

UNTIL HE RETURNS

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Part 4: Stand Firm in the Lord

1 Thessalonians 3

In this chapter Paul expresses his deep concern for the young believers who were facing persecution. Unable to visit them himself, he sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage their faith. Timothy returned with the wonderful news that they were standing firm in the Lord. Paul responded with thanksgiving and prayed that their love would increase and that God would prepare them to live holy lives as they awaited Christ's return.

In this chapter Paul describes three very important things Christians are to do until Jesus returns.

1) **Strengthen** One Another

"So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens.

² We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith..." 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 NIV

- Paul cared more about the Thessalonians' spiritual welfare than his own comfort.
- He sent Timothy to strengthen their faith and encourage them during persecution.
- Even strong Christians sometimes need reassurance and support.
- God often uses other believers to help us remain faithful.
- Every Christian can become a source of encouragement to someone else.

Question: How would you strengthen and encourage a new believer who had just accepted Jesus only a few weeks ago and didn't know how to live the Christian life?

Answer: You could begin by reassuring the new believer: "You do not have to know how to do everything yet. Following Jesus is something you learn day by day, with the help of the Holy Spirit and other Christians."

Then you could walk alongside them in a few simple ways:

- Read a Gospel together, perhaps Mark or John, and ask, "What does this show us about Jesus?"
- Show them how to pray in their own words—thanking God, asking for help, and telling him what is on their mind.

- **Help them connect with a church and a few caring believers so they have people to ask and learn from.**
- **Encourage one step of obedience at a time. When they make a mistake, remind them that they can confess it and return to Christ (1 John 1:9).**
- **Check in regularly. Ask what is encouraging them, what is confusing them, and how you can pray for them.**

2) Stand Firm During Difficult Times

“...so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. ⁴ In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. ⁵ For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain. ⁶ But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. ⁷ Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. ⁸ For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.” **1 Thessalonians 3:3-8 NIV**

- Paul prepared new believers to expect trials rather than promising them an easy life.
- Trials do not necessarily mean that we are outside of God’s will.
- Difficulties can test, strengthen, and mature our faith.
- Satan may use suffering to tempt us to doubt God’s goodness.
- Knowing that trials will come helps us prepare to face them with faith.

Question: What did Paul mean when he told the Thessalonian Christians to “stand firm”? How would you help a fellow believer to “stand firm”?

Another believer can be helped by listening to what they are going through, reminding me of God’s promises, praying with them, and staying in touch. Timothy did something like this for the Thessalonians: he went to them to strengthen and encourage their faith (1 Thessalonians 3:2).

3) Stay Ready for Christ’s Return

“How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? ¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. ¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. ¹² May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³ May he strengthen

your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 NIV.

- Paul prayed that their loving care for each other would continue to increase and overflow.
- This loving care should extend beyond our friends to “everyone else.”
- God strengthens our hearts so that we can live holy lives.
- Holiness means becoming increasingly devoted to God and separated from sin.
- Christ’s future return should influence the way we love and live today.

Question: Verses 12—13 say “*May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.*” How can we as sinners possibly be “blameless and holy” when Jesus returns? Is this really possible?

Answer: Yes—but Paul is describing what God can make possible through Christ, not asking Christians to achieve sinless perfection by their own effort.

We can face Jesus’ return with confidence because Christ has forgiven us, and the faithful God who calls us is still making us holy. Our response is to keep trusting him and growing in love.

Notice how the sentence begins: “May he (God) strengthen your hearts” (1 Thessalonians 3:13). Paul is praying for God to do this work. The preceding verse asks God to make their love “increase and overflow” (3:12). As believers grow in love and holiness, they are learning to live in a way that pleases him.

“Blameless” does not mean that a Christian is sinless or has never sinned. It means being free from a charge that would condemn us before God. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, believers are forgiven and accepted by God (Romans 8:1). God also continues to shape their lives. Paul returns to that hope at the end of the letter: “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through... The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24, NIV).

Summary

The Thessalonians faced real trouble, but they did not face it alone. Paul sent Timothy to strengthen them, and the news that they were standing firm brought Paul great joy. Their example reminds us that trials need not weaken our faith: God gives us fellow believers to encourage us, and we can offer that same care to someone else.

As we wait for Jesus' return, we can keep trusting him through hardship and ask him to make our loving care for each other overflow. We do not have to make ourselves perfect. The God who strengthens our hearts is faithfully at work, helping us to become more like Jesus until He returns.

Resources Used

The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV)

Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*

Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*

Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*

John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*

Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on 1 Thessalonian*

1 Thessalonians 3: Verse-by-verse comments

Paul had been forced to leave the young Thessalonian church. This chapter tells how he sent Timothy to encourage them, how Timothy's report encouraged Paul in return, and what Paul prayed for them next. The comments below follow the NIV. [Bible Gateway](#)

Verse 1 — Paul chooses to remain in Athens. Paul could no longer bear the uncertainty about the believers. **Sending Timothy** meant giving up a valued companion while he was alone in Athens. His concern led him to act.

Verse 2 — Timothy is sent to strengthen and encourage. Paul calls Timothy a brother and coworker. His assignment was more than checking on the church: he was to help these new believers grow steadier in their faith.

Verse 3 — Trials need not shake their faith. Paul wanted them to know that persecution did not mean something had gone wrong with God's care for them. Timothy's encouragement would help them remain firm through it.

Verse 4 — Paul had prepared them for hardship. He had warned them that persecution would come. Now that it had, they could remember both his warning and his continued concern for them.

Verse 5 — Paul fears for their faith. Calling Satan "the tempter," Paul recognizes that hardship can become an occasion for doubt or abandonment of faith. He sends Timothy because he cares about what happens to them, not merely about whether his earlier work appears successful. [Bible Gateway](#)

Verse 6 — Timothy brings good news. The Thessalonians are continuing in *faith and love*, and they still want to see Paul. Timothy's report answers Paul's two concerns: their relationship with Christ has endured, and their affection for him remains.

Verse 7 — Their faith encourages Paul. Paul himself is suffering, yet news that they remain faithful gives him comfort. Encouragement travels both ways between a teacher and those he teaches.

Verse 8 — "Now we really live." Paul speaks with relief and joy. Seeing them stand firm in the Lord renews his own spirits.

Verse 9 — Paul thanks God for their growth. He rejoices over them in God's presence. Although Timothy helped them, Paul gives God the credit for their perseverance.

Verse 10 — Good progress is not the end of growth. Paul prays to see them again and “supply what is lacking” in their faith. That phrase need not mean their faith is false; it means these young believers still have things to learn and ways to mature. [Bible Gateway](#)

Verse 11 — Paul asks God to open the way. He longs to visit, but leaves the possibility in the hands of God the Father and the Lord Jesus.

Verse 12 — Love should keep growing. Paul prays that their love will *increase and overflow*, reaching both fellow believers and “everyone else.” Even a loving church has room to love more widely.

Verse 13 — God strengthens hearts for Christ’s return. Paul’s prayer joins love, holiness, and hope. He asks the Lord to establish them so they may stand “blameless and holy” when Jesus comes. This is a prayer for God’s work in their hearts, not a claim that they can make themselves sinless by trying harder. The identity of “his holy ones” is discussed by commentators; Paul’s central point here is the coming of Jesus and the believers’ readiness to meet him. [Bible Gateway](#)

Key truth for your class: Christians help one another stand firm in trials, rejoice when faith endures, and pray for continuing growth in love and holiness.

- **Resources used**

- [1 Thessalonians 3, NIV \(Bible Gateway\)](#) — passage text and cross-references. [Bible Gateway](#)
- [BibleProject, Guide to 1 Thessalonians](#) — the letter’s setting and the place of chapter 3 in its overall message. [Guide with Key Information and Resources](#)
- [David Guzik, Enduring Word Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 3](#) — explanatory comments, particularly on Timothy’s visit and Paul’s closing prayer