference in a strong church full of believers and one that is not teaching God's Word because we should, at some level, see the fruit.

Having a church full of believers is part of the main point here, though. This is an indication of a healthy church. This is what causes right characteristics of a church to be seen.

The other indication that helps steer us in the right direction is by the phrase, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. When written this way, it highlights the role of God in that relationship, meaning the Thessalonian church was because of God's Word, not of anyone else.

I've mentioned this previously, but I'll bring it up again. Remember, Paul knows the Jewish opposition, right, and the influence he's up against here. So using the term in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, he's kind of, in modern language, not trolling, but maybe trolling a little bit a lot of the Jewish opposition around there.

[19:27] One, he's making clear his view on Christ. And more importantly, he further encourages his readers on the deity of Christ. So Paul now begins moving into the next few verses as he starts here by expressing his thankfulness to God for the Thessalonian believers and he prays.

Note there that he says, they, or he says, we, they were taking the time to earnestly pray for this church. This shouldn't be lost on us as well as a church, as families, as individuals. We should be doing this.

We should be gathering and praying, much like Jeremy did in our call to worship. Are we taking the time to think and give thanks on the amazing work of the Lord and his work in the church?

Oftentimes, I don't, right?

We get busy throughout the week, succumb to the busyness of life in the world at times, not thinking about what great things God has done for our church. In Jessica and I's time here, we've seen the church move from a small back room, which I believe now is our breakfast nook, to a much bigger room with multiple bathrooms, and then now in a gathering space we have today.

Just taking it over the whole scheme that it's gone through and the whole grand scheme of time, it's just kind of incredible to think about what God's done in this church. He's grown it and moved it and strengthened it.

[20:45] It's not the building, really, that's the point. It's not the function of it all. It's the opportunity for us to come together and use our gifts to glorify God. God. That's the point.

And that's the point Paul is making here as he moves into this and he explicitly says what he's thankful for. Paul takes time to be mindful of the good things heard about this church and to pray and give thanks to God for them.

What is he bearing in mind and thinking about that he is so thankful for in this church? What are these characteristics that bring him so much joy? He says here in verse 3, constantly keeping in mind your work of faith and labor of love and perseverance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.

This is a common trio of characteristics. Some of you might be familiar with this. It's used by Paul elsewhere in scripture. This, as far as we know, being the first time it was used because we think, as far as the lens of history tells us, that 1 Thessalonians was his first letter, at least that we have recorded and have kept.

Work of faith, labor of love, and perseverance of hope. You may be more familiar with it in order of faith, hope, and love. Everyone's probably heard of that. For example, using 1 Corinthians 13, 13.

[22:07] But now, faith, hope, and love remain. These three, but the greatest of these is love. And again, he uses it in Colossians 1, 4 through 6. He says, Since we heard of your faith in Jesus Christ and the love which you have for all the saints because of the hope reserved for you in heaven of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you just as in all the world, also it is bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

Now, depending on what he is emphasizing will depend on the order of these. You see he switches the order in some of what he's writing. It's not the same. He moves around to play on what he's going to either talk about next or something he's emphasizing further on in his letter.

This will come to play later in chapter 4 when Paul addresses some of these concerns that as his church is patiently waiting on Christ's return, they were concerned what was happening to those who had died prior to Christ's returning.

So at the time, some of these things maybe we take for granted. We take this because we have God's word in its entirety right now. There's nothing new coming. We got it right here. So we're able to read this and we're able to see and God's told us what he has planned and what's coming.

This early church had questions on some of this and so they would often reference their church leaders and they were concerned about this. Paul addresses this later on. So he puts it in that order for a specific reason.

[23:33] In addition to other issues related to Christ's second coming, they had questions and were concerned about. So he puts emphasis on that characteristic in support of the rest of the letter that Lord willing we'll get to eventually.

But for now, let's start with our first characteristic, work of faith. Now I'll say that I had no intention of continuing the discussion of works from the Good Samaritan that we were on a few weeks ago.

But as I write this and I started studying through this a few days in, I was like, well, I'm just right back in it. So I apologize for the redundancy but you'll be well studied now to dive right into this. And the men's study, I think several weeks before that.

Sorry, fellas, but we were in James chapter 2 so we're certainly going to be familiar with all things works by the time we're done. Looking at the New Testament view of works, we'll quickly see that it is the fruit of faith.

Having faith in God's promise that He is predestined and prepared for us, predestined and prepared for us righteous works in Him. All the talents, skills, ideas, and abilities God prepared us long ago to serve Him by serving the church.

[24:42] Ephesians 2.10 tells us, for we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Can't say it any clearer than that. I'll repeat that again later because that's important to hang on to. And the little application part of this, do you have a heart and talent for serving others?

Help out with meal trains, food prep for Wednesday night stays. Are you handy, mechanically minded? There's lots of need in the physical building with cleaning and other things. Help out with that. Do you have a heart for children?

Help out in the nursery. Help out, how about teaching and public speaking? Are you good at it? Are you called to do it? God gives us the abilities and heart to serve His church as He requires. They're there.

You have those abilities. Every single one of us has those abilities to serve this church and they're all the same. One is not greater than another. Our body needs all the parts, every little piece and part.

[25:40] You take out a part out of my inside, I'm not going to work. They have to function together. Remember how the Good Samaritan ended since we were so close to this?

What did Jesus tell the lawyer at the end of all that whole parable in the vignette? To go and do the same. Now don't get too, we shouldn't get too mechanical about this as maybe the Western church I think often does and take this solely to mean serving the church building or serving the process, the process of coming together.

That's not necessarily the point. Remember, we're serving our fellow believers. We're serving our church family. It's not the process. It's not the building that's the point. Those support us and help us to serve each other and to teach and come together.

It's nice having lights and AC and a roof overhead but that's not the point. This is the point. We are the point here serving each other, loving on each other, serving our pastor as he needs our love and our time.

That's the point. Don't let that escape us. We can't let that escape us. Not any of the things I mentioned previous are inherently wrong at face value but much like we learned in the parable of the Good Samaritan and in James and elsewhere, these works are done as a requirement and not from faith.

[26:57] If they're done looking at it as a requirement, they can be kind of self-deceiving, can't they? I've gotten in this trap in the past before like I've got to go do this thing. I've got to do this.

Is it just the requirement thing to do? No, I'm doing this because I have faith in God that he's called me to do a certain thing. He's put this thing in front of me. I trust God.

I trust his plan so I'm going to follow it and I'm going to do that. Do the thing that's put before me. We get caught up in that, hey, you know, I did my thing last month. I did some cleanup. I showed my face.

I'm good for a while. Good job. Good on doing that. That is a good start. But we can do more.

There's always more time. What are you going to trade off? Good works done in faith are genuine and sacrificial.

And that's what Timothy is seeing in that church. That's what he's reported back to Paul. This is a church that is serving each other. They are faithfully working and doing the things, serving each other at each other's side, serving their church family and serving the community around them, sacrificing their time, their resources to put into others.

[28:04] What I mean by this is that we're doing these things from a gracious heart that desires to please the Lord and the genuineness of that service is seen and heard and felt in the church.

This is usually at the cost of something. For me, it's usually time. In my phase of life, my job is very demanding at time. That's honestly my most precious commodity at this phase.

In order to do things that I've been prepared for and designed to do, things I should be doing, serving the church, serving others, serving my neighbors, doing the thing that just shows up on my doorstep randomly that I know God's put in front of me I need to work toward, I have to give up something.

You have to give up something. What were you doing prior to that? You ever have that thought in your head? Well, when he showed up, I guess I, man, I could make an excuse. I've got to go do this thing. But what's pulling you away?

Something's pulling you away. It's the thing. You know, waxing the boat, cleaning the car. Often, it's my selfish heart doing the thing that I want to do or the thing I think I need to do.

[29:13] Maybe I want to catch up on some me time. I'm like, I'm so tired. I just want to rest. I just want to take a break. I got a garage full of broken jet skis.

They're going to stay there. They can sit for longer. What's more important? In that moment, church family, remember that. That thing shows up. Remember, we are faithfully working and serving our God by serving our church family or serving our brothers and sisters.

And I know we do here. I know we do here. I see it here. This morning was such a great example. I'm so, I'm just so thrilled about it. I'm going to repeat it again because we're just so excited. I'm like, I was sitting there thinking, like, ah, that's perfect. I don't even think we had that plan.

I don't even think serving, going and serving Jeff was on the docket when I started working on this. So, so neat how that pulled together. I don't need a rest. God will provide that.

Being a lifelong military man, and there's a few in here who may have heard this before. I was thinking as I was writing this as I was, and convicted about this because it's always going through my head. I'm like, I'm so tired. I just need a break. I just want to escape.

[30:18] I just want to go on a vacation. I flew down to Florida the other day to pick some people up and I had like an hour on the ground. I'm like, I could spend a couple weeks here. This is nice. It's 67 degrees, just beautiful blue water.

I just need a rest. And it came back to me all that time ago, huffing through the woods, sitting down, leaning up against a tree, just catching a break.

Sarge comes up to you. Hey, private, what are you doing? I'm taking a break. I'm tired. You can rest when you're dead, son. I kind of chuckled myself.

Think about that. I was telling Jessica about that to gauge if it was appropriate to stay in church or not. But man, how theologically accurate is that? You can rest when you're dead. And isn't that the real, that's the real rest.

That's where it really comes from. That's what we can look forward to. You got your sleep. You got your time. Get up. Get back to work. That's the point here.

[31:15] That's what, that's what this church is doing. That's what Timothy's seeing happening here. That me time I'm missing out on, it won't compare. He didn't need it anyway. We just wanted it.

So kind of wrapping up these works of faith that he's saying he sees in them. Jesus tells us in John 3, 21, but the one who practices, practices the truth comes to the light so that his deeds will be revealed as having been performed in God.

The next characteristic in this church that Paul is thankful for is their labor of love. Reading through this at first glance, it almost seems to see he was saying the same thing between works of faith and labor of love.

I kind of got hung up on the English translation of the works and labor. It kind of pulled me in. As I further dove into it, I kind of looked at the words individually.

It kind of paints a more clear picture. The word Paul uses for work or works, it more closely means action or act of zeal. It relates exactly to work.

[32:16] It relates what you and I would think of work. So forms of this in relation to building, technical work, agricultural, cultural activities, doing the thing, working and doing the thing.

So the translation is pretty straightforward. So working, doing works of faith. Remember, our faith produces those good works. Like in English, we might hear of a day laborer or a day worker.

It would mean the same thing to us. Oh, yeah, I'm a day laborer. I'm a construction worker. That's what I do every day. They generally mean the same thing. But this term Paul uses for labor has more of a meaning of the exertion caused by manual work that brings about physical tiredness.

It's kind of the end or the result of working. To give you more of a sense of this, so in the Septuagint, which is the original Greek translation of the Old Testament, that word for labor, it's used continuously in the Old Testament.

Examples are in Joshua and some other places to signify the tiring from battle, the exhaustion from fighting or the exertions from continuously working or the groaning of the afflicted.

[33:25] So you see, it's a little bit different what Paul is saying here. It's more separate. So simply put, where works of faith might be the actions we undertake as a result of us believing God, our labor of love is that weariness from battle that we endure because of our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

That exhaustion from doing the work constantly over and over again, showing up week after week, day after day, doing the things that God has put before you. This may be simple, church.

Don't overlook this. This isn't, this isn't, you know, am I serving? Am I cleaning the church every day, every Sunday, every week, every doing the thing? Don't get hung up on that. It's also right in front of you at home too, right, in our marriages, with our kids.

Are we laboring to love our wives, love our husbands, love our kids, and that, it's constant. It's every day. It's hard sometimes, isn't it? That's that labor of love over and over, not just once. It's not that simple mechanical work, but laboring at it constantly and consistently, sacrificing your time, your leisure, your resources, and maybe in some cases your health.

We could just look at the life of Paul, for example, this. Remember where he was prior to this. Remember he was in prison in Philippi. Remember, you kind of gloss over it a little bit, but remember when the jailer, there was the earthquake, the doors fell down, their chains fell off, and the jailer came.

[34:50] He said, what must I do to be saved? Paul preaches to the man. He's baptized. He repents. What does it say he does? He tends to his wounds. He was not sitting in a nice cushy prison because he had a hard night.

He has wounds, so this wasn't an easy life. Either the shackles were too tight, they were probably beaten. We don't know exactly how long he was in there. This cannot be done without a heart of love for God's people, and that's what Paul had, and that's what Timothy sees in his church.

That's what Paul is so thankful for. The Thessalonian believers labor of love for each other. They labor. They toil. They're long-suffering for one another, and the only way one endures that is because of love.

You can do the work once. I can do the thing. There we go. Knock it out. Get it done. Okay, you're welcome. See you later. How about again, and again, and the next time, and the next time, and how about sacrificing, take it a step further, how about sacrificing the things you want and you have and your stuff and your time and your resources.

That is that labor of love. That only comes from a heart of love for Christ and a love for believers. Society will tell us there's a limit to this kind of action or that we should be receiving compensation for some sort or the work isn't fair.

[36:07] You're like, I don't need to do that. That's not fair. They can do that on their own. We always want to justify it. We need to get out of it for some way. This is where the love of God working in us is seen most. Expecting nothing in return, laboring for one another.

Our church is a good example of this right now. It's just so perfect. With Jeff out, people stepping in the near term. As people move and shift, people have to fill in and move and shift, and our church has been so gracious at that.

It's been so amazing to watch. There's been vacancies in other areas and needs in other areas or needs or opportunities if you ask me. Opportunities to serve in maybe ways you didn't know you were gifted.

Maybe ways you hadn't thought of before. There's plenty of opportunities to do this continuing in the future. Hopefully, the good news is that Jeff is going to be hopefully back up on the move soon, but there's always something else.

There's always something that comes along. There's always going to be a need for us to serve, church family. Moving to this final characteristic, Paul says, their perseverance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ was another reason for his thankfulness to the Lord.

[37:10] Remember, he mentions this last to help emphasize the importance of this hope in the Lord, specifically the Lord's return at his appointed time. To kind of give you a head into the rest of the letter, Paul is doing this in the original language.

This would be clear to them, but he's doing this kind of a foot stomp a little bit to say here, hey, continue to patiently wait in the Lord. He is coming back.

Don't worry. And this is important. I'm going to talk about this later. So that's why this is kind of listed here. He addresses several things related to eschatology and that later.

That's why that is there, hoping in the Lord, that perseverance as they hope in the Lord, that study of the last things and end times. There's a couple spots that he addresses that, and we'll get into that hopefully as we move through this letter later.

But here he expresses thankfulness for their perseverance of hope that they do have. This church is showing signs of a faithful, dedicated attitude that is patiently waiting on the Lord's return.

[38:17] Timothy must have seen and reported to Paul the evidence of these believers were expressing that true confidence in Christ's return, not just a simple wish or just a general desire like, boy, yeah, I sure hope God returns.

That's too simple. That's not what he's saying here. That's not what he's saying he's seeing in them. He's saying that he's seeing a true unwavering belief that they will be with Christ in eternity.

That shapes your mindset. It shapes the way you think. Right? Rest when you're dead. It's... If you're thinking of eternity and you're thinking that you're going to be home with Christ when you die, how does that shape how you act here on earth?

It shapes the other two characteristics. Well, if that's the case, if I know where I'm going, I have a trust and I'm going to persevere knowing that I have hope in Christ's return and hope that he has saved me, that's going to change my whole life.

That's going to change my daily walk. That's going to change everything. When we know we're going to be judged on what we did here on earth and what God gave us, it hopefully adds a little bit of overhead to that as well.

[39:29] It puts a certain level of seriousness in that everyday life as well. And also comfort, knowing that our God has prepared a path for us. Remember, he's prepared for us good works in advance that we can partake in and we can be part of and we can do.

He's prepared that for us. Let's recap on these three characteristics. We've got a few more verses to move into here.

I'm pausing. I'm skipping over a few things. You're welcome. Their work of faith, remember initially, was seen in them through the good works they were doing amongst each other. Serving, working diligently to address needs in the church, all as a faithful response to God's goodness.

Then their labor of love. This was their long suffering and almost weariness in service. It was the idea of serving over and over. They were faithful. Faithful, remember, faith produces those works. They were laboring in that love, toiling to love their brothers and sisters in Christ and those around them, those that God has brought before them. That weariness, not in a downcast or poor me sort of way.

[40:37] I want to point that out. This isn't, oh man, I'm just so tired. I got to do the thing again. I got to clean the church and I got to work in the thing. I got to go do that. That's not what that is.

So push that away. And we'll get into that joy of that in a minute. Paul's going to speak to that. We're doing this with joyful hearts, knowing that our toil is not in vain.

Look what Paul says here in Philippians 2, 14 through 18. Do all things without complaining or arguments so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God, above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights, lights in the world, holding firmly the word of life so that on the day of Christ I can take pride because I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering, upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and I share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.

That was Philippians 2, 14 through 18. Paul knows what is at hand. He knows the end is coming. He doesn't consider his labor meaningless or in vain.

[41:57] He is joyful in his service to them. He is happy in what he is doing to them. He is serving them and he's encouraging them to do the same. That only comes from a faithful, loving heart that trusts in the

Lord.

That's not going to come naturally. You can see that in the society around us. Don't people think Christians are crazy? They're thankful for these circumstances and they see your joy amongst trials.

What's wrong with you? That's a horrible circumstance. Why are you smiling? Because I trust that God has put this before me to serve my family, serve my church family and serve him knowing he's called me for this and saved me.

And finally, we move to that last characteristic to kind of recap these three. Their perseverance of hope in Christ is reported to Paul that they're displaying behavior indicative of a life that patiently waits on the Lord's return.

This should cause us to act differently, right? Knowing Christ's return is imminent. We don't know this, but what if you knew exactly when Jesus was coming back? What if it was years from now?

[42:58] Like, alright, five years. I got four years and eleven months and I can get my act together. Right? We know our sinful minds would take advantage of that time.

I'm a procrastinator at heart. I definitely would. I've got a week to do it. I'm going to wait until I've got a day because if you've got a minute, whatever you're doing only takes a minute, right? I'm going to drag it on. What if you've got a day left?

Uh-oh. What'd you do with the time previously? Remember, think of Christ's return as imminent, knowing He's coming back for us. Zooming back out, we can see these same characteristics in our church.

Largely, I think I see these constantly here. We have an amazing church body here. Again, probably not a good thing, but I've been part of a lot of churches just because of moving and everything else.

I haven't seen a church like this before. I've never been part of a church like this before and I am so grateful for it. Much as in Paul reflects on his joy and gratefulness to God for the Thessalonians, I am grateful to be part of this church.

[44:03] I absolutely love it. So, knowing our church is doing the right things, knowing we're going in the right direction, does that mean we're good?

Does that mean we've made it? We've reached the end. I'm good. We're doing it right, church.

Good job. All right, take a knee. Take a rest. You can rest when you're dead. It's quite the opposite. As we learn and grow and serve and love better, the bar continually gets raised. So, if we did this and we're able to accomplish this, how much more can I sacrifice and serve over here?

The bar goes up. Much like an athlete, right, you think of a, like pole vaulting, you see them go over the bar. What happens when they get good? They get better, right? The bar's down here. Shoot, I can make that, right?

Then the bar gets up here. They get better, right? You see where this is going, right? I don't know if anybody will ever the point, but the bar continually raised. We made this bar, church. Let's make the next one. I'm going to move through these last two verses a little quicker than I should to kind of close this thought out here as Paul, this is all one thought here in chapter one, but to move through this, there's point to these last two verses in here, so we need to make sure we capture that.

[45:25] But let me read two through five again just so we can see the whole thing in context because context is important. 1 Thessalonians 1, 2 through 5. We always give thanks to God for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers, constantly keeping in mind your work of faith and labor of love and perseverance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brothers and sisters, beloved by God, his choice of you.

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. Just as you know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sakes.

There's a lot there. We could probably, we could spend, we could spend our time just on that. I'll have to move through it a little quicker. I'll recap on those a little bit because those blend into his final thought in this chapter, so next time I'm up here, we'll talk a little more on those.

But he continues in his thankfulness in verse four saying, he knows God's choice of them. How can he confidently say that he knows God's choice of them? Because of what he just said, right? Because that Timothy said, hey, this church has got it. This church gets it. They're doing the things. Paul, look what they're doing. This church is working in faith.

[46:38] This church is serving one another. This church is laboring for one another in love. They are steadfast and hoping in the Lord's return. It's incredible what I've seen. So Paul knows this.

He says, man, that is awesome. That only comes from a church that's full of transformed hearts. I'm sure many are wondering how you've all been waiting patiently at the edge of your seats for it. The obligatory Matthew Henry quote. I haven't forgotten. It's right here. By this we may know of our election if we not only speak of the things of God with our lips but feel their power in our hearts mortifying our lusts weaning us from the world and raising us up to heavenly things.

Those who attend our men's study should be familiar with James chapter 2 14 through 16 where we kind of did a deep dive on works being the evidence of true faith not a path to gain salvation. That's how the church was able to display these characteristics. At the beginning we looked at the language use that highlights Paul's consideration of this church being made up of true believers. This is how he's thinking.

[47:44] He knows they're made up of true believers and he's saying this in his language here. This is why he says knowing brothers and sisters be loved by God his choice of you. Paul is confident that this church is among the elect and this is why they display these characteristics he is so thankful for.

The elect God's sovereign choice in salvation. We'll spend more on that later. We don't have the time today. But I will say this the text stands on its own.

There's no secret or different meaning here. It doesn't need anything else. It is written as it is written. Paul says that God chose them. The thread of God's sovereignty is clear throughout Scripture.

You can't ignore it. We are told this message the good news of salvation Jesus Christ did not come in words only but in power in the form of the Holy Spirit.

Some commentators here there's a few kind of mixed meanings on this. Ultimately they all mean the same. But some commentators here believe the meaning of this verse that Paul himself may have displayed some miracles here in this church that they saw just based on the way he wrote it in addition to the words of the gospel he preached.

[49:01] Others simply state the power of the Holy Spirit accompanies the gospel received by faith in Christ. And this working power is what is being displayed in us as a result of our transformed hearts.

This is how we're able to serve and to love and to be patiently hopeful for our Lord's return. Is God working through us in us through the Holy Spirit? The latter is certain with the former being quite possible.

We don't know. Scripture doesn't come out and say that. But ultimately the meaning is that the good news of the gospel is accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit for those who believe. And he boldly claims that they prove to be examples of this in their time with them.

Paul tells them, hey, we prove to be examples. Remember some of the theme of the letters, him defending himself a little bit from non-believers outside the church. So he threads that in in several places. He says, hey, just like we prove to be examples of the gospel to you.

And he boldly claims that they prove to be the examples of this in their time with them. Timothy's telling them, hey, I saw them do this. I saw them emulating you. I saw them emulating our behavior. I saw them emulating Christ's behavior.

[50:16] There's more there, but we'll kind of briefly recap on what we talked about. So starting out in this first letter, the Thessalonians, Paul expresses great gratitude to God for the believers in the Thessalonian church. He's thankful initially for three characteristics they displayed, their work of faith, their labor of love, and their perseverance of hope in Christ Jesus.

He continues by being thankful to God for his sovereign choice in them, knowing that he has chosen them, much like we heard in Ephesians 2.10. I'll read one more time. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we should walk in them.

Remember that, church family. When that thing is put before you, what's more important? Remember, God prepared that for you. He gave you that opportunity. It came out in front of you to do that. It's through our believing hearts that we display our faith, our loving hearts, and our hope in Christ to our church and to those the Lord puts in front of us.

So today, church family, go and do that today. When that's put before you, remember that.

Remember that God caused that for you today. Let's pray. Let's pray. Dear Lord, thank you for this time together.

Thank you for this attentive church family. Thank you for the loving and gracious and wonderful hearts we have here. Thank you for this church, Lord. Thank you for the freedom to be here and to teach and to love those around us and to gather together in your name, knowing that not everyone gets to do what we get to do here, Lord.

[51:48] We pray as we go forth this week, you give us gracious, loving hearts that we serve you with those opportunities that are put in front of us and serve you with joyful, loving, gracious attitudes, God, knowing that our rest is in eternity with you, not here today.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.