

2:17 But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

3 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker^[a] in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, ³ that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. ⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. ⁵ For this reason, 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.

Read 2:17-18. Paul feels as though they were “torn away” from the Thessalonians. He says that he feels as though he is “orphaned from them”. Almost a reverse orphaned. There is such great emphasis on church being family. But he realized it was really just for a short time in terms of eternity.

Ask, What do you think we could do to feel as we are family here in our community group and our church?

Interestingly here Paul refers to Satan hindering them from visiting the Thessalonians face to face. Paul rarely refers to Satan in his writings. We need to be careful to give too much credit to Satan. What is the danger in giving too much credit in our everyday lives? (We could blame Satan for us being lazy and disobedient.)

Satan consistently hinders Gospel work and faithful obedience. If you are being distracted or hindered from helping others come to Christ and living obediently, then that is Satan at work. The Thessalonians were struggling because they were sharing the gospel, not just everyday happenings.

Read 2: 19-20. Paul says he will be overjoyed if he stands before the Lord and is able to boast on how the Thessalonians were faithful to Jesus.

Ask, When you think about what you hope for as you stand before Christ is it for your own self or for those you have invested in for them to be faithful to Christ? Many times, we hope we are “good enough” to make it and Paul mentions that his boasting would be for those he brought to Christ not in his works or deeds. Who are you investing in for eternity? (Your family, your kids, co-workers, etc.)

Ask, What might helping them come to know Christ and live faithfully to Him look like in your life?

Read 3:1-4. Paul went with plan B. Even though Paul and Silas wanted to come back to the church they were not able to as we discussed, so they sent Timothy. Timothy is a young believer sent to a young church. And Paul lets them know that Timothy is “one of us”. He is a solid believer and Paul stakes his reputation as a leader on Timothy because he has full faith in Timothy. Timothy reminds them be faithful in the midst of all these afflictions.

Ask, Who encourages you when you are faced with afflictions? We need to be careful to go to those who will encourage us to faithful obedience regardless of the circumstances. Many times we are quick to run to those who will wallow in the struggle with us rather than listen and encourage us.

We will all face afflictions. We are “destined for afflictions” when we live faithfully.

Ask, What is your plan when you are destined for something? Do you intentionally lean in to His Word and surround yourself with those who will encourage you to faithful obedience? or, Are you just waiting until affliction comes and just wing it from there?

The way to avoid suffering and affliction, just ignore gospel work. But, we are meant to make disciples as Christ followers.

Read 3:5. Paul wanted to warn them of the tempter (Satan) and to remind them that the tempter will do all he can to keep them from gospel work.

Ask, Are you someone easily distracted and hindered from gospel work? Who do you need to allow in your life to help you be faithfully obedient?

Are you someone who needs to encourage others to be faithful? Are you willing to “risk” and encourage someone who needs encouragement in the midst of affliction and suffering?

Be sensitive to those who may need encouragement in the midst of suffering and affliction. Also, challenge those in your group to be willing to step up and encourage others to be faithfully obedient to Christ.

Take time to take prayer requests and spend time praying for one another.