

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:8

Main Point: Friendship is one of the greatest gifts we receive from God.

Different definitions and expectations of a friend.

- Buddy
- Bud
- Bro
- Amigo
- Childhood friend
- Best friend
- Fraternity Brother
- Sorority Sister
- Friend at work
- Gym Friend
- Band Mates

Christian Friendship is:

1. Truthful about Troubles - 2:17-18 & 3:3b-4

17 But as for us, brothers and sisters, after we were forced to leave you for a short time (in person, not in heart), we greatly desired and made every effort to return and see you face to face. **18** So we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.

3b For you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. **4** In fact, when we were with you, we told you in advance that we were going to experience affliction, and as you know, it happened.

- **Paul and Crew sharing about the suffering and brokenness of their circumstances**
 - They speak of being “forced” or other translations “torn away” or “orphaned”.
 - The strong language describes the challenges of life when you follow the Lord.
 - Paul peppers this truth of Christian suffering all throughout his letter to the Thessalonians.
 - It’s like a parent saying something like, hey friends remember we talked about this, hey this is it, do you remember, hey don’t forget!
 - This is a stark reminder for them and for us that a life of following Jesus is a life of Joy and suffering as pastor Steve preached a few weeks ago.
 - Paul’s writing these truths not to discourage but to encourage, remember in chapter 1 v.4-6, our suffering is a reason we know we are chosen by God as his children!
- **Paul and Crew continue on speaking about the reality of Spiritual Warfare 2:18**
 - As Christians, we believe that we live in two worlds, one that is physical and one that is spiritual.

- Therefore when we read verse 18, Paul is making a case that as much as he desired to be with the Christians in Thessalonica, there is spiritual warfare going on preventing this from happening.
- Paul talks about spiritual warfare taking place in a number of other areas in scripture as he writes to the different churches. This includes examples of:
 - Reality of existence, Ephesians 6:12 “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.
 - Scheming and taking advantage, 2 Cor. 2:11
 - Tempting, 1 Thess. 3:5
 - And even Paul’s own thorn in his side, 2 Cor. 12:7
 - All of this isn’t something Paul says to scare us, but rather an exhortation to remember that the enemy has been defeated but until the end, they will continue to oppose the message of the gospel, so we’re called to be aware and be prepared to fight by putting on the armor of God as we live our daily lives.

Christian Friendship is:

2. Fueled by the Future 2:19-20

19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of boasting in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? **20** Indeed you are our glory and joy!

- **Paul and Crew in verses 19-20 takes the readers from looking at the present to the future of Jesus' second coming in these verses.**
- **Friends not only help you in the present, but help you fix your gaze on eternity.**
 - In this future outlook Paul says something strange, that his hope, glory and joy is and will be the Thessalonian Christians? What does this mean? Aren’t we to point each other to Christ and not to ourselves? Doesn’t Paul say in Galatians 6:14 “but as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - Not a contradiction or competition between Jesus and the Thessalonians.
 - 1. Paul and Crew have great hope in the Thessalonian church that they will remain steadfast through all the suffering and will make it till the end and that their ministry bore lasting fruit. Colossian 1:27 “God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”
 - 2. For Paul and Crew, the work of God in the church provided them their joy not only in the present but also in the future to come. 1 Thess. 3:9 “How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience before our God because of you,” Paul also writes similarly to the Philippian church Phillipians 4:1 “So then, my dearly loved and longed for

brothers and sisters, my joy and crown,^w in this manner stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.”

- 3. Paul and Crew are looking towards the future excited, boasting to God about these amazing Christians that they love who have been tested and tried! Phil.2:16 “by holding firm to the word of life. Then I can boast in the day of Christ that I didn’t run or labor for nothing.”

Lastly, Christian Friendship:

3. Concerned and Caring 3:1-3a, 5-8

1 Therefore, when we could no longer stand it, we thought it was better to be left alone in Athens. **2** And we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith, **3** so that no one will be shaken by these afflictions.

5 For this reason, when I could no longer stand it, I also sent him to find out about your faith, fearing that the tempter had tempted you and that our labor might be for nothing.

6 But now Timothy has come to us from you and brought us good news about your faith and love. He reported that you always have good memories of us and that you long to see us, as we also long to see you. **7** Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and affliction, we were encouraged about you through your faith. **8** For now we live, if you stand firm in the Lord.

- Here are the few takeaways from these passages,
 - There’s a cost to serving a friend: **3:1** Therefore, when we could no longer stand it, we thought it was better to be left alone in Athens.
 - Friendship within the body of Christ happens in community: **3:2** And we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ,
 - Genuine care and concern: Possibly wandering or **3:5**
 - Strengthen and Encourage: **3:2-3a, 6-8** both the one who is being served and one who serves.

Application:

- **For non-Christians, receive the gift of friendship with God through the finished work of Jesus. Repent of your sins and be reconciled to the father.**
- **For Christians, live in the friendship of God. Spend time with him through spiritual disciplines and enjoy God.**
- **Be in community, join a community group, seek to meet and know the Christians around you and look for ways to serve sacrificially.**
 - “Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the Cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick

of foes. There is his commission, his work. 'The kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ; he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people but the devout people. O you blasphemers and betrayers of Christ! If Christ had done what you are doing who would ever have been spared' (Luther)."

— **Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian in Community**

- **Repent of the unbiblical or extra biblical expectations you place on your friends and be grounded in how God describes friendship.**
 - “The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community.” — **Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian in Community**
- **Regularly build in a rhythm of praying for your brothers and sisters in Christ.**