

# Face To Face

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Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever.

Amen. You may be seated.

Obviously, we celebrated our country's independence this week, but it was kind of bittersweet for Sandra and I because her daughter and family moved to Nashville, Tennessee. We went up the week before to give our goodbyes, and it was kind of, as you can imagine, a cheerful moment for Sandra, you know, saying goodbye to her daughter and her three granddaughters as they move 3000 miles away. We'll still have contact with them through calls and texts and videos and maybe a visit or two, but it's not going to be the same. Before, if the kids were having an event, she could hop in the car and drive up there and, you know, enjoy the moment. If they needed someone to babysit, guess who they called?

Grandma. And she would be on her way. And, of course, we celebrated holidays together. Now we're not going to be so close, and what we're going to miss is that face to face time, actual being in each other's presence. Not that it won't be there, but it won't be the same.

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In our passage today, Paul expresses the same concern, a similar situation that he experienced with the church in Thessalonica. The letter that we read this morning in acts 17, we read that Paul was accused of sedition, and a mob rose up wanting to arrest him and imprison him. Well, it says that the brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea Paul. And the letter we wrote this morning said he was torn away from them, not in spirit, but physically. And he described it as really saddened as a result of that.

Eventually, he ended up in the city of Corinth, and that's where he wrote this letter. And he's sharing his great desire to come back to them so that he could have that face to face relationship with him. And so we want to look at that. I believe that's an important thing in the church. And I mentioned Pastor Razor, and one of the things I appreciated it was a face to face relationship.

And he wasn't someone that just behind the pew, he was someone that you would get involved with that would come alongside of you going through things. Frank may not remember this, but they used to have a big mercury station wagon, 429 engine or something. Probably got 6 miles to the gallon. My car was broke down once, and so who do I go to? Pastor Newt, can I borrow your car for a week?

Sure, go ahead. And I had to take the bank along with me to pay for the gas at gallon, but. But there was this personal interaction that we had that really encouraged me in the faith. I believe one of the problems we're facing today in the church as they get bigger and bigger and bigger is the pastors are more and more separated from the very people that they're called to minister to. In some ways, that's sad.

I know there's ways to make up for it, but I believe it's important for those not just in the ministry, but anyone that's really serving the Lord to have relationships with the people they want to serve. And so let's look at the reasons that Paul wanted this face in face encounter. So the first one we see is in verse, chapter two, verse 18, and chapter three, verse five. Want to look there? In verse 18, Paul says, because we wanted to come to you.

I, Paul, again and again. But there's that word. But. But Satan hindered us. Satan hindered us.

And then over in chapter three, verse five, it said, I sent to learn about your faith for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. And so Paul wants to be with the Thessalonians to protect them. He knows that they are in a spiritual battle. He was not able to spend a lot of time with them when he led them to the Lord. Three, four, five weeks, we don't know how many for sure.

And then he was torn away. And he was painfully aware of the spiritual battle they were in, that they had an enemy. We call him the devil or Satan or Lucifer, and that they may not have been prepared to fight against him. One author famously wrote a book titled Satan is alive and well on planet Earth. If you've been a Christian long, you know that's true.

And he opposes Christians, works against them. He's real, and he attacks Christians. Paul warned the Ephesians, for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the cosmic powers over this present darkness. And if you want to know our situation in America, it is this present darkness. There is a spiritual battle going on against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Satan is the enemy of every Christian, whether you are aware of that or not. When you put your faith in Christ, he declared war against you. So Paul tells us take up our armor and stand against him. Both James and John and Peter tell us to resist the devil, and he'll flee from us. Paul knows that these Christians in Thessalica, they're young in the faith, and he wants to go back to them to try to prepare them for the spiritual battle that they are facing.

Just one example of this is over in two Corinthians, chapter three, and I won't read the passage, but Paul writing again to the Corinthians, the brother that had sinned in first Corinthians, he tells them to forgive him and explains why forgiveness is such an important part of the spiritual life. And he says, anyone whom you forgive, I also have forgiven. Why does he say that? He goes on, so that we would not be outwitted by

Satan, for we are not ignorant of his designs. We are not ignorant of his schemes.

This is just one example in the Bible, how Christians, if they're not careful, can be outwitted by Satan and as a result, lose the battle. We do not want to be unaware of his designs or schemes. With that in mind, just a few of his schemes, Paul reveals ways that Satan attacks Christians. The first one, he says Satan hindered him. God allows Satan to hinder you and some of the things that you know you should be doing.

He has a reason for that. The word hindered here referred to a retreating army, and the enemy was hard on their heels. So what the retreating army would do, they would dig up the road, they would make ditches, and they'd make berms, and anything they could do to slow the enemy down so they wouldn't catch up trying to hinder them and from defeating them. And Satan does the same thing to us. He creates roadblocks or distractions to try to keep us from following close after Jesus Christ.

One example would be busyness. Uses busyness to keep us out of the word of God. I know I should read my Bible, I should do devotions, but I got busy. I got things to do. I don't have time for that.

And it hurts us in our walk with Christ and brings defeat into our life. Another thing he often does is uses offenses, real or imagine, to diminish our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ and for the loss, taking up offenses, he uses worldly distractions to take our focus off of Jesus. And in Paul's case, and we don't know how this happens, somehow he physically stopped Paul from going back to Thessalonica. And we know that because that's what the Bible tells us. For whatever reason, God allowed Satan to hinder Paul from accomplishing his ministry goal.

And if he can do that to Paul, he can do it to you and I. We need to be aware of that. We're in a battle against Satan. Second, we see that Satan is allowed to afflict us with suffering in chapter three, verse three. And he says to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions.

NIV says, trials for you yourselves know that we are destined for this. That's really good news, isn't it, that you and I are destined for afflictions? That God somehow has

allowed Satan to bring afflictions in their life. It could be physical, financial, relational, spiritual. However it comes, you can be sure it is painful, and God will allow that he has a purpose in mind for that.

It's not pleasant, but it can produce something in your life. Third, it says Satan is allowed to tempt us. In verse five of chapter three, notice it says that Satan is the tempter. He comes to tempt you and I. That's how he began his career.

He tempted Eve and he successfully got hurt to fall for the temptation and look at the problems it created for every one of us. He was so successful that he hasn't changed his plan. He's constantly trying to tempt us to go into sin, knowing that there will be consequences to that. I am absolutely amazed at the number of people, especially christian leaders, who have somehow fallen into temptation and destroyed their ministry, destroyed their testimony, destroyed their relationship, not with just believers, but even their family. And we don't want to take Satan lightly.

Paul wants to go back to Thessalonica so that he can train him. It's just like a battle. And when you're in a battle where it's life and death, you want to get the best training possible. The better trained you are, the more likely you're going to survive that battle. I've been keeping up on the war in Ukraine and Russia, and they estimate that 500,000 Russians have either died or been wounded in two years of battle.

If we had a couple thousand, we'd be running away. 500,000. The main reason for that is the troops are poorly trained and thrown into the battle before they're ready and like cannon fodder. And so Satan is real, and we have a battle with him. That's one reason he wants to go back and train them.

The second one. The second reason Paul wants to be with them. We see that in chapter three, verse one to three. He says, therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone. And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co worker in their gospel, to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions.

Paul wants to go back to Thessalonica so he can establish and exhort them in their faith so they won't be moved by the afflictions. When he realizes he's not going to be able to go back, he sends his protege Timothy back to train them. And the truth is, if you're a believer, you need to be trained in knowing how to fight the spiritual battle, how to stay firm and solid for Jesus Christ, how to not be unnerved by the attack of the devil. And that takes training. We need to know the word of God.

One of the reasons that so many christians fall into temptation as sin is they have not been trained, they haven't been discipled. They haven't realized that it is a battle, and we've got to learn how to fight that battle spiritually. Paul concerned this in his first letter to timothy concerning elders, and he gave directions and rules for selecting elders. One of the things he said in verse six of chapter three says he must not be a recent convert. In other words, he can't be a novice.

He can't be a new Christian. And he goes on and says, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Paul knows that without proper training, christian leaders will end up overestimating their own ability and underestimating the strength and power of the evil one. And we need godly men and women are alive who will help train us for the spiritual battle that we're going through, especially when we're young Christians. And again, I look back at Pastor Razor, who mentored me, and I'm thankful that he would take the time to build into my life to help prepare me for the things that we're doing.

If we don't do that, you can fight spiritual battles, and it's possible to fight them in vain, he says at the end of chapter five. And if you fight in vain, it means you lose, and you don't want to lose in a battle. I guarantee you that. There's a third reason Paul wants to be with the Thessalonians in chapter two, verse 19. And he says, for what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?

Is it not you? For you our glory and joy? He wants to be with them because he wants to prepare them for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is coming back again. We talk about that.

We long for that. But are we ready for his return? It'll be a day of rejoicing, but it will also be a day of accounting, and we will stand before the Lord Jesus, and we'll have to give an account of our lives. Were we successful in the ministry, in the life that God called us to lead. And there will be reward, or lack of reward, as a result of that.

When Jesus told the story of the persistent widow in Luke, chapter 18, Jesus asked a question of his disciples. He says, nevertheless, when the son of man comes, will he find faith on earth? When he comes, when Jesus comes, will he find you to be a man and woman of faith? Will you be walking closely with the Lord or not? He's going to examine us.

He's not going to ask, did you have a good time down there? Were you happy? Did you make a lot of money? Did you travel to a lot of places? Did you do this or did that?

No, he is not going to ask that. He is going to ask you, did you trust me with your life? Were you willing to obey me even when it was hard? Did you have faith? When Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, he said it was to establish and exhort them in the faith to help them grow in their faith.

Later, he says that he sent Timothy to learn about their faith, and if they weren't growing in their faith, it says, then his work would have been in vain. It's interesting, he says that when Christ comes back, and at the end of every chapter in first Thessalonians five, there is something about the coming of the Lord. He's focused on Christ coming back, and you and I should be, too. But he wants to exhort them so that they will not be ashamed on that day when we see Jesus Christ face to face again. The book of Thessalonians is mainly about Christ.

We talk about rewards. The greatest reward that any Christian can ever have is that they somehow had a part in somebody else's growth, whether it was somebody who came to Christ, whether it was somebody who grew in their faith, whether it was somebody they helped to overcome the obstacles and the afflictions that were in their life. And when we see Christ, we will be able to see our part in that, and there will be great joy knowing that we impacted someone's life. I mentioned each chapter ends

with something about the coming of Jesus. This chapter three, it ends.

This way with a prayer in verse eleven. Now may our God and father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. He's still asking to go back to Thessalonica. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you. Great prayer, one that we should be praying.

But he gives us the reason why in verse 13. So that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. And so Paul wants this face to face time with the people he led to Christ in Thessalonica. He wants to protect them from the attack of Satan. He wants them to prepare to fight the battle that they're facing.

And he wants to rejoice in their faith. And there's nothing greater that you and I can do in our walk with Jesus Christ than to be involved in other people's lives and helping them grow in Christ. Let's pray.

Father, again we thank you for your word. God. Thank you for Paul's desire to be with those he had led to Christ. God, I can't even begin to comprehend how busy of a Mandev Paul was and the thousands of people he led to Christ. The churches he established, the word that he wrote that we're reading today and so many other passages.

And yet, Father, he always had time for people. He cared about them. They were his joy and his crown. And I pray that you give us the same love for our brothers and sisters. In Christ's name.

Amen.