

Good Habits

Thessalonians



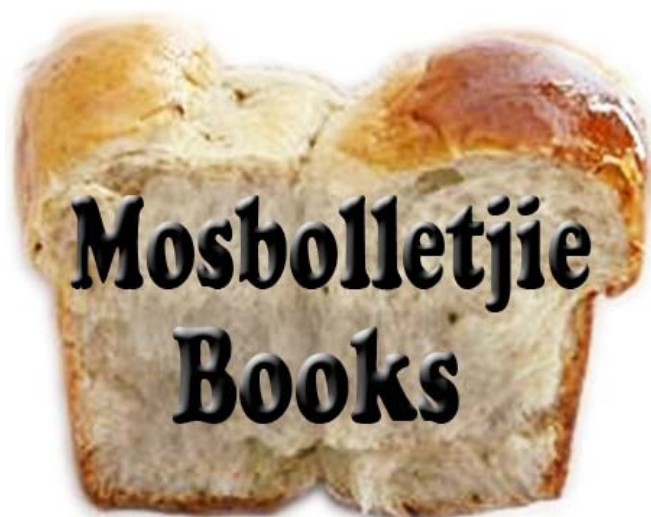
Louis Nel

Good Habits

**Reflections on 1 and 2
Thessalonians**

Louis Nel

September 2023



Contents

Part 1: 1 Thessalonians

- 1 Good Habits
- 2 Friends Through Thick and Thin
- 3 Election
- 4 Chosen, but What Now?
- 5 Paul's Policy Statement
- 6 Jews and New Believers
- 7 Longing
- 8 Adversity is Purification
- 9 Glowing Embers
- 10 Live Purely
- 11 True Brotherly Love
- 12 Life After Death
- 13 Jesus Returns
- 14 Joy and Gratitude
- 15 A Jubilation in the Heart

Part 2: 2 Thessalonians – Fulfil Your Calling

16 The Sweet and Sour of Gospel Ministry

17 Peace for You

18 A Candle in the Darkness

19 Promises of Rain

20 The Antichrist

21 Thank You for Being Part

22 Hard Work and Loafers

Good Habits

Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

Many years ago, we had a bush cottage in the Lowveld in Marloth Park. One evening, I sat on our porch with my better half, Mosbolletjie. The night was pitch-black, and we sat there chatting and listening to the bush concert with just a candle for comfort. The lion plucked the strings of a bass guitar with a deep "oemf-oemf-oemf" resonance. Elephant played the trumpet while splashing in the Crocodile River, and startling all the monster lizards! Nightjar played on crystal-clear tiny bells, and Hippopotamus beat the bass drum. His old lady laughed heartily from the depths of her belly from sheer enjoyment.

The two of us felt a bit jittery in the darkness, and from time to time, I would shine the flashlight through the trees, just to make sure...!

Suddenly, there was a bright, twinkling eye

high up in a thorn tree some distance away. My heart skipped a beat with excitement. "Giraffe!" we decided. Suddenly, the eye "jumped" almost to the ground. "Why would a giraffe be looking for something on the ground?" I wondered in amazement. But then it swiftly lifted its head again, and its eye flew upward! I tried to see the giraffe, but the tree's branches were too dense. With great interest, we followed the eye as it flew through the branches of the thorn tree. It wasn't until Mosbolletjie brought out the big torch that we saw that this "giraffe" was actually a tiny bushbaby! Our very first encounter with a bushbaby!

As the days, or rather nights passed, it became more accustomed to us and ventured closer and closer. Later, it even brought its mate to entertain us by our braai fire in the evenings. Eventually, after several years, they became so used to us that it became a habit for them to come onto the porch in the evenings to catch insects in the porch light. And if there happened to be a

banana lying around, they would jump up and down with excitement. Every visitor to our bush cottage raved about the delightful little bushbabies that brought them so much joy in the evenings!

Once you've learned a habit, it's not easy to shake it off! I shake my head when I watch the men and women who tirelessly jog up and down the streets early in the morning. Don't they ever get tired? For me, it's the greatest punishment to go jogging, but for them, it's second nature. However, ask any runner, and they will tell you that it didn't just happen overnight. It took months and years of dedicated self-discipline to acquire this habit. This is exactly how it works with your faith life, especially when it comes to the practical living out of it. You don't become a dedicated believer who is faithful in every aspect overnight. It usually takes many years of hard work and self-discipline.

The Thessalonian letters were written by the great missionary Paul to a very young congregation. (Possibly Paul's very first

letter.) Thessalonica had only heard the Gospel a short while before this letter was written, and the congregation was still in its infancy. For them, it was, of course, a tremendous adjustment because now they had to learn a completely new way of thinking and living. We must remember that these people were pagans who worshipped all sorts of idols and had suddenly become Christians. It's not easy to unlearn all the old bad habits! There wasn't really a system in their religion yet, and I'm sure they often felt discouraged. Perhaps they sometimes thought they would never get it right! So, in this letter, Paul encourages them by dedicating a large part of it to help them understand how well things are actually going for them as brand new Christians!

However, Paul knows all too well that their faith cannot just be left at that level and that it needs to be supplemented. They need to start learning about the things that matter in faith. Moreover, there are, of course, troubling questions he needs to answer, like

the fate of people who die before Jesus' return. They struggle to confess their faith and apply it practically in daily life. They need to be reminded of the things Paul taught them in the short time he was there, and they need to know that this new way of life requires a lot of effort. You will recall that Paul could only spend a short time in Thessalonica and had to cut his ministry short there and flee for his life. Therefore, he could not instill these things in them properly.

This letter is still highly relevant today. Many believers face the same problems as the believers in Thessalonica. Over the years, I have encountered many people who simply cannot get the basics of faith right, often simple things like prayer and faith assurance. The "old" believers can just smile because most of us have walked the same path! By persisting and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, you can overcome these things. It takes practice and perseverance. And of course, a lot of hard work! A healthy, established faith life certainly does not come

easily. So, keep your spirits up!

Prayer:

Lord, this morning I want to entrust every young believer reading this message to You. Take them by the hand so that they can become great trees in the faith!

Friends Through Thick and Thin

1 Thessalonians 1:1

It was early in the summer of the year 50 AD when Paul and Silas, accompanied by the young lad Timothy, arrived in the Greek port city of Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia. It was a bustling trade centre on the 7,000-kilometer-long Via Egnatia, the main route between Rome and the East. Their goal was simple: as many people as possible in the city should hear and accept the message of salvation in Jesus. Their strategy was to first approach the Jews because they already had a background about God. Since Paul was a respected Pharisee and teacher, they could gain access to the local synagogue and preach there for three weeks. It went well, and a few Jews even converted! But it was actually the Greeks, especially a group of prominent Greek women, who hung on the lips of these

missionaries!

When the Jews saw how the Greeks responded, they became jealous and devised a cunning plan to get rid of Paul. They bribed a few troublemakers to incite a riot. Barely three weeks after their arrival, Paul and his companions had to flee for their lives!

Timothy and Silas stayed in the vicinity at Berea while Paul went on to the city of Athens. But the fledgling congregation in Thessalonica remained in his thoughts. Would their faith endure? From Athens, he went to Corinth, where he wrote a letter to the Thessalonian church. He didn't want this congregation to simply disappear, and the truths he had taught them to be forgotten! It is remarkable that a young congregation, consisting only of new believers and receiving spiritual guidance for only 3 weeks, continued to exist and even flourish!

Paul decided to send Timothy to Thessalonica with his letter. Dear Timothy, half Jewish, half Greek, but a wonderful

dedicated believer and friend! Of course, Timothy, as usual, had no hesitation about going back to that hostile city. Indeed, Timothy's life was not without its challenges. Because his father was Greek, Timothy was never circumcised like the other little Jewish boys. Paul saw trouble coming, for an uncircumcised Timothy could never enter a synagogue, and poor Timothy had to endure the painful procedure while Paul performed the operation in his hometown, Lystra. But afterward, Timothy was ready to face any synagogue! A few years later, Paul would send Timothy to Ephesus to serve as a shepherd of that congregation.

Paul had grown very fond of the people of Thessalonica! He began his letter writing on behalf of himself and his two colleagues: "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of Thessalonica in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul's thoughts wander: How much he and

his two companions have been through! Together they could establish a vibrant ministry in various cities. Of course, it was only possible through the wonderful power that the Holy Spirit had given them! But together, they also had to flee for their lives a few times, especially when the Jews had it out for them! And then there was the time when Silas was locked up with him in jail. He remembers how sore their bodies were after being flogged, and how they were chained in the prison in Philippi. When they couldn't lie down because of the raw sores on their bodies, they started singing. After all, it helped to drive away the pain. Later, their joyful hymns echoed throughout the terrifying night, resonating through the entire prison. And then, the breathtaking miracle when an angel came to free them. He broke the chains and opened the prison doors. Paul smiles when he thinks of the jailer's frightened face. True stalwarts, Silas and Timothy!

Of course, Silas has been on a long journey

with Paul. Even before the first missionary journey took place, the leaders in Jerusalem sent Silas with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to sort things out there.

True friends who are willing to stand with you through thick and thin are worth their weight in gold! It's heavenly to know that there's someone who will sacrifice their life for you and do anything for you - selflessly! The question, however, is whether you and I are willing to do the same for someone else. Life isn't about the good friends you have; it's about whether you yourself are a good friend to someone. Jesus set the example for us of what a good friend should do. He gave up everything in life to bring about the message of the Gospel. He was willing to defy huge crowds to heal people, provide food, and teach. He toiled for His inner circle of disciples, teaching and training them for their great life task. When His intimate friends deserted Him, ran away, and even denied Him, He still retained His love for them. He went further and gave His life in the most

gruesome way possible so that they could live. What do you and I do?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for wonderful friends throughout my life, but especially thank You for what You have done for me. Lord, please make me a good friend!

The Election

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

Paul begins his letter to the very young congregation in Thessalonica by assuring them that he prays for them continuously and is very thankful for them. They are precious to him because he sees in them a group of people who are fervently working in the Kingdom of God. They actively demonstrate their love and their faith stands strong.

Can this be said of you and me? How wonderful to hear such a testimony, especially from a congregation that is still in its spiritual infancy!

Paul goes on to assure them that they are chosen. When we hear the word "election", it often feels like hitting a wall of faith for many believers. I've heard many people, even believers, say, "God is unjust." How can God choose some people to have eternal life and reject others? His love is then questioned

because it doesn't seem loving to reject someone. The entire concept of election is a stumbling block for many, even for believers. I have heard believers ask the question several times, "How can I be sure that I am truly chosen?" There are many questions about this topic and I will try to find a few answers.

What is meant by the word "election"?

It can refer to God's choice of a person for a specific task. However, our scripture refers to God's sovereign choice of someone to be His own, His child. Of course, all of this happens according to God's eternal plan. Feel free to read about it in Ephesians 1:11. Based on this loving plan, He rescues people of His choosing and makes them His children (Ephesians 1:4). The entire concept of election speaks not of injustice but of God's inexplicable love and grace. God takes no pleasure in anyone being lost; He desires that all be saved.

The second question is whether it might be

unfair for God to choose only certain people?

The answer is a resounding "NO!" It is simply a fact that people are inherently sinful and enemies of God. Romans 3:23 states it clearly: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 6:23 goes further to explain what the destiny of such a person is: "For the wages of sin is death." And it is not just any death, but the eternal punishment being discussed here. Is it unfair for God to show mercy to someone who lives in sin and deserves the death penalty?

Let's imagine a scenario: You walk into a room full of wicked people, and they start mocking, cursing, throwing stones and driving you out. Do you think it would be just for you to choose one of them, take their hand, and lead them out of that wicked place? Your idea is to teach them manners, care for them, and make a better person out of them. Of course, it would not be unfair! Are you then unfair to the others because you didn't do the same for all of them? Certainly not, because they didn't want to come with

you anyway!

It's the same with humans and God. They don't want anything to do with Him anyway. So if someone is not chosen, it is certainly not unfair. Therefore, when He chooses someone to be His child, it is purely grace and unfathomable love. He often chooses even those who vehemently oppose Him and resist following Him.

How do I know if I am chosen?

If you are reading this daily reflection or listening to the recording, it is reason enough to believe that you are indeed chosen. God's call goes out to everyone. His love is so immeasurably great that He does not want a single person to be lost. However, the question is whether I respond to that call from God. "I stand at the door and knock," pleads Jesus. When someone knocks on your front door, they are not there without reason. They want you to open up. Jesus also knocks in various ways, possibly this morning through this daily reflection. Perhaps

He is knocking through someone who talks to you about Jesus. His greatest desire is for you to open up to Him. It is your own choice whether you will open up or not.

The election has two sides: God's and yours. In Romans 5:8, Paul writes: "But God demonstrates His love for us in this, that Christ died for us while we were still sinners." But you must believe! 1 John 5:12 says: "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have eternal life either." He very much wants everyone to believe in Him. But not everyone wants to believe. God chooses you and offers you the breathtaking gift of eternal life. It is then up to you to decide whether you will accept that gift or not. It is just a simple "Yes" or "No."

We are far from finished with this topic. Tomorrow, God willing, we will look further at more interesting questions about election.

Prayer:

Thank you for choosing me, Lord, and for your grace washing over me!

Chosen, but What Now?

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

Yesterday, we looked at three questions regarding election. On the first question about what election means, we said that it is God's sovereign choice to select a person to become His possession. The second question was whether it is just for God to choose some people and not others? And then we clearly see that there is nothing unjust in God's choice. The third question was, how do I know if I am chosen? We learned that God does not want anyone to be lost, but that people have a choice to follow God or not.

This morning we come to the fourth question, and it is: "What should I do if I am chosen?" When I recognize God's call and respond with a "Yes," it does not mean that I can just sit back and let God's grace wash over me. It means that I must prepare myself for eternal

life because it is a life that lasts for eternity with God.

We know that God is absolutely holy, and therefore, it would be highly inappropriate to live dirty and completely contaminated with Him. For example, if I were to decide to be very merciful and bring in a dirty homeless person to live with me and share my home, there would be certain implications. First of all, the man is dirty, possibly full of lice! He hasn't bathed in months, and he doesn't even know the purpose of a bar of soap. Toothpaste is definitely not on his shopping list! I wouldn't be able to tolerate having such a "fragrant" man in the house for long. The simple answer is that he needs to get cleaned up and rid of his bad breath. And it's not a one-time thing; he has to stay clean every day, or there will be issues again!

For the same reason, it is nothing less than right for a believer to try to cleanse themselves of sin and in this way make themselves more acceptable to God. If I want to live in God's presence, the filth of my sin

must be washed away. But just like with the homeless man, it's not a one-time thing. It's an ongoing process where I examine my life in the mirror of God's Word every day and clean up what is dirty. The wonderful thing is that He provides all the help I need. The Holy Spirit is always there to guide me. If I am willing to open my ears of faith to the Spirit and make my heart receptive to what He tells me through the Word and through fellow-believers, then He will lead me on a path where I can live a life that is pleasing to God.

Paul says that you can recognize someone who is chosen by what they do because the guidance of the Holy Spirit makes you different. First and foremost, it becomes clear in the fact that you have heard and accepted the Gospel. In short: if you have responded to Jesus' call, you are chosen!

The second phase of a chosen person's life is that your faith is put into action. It becomes visible in the things you do. In short, it means that you actively live out Jesus' love, not just with words but also with your actions. Of

course, you express your love on two levels, horizontally towards your fellow-human beings, but even more importantly, vertically towards God.

The fact is, the harder you work on the field of love, the stronger your faith becomes. Your love becomes the proof that God has chosen you. Note that you don't have to work to be chosen; God gives that freely. You work **BECAUSE** you are already chosen out of gratitude for the grace God has **ALREADY** shown you!

Remember that living out this love and performing good deeds and all that goes with it is not for your own sake. It's all about God alone. And part of it is also to serve as an example to others, to inspire them to faith and to serve God. Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica, "So you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia" (1:7). Their lives were such an inspiration to the people of Macedonia and Achaia that Paul didn't even need to go there to preach.

The third phase that Paul mentions is "the endurance of your hope" (1:3). Hoping in the Lord means that you know He will fulfill what He has promised. You persevere in this hope when you show with your life that you take God at His word.

In conclusion, I have heard someone say to a stubborn unbeliever that they believe that person is not chosen. Remember the thief next to Jesus on the cross! Who am I or you to judge? Treat every person, no matter how they may live, as if they are chosen. If God could choose me, then He can choose anyone!

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, that I can be sure today that I am chosen. Teach me to live a holy life for Your glory, and in doing so, inspire others to say "Yes" to Jesus!

Paul's Statement of Purpose

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Anyone who decides to deliver and proclaim the Word of God must be extremely careful to ensure that their motives are 100% pure and that they carry out the task with great care. It should never be for personal gain or to make a name for oneself. This applies especially to the tall trees, the cedars of life, who must be cautious not to let the fame they receive overshadow their mission. But even ordinary believers who work "on a small scale" in the Kingdom must be equally careful.

Paul was probably accused of letting his tremendous success in the field of ministry go to his head and of receiving flattery. Even worse, he may have been accused of trying to profit from his ministry. This may be the reason for his "statement of purpose" in this passage. Here, he elaborates on how he approaches his ministry. He does so not to

defend himself against slanderous talk but rather to explain to the congregation what his work actually involves.

Despite the fact that Paul and his companions had to flee from Thessalonica due to an angry mob, their ministry was still successful. It's easy to let a single incident get the better of you. A few years ago, someone cursed me for daring to send them the Gospel message. For days, I walked around with a sick feeling in my stomach, feeling sorry for myself for the injustice done to me. I even felt guilty! My ministry suffered as a result. Later however, I realized that such things happen. It's just one of the things you should expect when you're serious about the Gospel. Later, when something similar happened, I actually felt sorry for the man who rejected Jesus. When Paul was driven out of the city, he didn't dwell on the injustice or disappointment but on the tremendous success achieved among the believers who remained. Don't let a few stumbling blocks in your path derail your ministry! The Lord will

give you the strength to persevere in spite of any opposition.

Paul explains what his ministry is and what it is NOT. The goal is not admiration for Paul but to serve as an example for every believer who is serious about their calling. Paul mentions three things for which you could NOT accuse his ministry: definitely not false doctrine or leading people astray with honeyed words or flattery. Smooth talk won't get you anywhere! Secondly, there were no impure motives for his ministry. Financial gain or greed was never mentioned. Sometimes you wonder about some great evangelists living in huge mansions. Are their motives truly pure? On the other hand, I've encountered several brilliant individuals who have given up everything in life to minister to the poorest of the poor. Thirdly, Paul's ministry was without any ulterior motives. He never said or did anything to seek glory.

So what did Paul's ministry entail? Once again, he mentions three things, comparing them to the attributes of a baby, a mother,

and a father.

First, just as a baby has absolutely no pretensions, without a hint of conceit, ulterior motives, or tricks to earn people's praise, so were Paul and his co-workers' intentions absolutely pure. We must not try to carry out God's commands with all sorts of gimmicks to impress people! Don't try to bluff anyone! Like a baby, you must express exactly what you feel and mean.

The second attribute of his ministry is compared to that of a mother who not only provides milk for her baby but is also willing to give herself for him. Similarly, Paul and his companions were willing to provide the Gospel to the believers without any financial gain. Even more: they were willing to sacrifice their lives to bring the Gospel to the people. Paul remembers vividly how he and Silas were humiliated, flogged, and chained in the prison in Philippi! Furthermore, they never asked for money for their ministry but provided for themselves and never allowed anyone to support them financially. Indeed, I

must be willing, like a mother, to give of myself, to sacrifice in my service to God.

Thirdly, Paul says that he acted like a father. A father who does not use flattery and tell his children they are cute when they are not. However, he individually encouraged, spurred on, and impressed upon each one to live according to God's will. Paul asks us today to drop the cheap flattery and be honest and straightforward with people. Like a father, you must be willing to correct someone when they are wrong but at the same time provide the necessary encouragement and motivation to live for the glory of God.

Prayer:

Lord, teach me to proclaim the Gospel fearlessly and without any pretensions, just like Paul did!

Jews and New Believers

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

The Jews are perhaps the most stubborn group of people in the history of the world. When you page through the Old Testament, you can see how often they veered off course. Jaco Thom wrote a book called "The Bybel Novel" in which he tells the entire history of the Bible, from Adam to Paul, in story format. Although it is partly fiction because he sometimes had to create fictional characters to tell how he thought the events might have taken place, it is still factually accurate, and it opens your eyes. You get a good sense of how the Israelites experienced their religion, and how they constantly sauntered after idolatry. On the other hand, this book also tells of an extremely gracious and patient God who forgives again and again and lifts the people from the ashes and restored them. This was especially evident during the time of the judges and kings when

the people frequently fell into idolatry! Of course, it reached an absolute peak, or rather a dip, under the rule of the wicked Ahab and Jezebel!

When the New Testament era began, it swung from one extreme to another when the people experienced a hyper-religious period under the leadership of the law-obsessed Pharisees who based and lived their lives on laws and more laws. They were so immersed in their legalistic rituals that they did not even recognize the Messiah they had learned about and dreamed of in the Scriptures! When He lived out God's love, they considered Him lawless and put Him to death. They tried to exterminate Jesus' followers and poor Paul had to flee for his life numerous times to escape the clutches of these fanatical Jews. The irony of it all is that Paul himself was a Pharisee and was at the forefront of those who persecuted Christians before his conversion!

It is against this background that Paul writes this passage to the church in Thessalonica.

After all, they themselves had experienced their fair share of persecution from Jewish fanatics. It's now two thousand years later and the Jews haven't changed much. My daughter worked in Israel for three years. She planted vegetables, packed store shelves, babysat children and scrubbed floors. She was a wreck when she returned because the Jews are slave drivers and just as fanatical and stubborn as ever!

When Paul speaks of the Jews in this way, he is naturally not referring to all the Jews. You can't treat all alike! He is specifically talking about those who opposed his ministry. Of course, there were still many Jews who were supportive of him, and just as today, we can't say that all Jews are a nasty bunch! What is, however, true is that it's often your own people who turn against you when you become a believer. It's painful when your former friends mock and reject you, or when your own family looks at you as if you've gone completely crazy. I remember the absolute disgust on an unbelieving doctor's

face years ago when he told me that his son had given up the medical profession to become a preacher. It was as if the son had slapped his father in the face!

When we read today's Scripture passage, we notice that Paul's brief ministry in Thessalonica had a significant impact on the residents. They responded in faith! Two things clearly indicated their response. Firstly, they accepted the message as the Word of God. Secondly, that message had a positive effect on their lives. Over the past 23 years, I've had the privilege of sharing God's message of salvation with many people. Each one of them, including you, has a responsibility to first test what I have told them against the Word. You must ensure that it is the truth, faithful to the Scriptures, and genuinely the Word of God. Does what I've written align with what is written elsewhere in the Bible? Secondly, it is of utmost importance to accept the Word of God. When you do, it should have an impact on your life. You can't just conveniently forget what you've

heard; you must live out what you've heard! The new believers in Thessalonica did not just sit back after they became believers; they immediately began working on their faith. The same should be seen in our lives. If a baby does not grow and remains a baby, there is something terribly wrong with them. Similarly, a believer must grow in their faith. If this is not happening, there is a major problem!

Think for a moment this morning: how do you experience your faith? Is it something that has remained stagnant over the years? Is it still right where it started? Or has it grown, blossomed, and borne fruit?

I invite you this morning to do some introspection with me. Let's see if we are still growing in our faith. Indeed, this is the one aspect of your life where you can continue to grow until the day you die!

Prayer:

I ask this morning that You would inspire me

to continue growing spiritually, Lord!

Longing

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

Longing - that's a very significant word! This little word shouldn't be taken lightly!

I remember the greatest longing in my life like it was yesterday. It was in November 1973 - will I ever forget it? I had met the great love of my life a few months earlier, and love was blossoming! Then came the news in the form of an official military letter: It was time for me to go to a camp again so the government could ensure that I still remembered how to make war. Things were already heating up in Angola! Fortunately, they sent us only to Potchefstroom!

My heart sank into my shoes: how would I endure a full three weeks without my beloved Mosbolletjie? There in the middle of nowhere where they sent me, there was no phone or any form of communication. So, I packed a thick notebook and a few pens.

The farewell at Durban station was intimate, long, and incredibly difficult. The train had already turned the corner, and I was still hanging out the window just for one last glimpse, even though I couldn't see her anymore. That first night on the train, I had already poured out my longing onto a sheet of paper!

On the dusty campsite outside Potchefstroom, I anxiously stood with the guys and waited. The postman should have been back ages ago with the mail! And then, finally, a dust trail appeared on the dirt path leading to the camp. "There he comes!" someone shouted excitedly. The guys rushed to be the first at the Jeep, even before it could come to a complete standstill. The sergeant grabbed the mailbag, and one by one, he read the names aloud. I stood impatiently, fidgeting. "Louis Nel!" I heard my name, and it sounded like the most beautiful music in my ears!

With trembling hands, I carefully tore open the envelope. I breathed in the lovely scent of

her perfume on the letter. I read the letter over and over again because I didn't want to miss a single word. The guys teased me, but I didn't care. The great longing for the one I loved so dearly was slightly satisfied. Tonight, I'll pour out all my heart's desires on a sheet of paper again because I know she's waiting for me...

When Paul writes this letter to his "children" in Thessalonica, he overflows with longing. He was only there for a measly three weeks, but in that short time, he got to know and love them, and now the longing becomes too much for him. He yearns to see them, but circumstances prevent it. Paul does find some solace when he sends Timothy to check on them. What would he have done without dear old Timothy?

Why is Paul's longing so great specifically for this congregation? He sees in them a glimpse of the return of Jesus. He knows that they will be a source of joy and pride for him at the Second Coming! Isn't that a wonderful testimony of a congregation! The lives of the

members had ignited an old man's heart with longing for Jesus' return because their way of life has shown that Jesus truly lives and that He is coming back to gather His children to be with Him.

For Paul, the real reward for his work wasn't money, fame, or honour. His greatest reward was seeing how Jesus Christ works through the believers in a congregation when they truly acknowledge Him as the Head. He writes in verse 19 that this congregation is the crown of his work.

Wherein do you find your greatest joy? Is it also when you find out that someone you prayed for or shared the gospel with has found Jesus and is now living for His glory? Wouldn't it be wonderful if you and I could align our life's mission in our congregation in such a way that it sparks longing for Jesus' return in everyone we encounter! I believe that every believer has the task of working together so that the congregation of which we are a part can convey the message of hope in this way. Those outsiders should be

able to see that being a believer is a joy for me and that I deeply enjoy my role in the congregation. My task should not be a burden to me but a joy.

Furthermore, it is essential that my joy is contagious and encourages the rest of the congregation to serve. In our congregation in Ballito, it certainly works! Everyone who comes here from elsewhere talks about the love and joy they can see flourishing in our congregation. Yes, there is indeed still unkindness and discord that we need to work on, but it is overshadowed by the excitement and joy radiating from the majority of the congregation members!

What does your congregation look like? It starts with one person willing to ignite the fire to eventually create a strong longing for the true joy that only Jesus can provide in everyone. It can start with you!

Prayer:

Lord, please cultivate in me that joy that will

make outsiders long for You!

Adversity is Purification

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Yesterday, we saw how Paul longed for the congregation in Thessalonica. However, it was impossible for him to return there to see them. He knew they needed spiritual help, but how to proceed? So, he sent Timothy in his place!

An important aspect of our faith life to consider is the fact that we should also expect storms when our faith boat glides over the lake. That's when you need to plan strategically! When Paul and his companions preached the Gospel in Thessalonica, they encountered trouble. Some Jews came to faith under their preaching, but the rest were very sceptical. So, they turned to preaching to the Greeks, and a large number of them converted. This upset the Jews and they began to incite trouble. They hired a bunch of troublemakers to organize a protest, stirring

up the whole city against Paul and his group.

It was so bad that Paul, Silas, and Timothy had to sneak out of the city in the middle of the night for fear of their lives. The congregation took them to Berea, but there, too, they encountered trouble because the jealous Jews from Thessalonica heard they were there and that they were successfully preaching the Gospel. They did exactly the same thing as in Thessalonica, inciting a riot in Berea. Once again, Paul had to flee for his life and went to Athens. However, this time he left Timothy and Silas in Berea to quietly continue the work. Later, Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica to help the believers, and through correspondence Paul was able to communicate with the congregation and strengthen them.

Often, people think that all problems must be attributed to sin and lack of faith. We should expect adversity when we are serious about our work for the Lord, and we should be prepared for it. When trials and adversity come into our lives, God usually uses them

to strengthen our faith. Problems often open new doors for you! Don't just sit in despair when adversity strikes; make the most of it, and if possible, let adversity work for you!

Many people worship a "good-luck god." They believe that the Lord will keep all forms of adversity away from them. God doesn't promise that He will never allow adversity into your life, but what He does promise is that He will protect you and give you strength even when adversity strikes! Psalm 23 puts it so aptly: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." Also, remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5:11: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven."

Perhaps we should view adversity in the life of a believer as a crucible. When we look at the process of refining gold, we know that dangerous chemicals like chlorine are used. Additionally, the gold must be melted at a

very high temperature, more than 1000 degrees Celsius. However, when gold has gone through this process, it becomes almost 100% pure, a precious and highly sought-after metal. In stark contrast is garbage dump. In biblical times trash was burned, completely destroying it and turning it into smoke. Nothing remained but worthless, foul-smelling ash!

God's purpose with adversity in the life of a believer is not to destroy you like garbage but rather to purify you like gold. In doing so, you become more useful for God's Kingdom and at the same time, you draw closer to Him.

Finally, we must also consider the devil, the deceiver. Paul was concerned that the devil might have his way in Thessalonica. Although Jesus has already conquered the devil, he still tries to drive believers away from Jesus. Yes, in Thessalonica, the devil certainly tried hard to thwart all of Paul's plans. Initially, his efforts seemed successful when Paul had to flee the city after only a short while and leave the congregation to

fend for themselves. But did it destroy them? No, definitely not. It taught these people to stand on their own. If they wanted to survive, they couldn't wait for a pastor to be appointed to lead them. There was no one to appoint! No, they had to do it themselves. And they did it very well because all that was needed was for Timothy to come and lend a hand for a while to strengthen their faith and encourage them!

Paul's sound advice in Ephesians 6:11-17 is to put on the full armour of God to withstand the devil's attacks. Use even the devil's attacks to make you stronger and to grow in faith.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for often testing me and for the difficult times that come into my life. I am grateful that You carry me through it all and make me strong for Your Kingdom!

Glowing Coals

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

There is a deep yearning in my heart this morning, a yearning to be able to talk to every person with whom I have shared the message of the Gospel over the past 23 years. I am deeply concerned about you dear friend, for it feels as though a piece of my own life has gone out towards you. Please write to me and let me know how you are doing. What are you experiencing? Is there bubbling joy inside you because of the new life that Jesus has given you? Inside me I am bubbling with excitement because every new soul for Jesus causes the angels in heaven to burst forth in a jubilant symphony of joy and happiness!

I get as excited as a little warthog that has discovered a patch of green grass every time someone writes to me and asks how to meet Jesus or how to share the Gospel with

someone. At the link at the bottom of the daily devotion, there is a pamphlet explaining how to tell someone about Jesus. It is available in Afrikaans, English, and Zulu. This is probably the main reason why I have been writing these daily devotions for the past 23 years - to win souls for Jesus. Isn't that one of our greatest tasks as believers? And certainly, the most delightful one! Someone once told me that as believers, we are actually just the sowers in God's Kingdom, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives life to the seeds we sow, causing them to sprout and grow. That is very true, and isn't it the most wonderful feeling on earth when you see those first leaves of faith breaking through the earth's surface? Those sparkling green leaves are still so fragile, but within just a few days they shoot up into full-grown plants. New faith excites me immensely!

Paul experienced exactly the same with the Thessalonians. He had to leave so quickly that he couldn't even witness the beginning of their new faith. As you already know, he

later sent Timothy to see what was happening in Thessalonica. And then Paul probably paced around restlessly, for he simply couldn't wait to hear the news. Where could Timothy be taking so long? Did he run into trouble? Did they fall back into sin?

And eventually, Timothy arrived. Paul probably stood waiting for him, watching from a distance as he approached, jumping up and down with excitement. "Come on, Timothy - tell me!!! Tell me!!!" Paul must have literally drawn every word out of Timothy because he was intensely interested in each and every person in Thessalonica. They were his spiritual children, and he genuinely cared for each one, even though he barely knew them. In the three short weeks he spent in Thessalonica, he had become deeply fond of each of those believers.

Paul was probably tired from the long journey and all the hardships he had gone through. It's not nice to be chased out of town like a scoundrel, and it certainly dampens your spirits. Then Timothy arrived with this fresh

news from Thessalonica, and it was like a refreshing stream in a dry desert for Paul. Suddenly, the old man had a new zest for life. These fragile young plants that had barely pushed their first leaves above the ground meant so much to Paul that he was inwardly strengthened and rejoiced in the Lord. What did he do? Did he scold them for the things that were still wrong? No, he genuinely complimented them on the good things he saw happening!

Sincere expressions of gratitude, compliments, and support often have a much greater impact on a young believer who is still wobbly in the faith than getting on their case about the things that are wrong in their life. Indeed, Paul could have found plenty to argue about, but he chose to focus on the good. Even when he came to the bad things, he spoke about them in a positive way. For example, in 3:9, Paul thanks God for all the joy he has because of them. As a believer, I should be able to tell a fellow-believer with a sincere heart that I thank God for all the joy

that person brings into my life. If you truly mean what you say, it brings a new dimension to your relationship with fellow believers that goes far beyond mere friendship. Your relationship is then carried by God's love.

I do sometimes receive severe criticism for my work, and it leaves a lump in my stomach. But then I receive numerous letters, sometimes just a single line, from people expressing their appreciation for the daily devotions and what it means to them. I deeply appreciate every one of those letters because they give me new enthusiasm to continue and to do my very best in my writing despite the harsh criticism, because they make me realize that my work is making a difference in people's lives.

Believers need each other very much! No believer can carry on alone. It's like taking a coal out of the fire and placing it aside. It doesn't take long for that coal to go cold. But put it back with the other coals where it is part of the heat, and soon it will glow brightly!

Prayer:

Lord, please keep me glowing along with my fellow-believers, and help me to genuinely appreciate other believers and express it to them!

Get the booklet: How to Tell About Jesus? at:
bit.ly/bbVertel

Live Purely

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

When Timothy returned from Thessalonica, Paul wanted to know everything about how things were going there. Timothy was excited: "That tiny congregation is on fire!" he told him, full of enthusiasm. "However, there are still a few issues that we urgently need to address....." Paul listened carefully to what Timothy told him and then he addressed the young man's concerns in his letter, practical things that could make a big difference in the end. His list covers topics like sexual life, love between believers, labour issues, what happens to you when you die, Jesus' return, and more.

In chapter 4 Paul begins by writing that a believer should live as God desires. He doesn't say this because it's his own opinion, but on the authority of Jesus Christ. He emphasizes that you shouldn't just approach

your faith half-heartedly but should dedicate yourself to it wholeheartedly. You and I must realize that everything we do is under the authority and command of Jesus Christ.

The first issue Paul addresses is a sore point. The moral standards of society in those days left much to be desired. It makes you think of our own situation today! It's a fact that a person's natural inclination leads them to fall back the moment they become lax in their faith. And the first thing that happens is that they are tempted into immorality, or in other words, sexual sins. Every believer must remember that when it comes to sex, we are also under the authority of Jesus Christ. We must not be involved in a sexual relationship unless it is in a permanent one-to-one trust-relationship, in other words, in marriage.

"Abstain from sexual immorality," Paul emphasizes it to the church. In those days, immorality was an integral part of the heathens' idolatry. Today it might be practiced a bit differently. The numerous strip

clubs in our cities have become a steamy business that attracts men and even women in hordes. Massage parlors and prostitutes are common occurrences!

No believer should be involved in these repugnant things. However, there are believers who have become addicted to sex to such an extent that they secretly visit these places. There is also a more subtle temptation: almost any magazine you open, you will find advertisements for "phone sex." Here you can secretly indulge your fantasies, and no one will ever be the wiser! The problem is that it is not a secret to God, and you pollute your thoughts with these things, clouding your relationship with God. The same goes for the numerous sex magazines, pornography on the internet, etc. All these things distance you further and further from God, and in the end, you complain that your prayers are in vain and that God has abandoned you. No, it is not God who has abandoned you, but you who have abandoned God!

A second aspect is to abstain from any extramarital sexual relationship. It may start with an "innocent" flirtation or a desiring look at someone. Jesus said that if you look at someone with lust, you have already committed adultery. And it's not for nothing, because such desires can simmer in you until they lead to things you can no longer control. I have often seen the immense pain a divorce can cause. Unfortunately, it's not just one person who gets hurt, but the damage done to the children is irreparable. Moreover, it also affects the family and friends. In short, it comes down to the love commandment being completely neglected, because love binds people together, it does not break relationships, and it does not hurt.

In this passage, Paul primarily addresses the men. There is a good reason for this: in those days, women were bound to the house (except, of course, street prostitutes), and it was the men who had the freedom to sleep around. A woman never had the opportunity to be alone in the company of a strange man.

Today, things have changed significantly, and what was applicable to men in those days is equally applicable to women today.

My plea this morning is that if you are involved in any immorality in your life, please break free from it today! God is willing to cleanse you and forgive you completely!

Rather do what Paul prescribes in Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—focus your thoughts on it."

If you fill your thoughts with beautiful and good things, there will be no room for the immoral!

Prayer:

Lord, please help me to keep my life pure for the honour and glory of Your name!

Genuine Brotherly Love

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

If we, as believers, could only stand together and believe in each other, things would fare much better in the church! After all, we are family, saved by the same precious blood of Jesus Christ and children of God. Therefore, we are brothers and sisters to each other. In verses 9 and 10, Paul advocates brotherly love. Yes, he saw that the Thessalonian believers did love each other, but he asks that this bond of love be even stronger: "So we beg you, our brothers and sisters, to do even more." (v. 10).

What does this brotherly love mean? It is the kind of love that makes you willing to sacrifice everything for your fellow-believers. It is a love that goes completely against a person's natural inclinations. This love for example, requires you to accept fellow-believers just as they are, with all their flaws.

You and I should not reject a fellow-believer just because they have fallen into sin. It is precisely then that they need us the most! I cannot elevate myself above another believer and say that I am holier. Remember: anyone can stumble. In recent years, we have been shocked to learn of respected evangelists who have fallen hard. The same could happen to you and me! No one is infallible, and there is not a single person without sin!

The fact is that the Lord's grace upon you and me is so incredibly great that He was willing to forgive all our sins, even the sins we still commit every day. The least we can do is also forgive our fellow-believers when they stumble and love them unconditionally. It is certainly not easy! If we succeed however, we proclaim peace and harmony in our lives. But this love must actually go much further: it must be a practical, sacrificial living out of what we proclaim. It doesn't help I just say to someone, "I love you!" Love is to physically, and practically actually do something for someone else. When we

practically live out our love for each other in this way, we truly radiate God's love so that the world can see His wonderful love reflected in us. Then we have achieved our purpose!

There is, however, a difference between the love commandment, to love your neighbour, and the brotherly love that Paul talks about and that Jesus also gave to His disciples shortly before His crucifixion. Let me explain: when I encounter a stranger on the street, I might greet them politely. However, if it's a family member, I will hug and kiss them. There is a special bond of love. Since believers are "blood relatives," we should extend the same kind of love to each other. This love should stretch across all denominational boundaries because we are all one in Christ.

In verses 11 and 12, Jesus gives us, through Paul, instructions for our attitude towards our work and financial matters. The Thessalonians had an obsession with the Second Coming. They understood that

Jesus' return could happen any day and felt they had to sit and wait for it. A Second Coming expectation should be an adrenaline injection, causing you to roll up your sleeves and work harder. However, their view was, "Jesus is coming soon to solve all our problems. Why should I exert myself now?" These people were still very young in the faith, and Paul speaks gently and very diplomatically to them when encouraging them to put their shoulders to the wheel. Apparently, Paul's admonition did not help much. In his next letter, however, he speaks more firmly when he says, "If anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat!" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). So, until the Lord comes, live peacefully, keep your business to yourself and do not neglect your duty (work/family).

The call to live peacefully is not just a general one but applies to the work situation. It means that you should not be hotheads but take your work seriously and be diligent. And, of course, the same applies to you and me

today.

The second call is to not be busybodies, prescribing to others what they should do, possibly while sitting idly in an armchair! Do your work where God has placed you.

The third call is to be financially independent. Do not be a loafer! Do not depend on someone else for your livelihood. This also means that you should handle your finances wisely and not do foolish things.

The fact is, if you follow these three commands, your honorable way of life will command the respect of others, and you will become a mirror in which the world can see God.

Prayer:

Lord, please cultivate in me a genuine brotherly love for my fellow-believers, a love that forgives unconditionally and genuinely cares!

Life after Death

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Do you remember the mournful songs and lamentations of the Briels? As a child, I used to shiver when they sang about graves and corpses and bitter, heartrending longings. I still remember how the elderly would mourn: the poor women would wear pitch-black dresses and hats for months after their loved ones had passed away, and the men would wear black mourning bands on their arms. There was not a trace of a smile on the poor widow's face, for everyone would think she wasn't serious about her loved one's death!

Today, there are still people who mourn in the same way. I once spoke with a Hindu lady, and the topic of death came up. She told me how Hindus grieve terribly when someone is about to die. Yes, they also believe in life after death, she said, and then she quickly explained reincarnation. "Do you believe in

life after death?" she asked me, and I had the opportunity to testify to where I am going and that I am not afraid to die at all!

A few years ago, there was news of a plane that crashed against the mountain near Barberton, claiming the lives of 9 people. In an interview with the elderly parents of one of the victims, the father said, "I do not remember my son's death. I celebrate his life..." What causes one person to mourn bitterly over a loved one, while another accepts it with joy? Of course, there is sadness - it is only natural, but the bitter, heart-wrenching grief is not evident.

The Thessalonians did not have a very clear understanding of Jesus' second coming. They believed it would happen very soon, and that they would all meet Jesus when He comes on the clouds. They waited, but it did not happen. In the meantime, some of them died, and they were very concerned that those who died prematurely might miss Jesus' second coming! So when someone died, they mourned bitterly. It was a tragedy!

This compelled Paul to explain to them that death is not a final separation as they thought. Both the separation between body and spirit and the separation between believers are only temporary. When Jesus returns, the spirit receives a new body, and so the believers are reunited. Then those who have already died and those who are still alive will be together again with Jesus' second coming. Forever!

Paul's intention with this letter was not to provide a detailed description of exactly what happens in what order at the second coming. It was to give the troubled believers the assurance that the departed ones do not have a disadvantage when Jesus comes.

Paul speaks of "the departed." Elsewhere in the Bible, death is compared to "sleep." Just as physical sleep is a temporary state, so is death. Jesus has taken the sting out of death. It is actually a beautiful image to compare death to sleep because there are quite a few interesting similarities:

Just as sleep is an intermediate state, so is death. Before you sleep you are awake, and after you have slept, you are awake again. Likewise, death is a wonderful "rest" with the Lord. What happens exactly afterward is unfortunately a mystery to us because very little is written about it in the Bible. We can only make certain derivations.

The second comparison with sleep is that when you wake up and look in the mirror, you still see the exact same person. It is the same with the resurrection after death; you will still be the same person.

The third comparison is that after you have slept, you are refreshed and renewed. You wake up as a new person after a good night's rest. With death, it is even more so because you become a completely new person, not with a refreshed body but a glorified body without sickness, pain, and limitations.

So when you stand by the grave or deathbed of a loved one again, remind yourself of the words of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and 18 and

experience the wonderful comfort that God gives you there. Indeed, we will be with our loved ones with Jesus. There will be a reunion, never to be separated again. There lies a wonderful future with the Lord after He has renewed us. Yes, the sweet comforting words of 1 Thessalonians 4:13 provide hope to each of us: "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope." Of course, we may grieve and be sad. After all, we are separated from someone we love for a while. But the wonderful hope gives us consolation, for the separation is not forever, only temporary.

Indeed, this passage in Thessalonians is a great comfort to me personally today as well. The day before yesterday (Sunday), we received the shocking news that our daughter-in-law Claudette passed away unexpectedly. It was a huge shock to our family. But we have the comfort of 1 Thessalonians 4:13!

Prayer:

Thank you very much for comforting us with a wonderful hope, even when death casts a shadow over us!

Jesus is Coming Again

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

I have once again experienced the brevity of life when my daughter-in-law, in the prime of her life, was suddenly taken from our midst. During the Covid-19 pandemic, several of our friends died suddenly after a short illness. It has shaken me deeply many times! Yes, we do not know the time and day; it can come entirely unexpectedly, like a thief in the night! Are you prepared if your end were to come suddenly today?

However, today we are not talking about death but something closely related to it: the return of Jesus. It is, of course, a very controversial matter because different people understand it differently. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the second coming already occurred in 1918 or possibly in 1945.

Some people believe there will be two

comings and that the rapture is a reality, while others believe there won't be a rapture. I won't express my opinion on these matters, and I say in advance that I won't respond to letters about this, as I don't want to get involved in a senseless argument. However, there are two things we must be very clear about regarding the second coming: it will happen unexpectedly, and you and I must be prepared for it.

Various "prophets" have predicted specific dates for Jesus' return. There are occasional news reports about some cult waiting somewhere for that day, and if the day doesn't come, there is a mass suicide that shocks the whole world. Not too long ago, a large number of people believed that December 21, 2012, would be the end of the world. Their claims were based on the Mayan calendar. How can you base Christ's second coming on a specific day just because a group of idol-worshipping priests said so? Of course, it did not happen...

Paul makes it very clear that it will overtake

us like a thief in the night. If you knew when a thief would break in, you could have awaited him. But he will not let himself be caught! Indeed, absolutely no one can predict when it will happen. The Thessalonians expected the second coming to happen in their time because the signs of the times were already there. Today, we see the signs that precede the second coming even more clearly. Some people do say that certain things must still happen in Israel before the second coming can take place, but maybe they misunderstand the prophecies. The second coming could actually happen today. In any case, the second coming, in a certain sense, takes place for you today if you were to unexpectedly die in a car accident or from a heart attack.

It is against this backdrop that Paul admonishes us to be ready at all times to meet Jesus, whether in His second coming or if we were to die. The question is, are you ready to meet your Lord today?

The first simple question is, do you know

what will happen to you when you die or if Jesus were to come today? Are you sure that your name is written in the book of life and that you will be with Jesus in heaven? If you do not have that certainty today, there is a simple step: write me a letter at louis@dagstukkie.co.za or send a WhatsApp message to 082 771 4925. You can send me a message by simply clicking here: bit.ly/dsWA. I will gladly explain what it means to become a child of God.

However, if you already have that certainty, there are other things to consider about your readiness. Then the question is no longer whether I will be with Jesus, but rather how I live out my Christianity. Will I stand in shame before Him and explain that I thought there was plenty of time, and so I did nothing for Him, or will I be able to go to Him with frankness, knowing that I have dedicated my life to Him? And no, as believers, we do not have to stand in fear and trembling before Him, expecting punishment where we may have been negligent or sinned!

How should a believer wait for Jesus' second coming? Paul explains: We must be awake and sober. Being awake means not resting on one's laurels. Sobriety means living in spiritual and moral balance; being self-controlled and calm, doing our duty, and fulfilling our calling. How do we do this? By fully expressing our love in all aspects of life. Just as a soldier wears a breastplate, we must use our faith and love to protect our hearts. But a soldier is actually in the service of the king and others, so our love must flow out to everyone we encounter, but especially to our King.

Are you ready for that meeting?

Prayer:

Lord, please keep me ready and vigilant, and diligent - prepared to meet Jesus!

Joy and Gratitude

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

I've often heard in the corridors, "That preacher really needs to get it together," and then the person whispers, "He doesn't do enough house visits; his sermons are too long; his sermons are far too short; his sermons don't resonate with me; he repeats too much; he preaches about sin all the time; he preaches about grace and love all the time; his sermons are childish - after all, I'm an educated man; his sermons are far too complicated....."

Have you heard these arguments before? Are you perhaps someone who regularly criticizes in such a manner? I know people who run from church to church because they can't find a preacher or pastor who preaches to their liking! Don't get me wrong: Of course, any preacher's preaching should reflect the pure Word of God, and if it doesn't, we

shouldn't listen to him because then he's a false prophet! But the arguments mentioned above should not be part of a believer's vocabulary!

You might ask if we should then place the preachers on a pedestal? Are they superior to "ordinary" people? Not that I don't want to say for a moment. But listen to what Paul says to the church in Thessalonica: "But we ask you, brothers, to show respect for those who labour among you and lead you in the Lord's name and correct you and, based on their work, to treat them with love and the highest regard." (1 Thess 5:12-13) The command that God gives through Paul to you and me is to think about how we respect the teacher and the other leadership figures in our church. No, it doesn't mean they should be worshipped, but the least we can do is tell them that we appreciate the work they do. Tell them that their leadership and teaching help you and thank them for what their ministry means in your life. If I and you don't express our appreciation, they will never

know it. Of course, what you say must come sincerely from your heart. Flattery is evil! But your words should also be confirmed by your actions: accept their leadership without complaining and grumbling. And incidentally if you thought I'm a preacher who seeks recognition - no, I'm just an ordinary member!

We are dealing with the final chapter of Paul's first sermon/letter to the church in Thessalonica, and he touches on a few sensitive points that Timothy probably mentioned to him. Yes, the way they treat the church leaders is a concern. But there are also other things that bother him. In verses 14 and 15, he writes that if someone experiences the Lord's personal love, then their relationship with fellow believers should also show that they have a unique personal relationship with each one. For sure you will act differently toward people with specific problems or needs. For example, you will not handle someone who is weak as if they are just willfully disobedient. This requires us to act wisely and with great love towards every

fellow-believer, thus conveying God's love to each one.

In verses 16-18, Paul asks us to reflect on our daily inner attitude. I once had a dear old friend, an outspoken and very deep believer. He had one big problem in his life: melancholy. The love of Jesus literally radiated from the man, but every time I saw him, it seemed as if the world's burdens rested on his shoulders. The political situation in our country and the crime and corruption and godlessness of humanity, he wanted to carry it all. Of course, we must not forget those things, but such things that you and I cannot solve, we can safely leave in God's capable hands. Paul says that as believers, our attitude towards life must speak of the Lord's loving care, and that we should be thankful in all circumstances, for "this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thess 5:18). What does this inner attitude entail? If you know what God has done for you in Christ, you simply cannot help but always be joyful. This means that you will live

a life of prayer and be thankful in all circumstances.

In Philippians 4:4, Paul bursts forth: "Rejoice in the Lord always! I say it again: Rejoice!" This sustained joy, prayer life, and gratitude that accompanies it, should never depend on your circumstances, your mood, or your emotions. You must obey these three calls, even if you feel that you have enough reason not to do so. Joy can be cultivated and controlled. And the wonderful thing is that if you have a dark day, and you say to yourself, "I am happy!" and you put a smile on your face, it's as if that dark cloud simply lifts by itself. Oh! Such joy is contagious! Gratitude is almost a natural consequence of such joy. But it's also something we must practice; it doesn't just come naturally. And then prayer: Again, prayer is not necessarily that formal quiet time, but a continuous conversation with God throughout the day. Jesus is just a thought away! Speak to Him!

Prayer:

Lord, please fill my heart with gratitude and joy today!

A Jubilation in the Heart

1 Thessalonians 5:16-28

Paul emphasizes in 1 Thessalonians 5:16: "Always be joyful!" In Philipians 4:4, he says the same: "Rejoice in the Lord always! I say it again: Rejoice!" If only you and I could be as carefree and genuinely jubilant as the birds and other animals in the veldt. And now, with a sore heart, I yearn for the bush - it's been years since we were there! On September 14th, 2008, I made the following entry in my diary:

This morning I sit on the porch of our bush cottage, with the fiery red sun peeking through the tangled branches of the thorn trees. It's still playing peek-a-boo over the horizon, colouring the sky with soft shades of orange, red, and yellow. A green pigeon complains bitterly that the day is going to be terribly hot again - he feels it in his bones: "The day, oh, the day is going to be hot - I

feel it in my bones, in my bones..." The morning air has a nip to it, and you can hardly believe that it was so hot yesterday; the Lowveld sun cooked us, reaching into the forties. And it's incredibly dry. The poor impalas look like skeletons, thirsting for a mouthful of greenery. But there's nothing, just the bare, dry, sunbaked earth.....

Nevertheless, there's a jubilation in the air. A few bul-buls chirp excitedly when they discover an apple I've stuck in a tree branch, and a wide-eyed duiker approaches cautiously, looking for a few corn kernels. Somewhere, a Black-headed oriole sings its heart out, while a francolin loudly proclaims the arrival of the new day, as if everyone doesn't already know that the new day is here. At first glance, the bush looks dead and dry, but the jubilant song resonates overwhelmingly, echoing through the dry branches. A hoopoe, a few noisy babblers, a pied kingfisher, and a few exuberant Egyptian geese frolicking along the Great Crocodile, all clacking merrily and cheerfully.

Twenty-odd guiney fowls hop by. How can everyone be so happy and excited and exuberant when it's so tough? The sun has by now discarded its red nightgown, and it hangs white-hot above the treetops. "Today, I'm going to scorch you!" the sun hisses. "Life is great!" the guiney fowls proclaim excitedly. A yellow-billed hornbill struggles to get started, like a Lister diesel engine on a cold morning, but once it's started, there's no stopping it. I even hear a purple-crested lourie proclaim that the bush isn't such a bad place to live in, despite the food shortage.

What makes everyone so happy and excited and exuberant? Can't they see that it's very tough? Can't they feel the oppressive drought on their bodies? Perhaps the answer is locked in the song I heard last night: "Dear Lord - please save us!" the plea of a nightjar. When I woke up this morning, his prayer still resounded: "Dear Lord - please save us!" Is that perhaps the reason why the black-collared barbet can sing their bubbling duet this morning, even though there isn't a single

piece of fruit for them to eat in the dry field?

In yesterday's devotion, we already said to each other, but it is necessary to say it again, because it is so incredibly important. Joy is seen in nature, and it must encourage us to make it part of our lives.

The other very important thing that Paul says, and that we can repeat, is: "Pray without ceasing!" (verse 17). Like the nightjar prayed all night long, we must make it part of our lives to pray, all day long! But then Paul also asks in verse 25 that the congregation should pray for him and his co-workers. Yes, even the great Paul needs intercession. How much more every worker in God's vineyard, every missionary, teacher, and evangelist. It is especially those who are willing to carry the Word out that need to be carried by our prayers, so that they will have the strength to spread the wonderful message.

When we start getting these things right in our lives, we will experience the wonderful peace of God, the peace that Paul speaks

about in his closing message in verse 23. Peace is not something achieved by people. It is God alone who can give true peace. However, He does not only give peace, it's much more. In verse 23, he also prays that "God will sanctify you in every respect; and may your spirit, soul, and body be preserved flawless, until our Lord Jesus Christ comes."

Paul concludes his letter with the comforting blessing: "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you!" or put differently: "May the loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." That is also my prayer for you, dear reader, that today you will experience that loving kindness of Jesus. However, it will only happen if you yourself shoulder the wheel and make the day positive, jubilant, and thankful for yourself. The Key to this is Jesus!

Prayer:

Lord, I am bubbling with excitement this morning about this wonderful day that lies ahead of me. Perhaps it will be unbearably

hot, but just the knowledge that You are with me is enough for me to be grateful and jubilant!

The Sweet and Sour of Gospel Ministry

Introduction to 2 Thessalonians

It is September 2008. The drought in the Lowveldt is heart-wrenching. Where I sit on my porch and write, the scene before me is a dense thornveld, speckled with red bushwillow, knobthorn, buffalo thorn, raisin bush, sickle bush, and marula trees. Usually, you can't see much further than thirty or forty meters because lush grass, shrubs, and wildflowers thrive between these almost impenetrable bushes. Now, however, I'm looking through a forest of bare trunks and leafless trees, and you can see every movement in the veldt far into the distance. Bare, sun-scorched earth replaces the once-lush grassland.

But despite the relentless drought, the veldt is still jubilant. The advantage is that you can see every creature on two or four legs. The

six- and eight-legged creatures are less visible. As I let my eyes wander over the veldt, I see a guinea fowl in almost every open space. The field literally teems with them. Have you ever really looked at these feathered friends? They look to me like dignified old ladies in modest, long dresses buttoned up to their chins. And they wear these comical blue hats and black stockings. A group of these mature ladies scrubbing for food in front of the house. I throw a handful of corn kernels in front of the porch. They very cautiously first take a wide turn, but one of the guinea fowls decides that hunger weighs heavier than dangerous humans, and she runs straight for the corn. When her comrades see that they might miss out on this feast opportunity, they charge towards the meal in unison, of course, very loudly, because these birds love to chatter. The cacophony that erupts around the dining table is a bush telegraph, and everywhere in the bush, dust clouds rise from uninvited guests. Before you can say, "Mieliepip!" there are about forty guinea fowls in front of my

porch. I crow with pure delight!

Yes, I conveniently do not want to know about the struggles of the animals or the carcasses lying everywhere. I just want to see the beauty and enjoy the scene. Unfortunately, sometimes one must also see and appreciate the hardships they go through.

Smart people say that being a pastor is one of the most stressful professions. But it looks like such a peaceful job! He only works on Sundays, and the rest of the week, he just sits around doing nothing... However, the fact is that we might not want to know what his profession really entails! If, for example, we look at Paul's life, we see someone whose dedication to his calling and his task as a witness of Jesus Christ is captivating and inspiring, even though he is often deeply disappointed by people, especially fellow-Christians. However, you also see that proclaiming and living out the joyful message of Christ's salvation places high demands on anyone who does it. I think every pastor can

testify to this because Sunday's sermon is the "enjoyable" part of his ministry. Few people see what goes on behind the scenes. The many problems he must try to solve can eat away at him. Dark secrets that people often share with him may be discussed with no one else, and often he bears the burdens of those people more heavily than they do themselves! It is often a bitterly lonely life he leads because he must present the front of someone who is radiant, happy, and carefree while he is not allowed to share other people's secrets that weigh so heavily on his heart with anyone. Then there are often the numerous accusations hurled at him, often out of ignorance because people do not see what his daily work entails. But then, that wonderful "high" he experiences when a lost soul finds Jesus as Saviour. Then all that hardship is forgotten!

Indeed, it is not only pastors who face such challenges. Every believer who lives out their Christianity will encounter these things. When we read the book of 2 Corinthians, we

are reminded as modern, fast-paced people to be empathetic and sensitive to each other's circumstances. Someone else's need and requirement must not only be acknowledged theoretically but practically solved as far as possible. Indeed, Christian believers' concern for one another also has financial implications. Christians must fulfill their daily tasks and duties according to the demands of the Gospel of salvation. Believers must live what they have become in Christ and do what they confess. This requires discipline, dedication, and loyalty, and definitely not undermining, abuse of power, or slandering each other for personal gain. An evangelical life practice finds its motivation in a dedicated faith relationship with the living Lord. But fortunately, a Christian believer's life is not just hardship because the beauty that accompanies it, the inspiring things, and the wonderful promises that the Word offers us, the comfort of the Holy Spirit and communion with our Saviour, Jesus, compensate for all the hardship.

I invite you to experience this inspiring book by Paul with me and discover the wonderful truths of faith contained herein.

And by the way, if you want to know what a pastor's life really looks like, please read the sketch: "Diary of Pastor X" at: bit.ly/bbDagboek

Prayer:

Lord, please teach me to look at my fellow believers with great compassion and empathy!

Peace Be With You

2 Thessalonians 1:1,2

Peace is a wonderful thing, it's just a pity that it's so frighteningly scarce these days! Currently, there is some form of war raging in no less than 32 countries in Africa alone! Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan are just a few of them. Elsewhere, the bloody conflict between Russia and Ukraine has been ongoing for a while, and then the horrifying war in Israel that erupted just a week ago. Thousands of people are dying daily in the conflict. There is no peace in the world!

Even in nature, true peace is an ever-elusive sigh. It's late afternoon in Marloth Park, and my Mosbolletjie and I are sitting by the Crocodile River, watching the sun bid

farewell to the evening. The scene before us is the epitome of serenity, where the cool waters of the mighty river gently meander toward Mozambique. A heron strolls lazily, hoping for a morsel to swim by before nightfall. On a patch of greenery, a group of impalas stand idly. A little further down in the river, a fish eagle is having dinner, a shiny, super-fresh tiger fish. Twilight descends upon us, and we feel content because everything is perfect. Or is it?

I jump in surprise as a spine-chilling, otherworldly bellow rises from the reeds. I try to see what it is, but unfortunately the reedbed is too dense. Again, the thing roars and growls and screams, and we wonder what it could be. It's definitely not an elephant, and not a lion either. The roars become increasingly aggressive until it sounds like someone engaged in a fierce battle. Amidst the chilling yells and roars, we recognize the voice of a hippopotamus. We conclude that it's two disheveled male hippos fighting for the right to a pool, especially its

content of females!

The peace is shattered!

It's pitch dark when we arrive home, and the roars continue to echo through the woods. Only after our cozy campfire crackles do the aggressions subside, and the two of us sit peacefully and calmly on the porch, exhausted from our day's activities. Soon, the delightful aroma of meat sizzling on the coals wafts up, and Mosbolletjie and I become exceptionally ravenous!

However, the next morning, the sun has barely risen, when our peace is shattered again! Now, it's the warthogs! One old warthog was undoubtedly on Noah's ark with Grandpa Noah himself, and this old Methuselah believes the whole forest belongs to him alone! The other warthogs, guineafowl, and mongooses must simply get out of his way to avoid his single tusked, which has survived two world wars. He is grumpy, hideously ugly and scavenging, and there is not a hint of peace in sight!

In the midst of this chaos, I read Paul's uplifting blessing at the beginning of the second letter he wrote to the Thessalonian church: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Are these not the most beautiful words you can wish anyone? He wishes them the undeserved kindness and peace of God! But why can he wish such peace to the Thessalonians? The answer is in the previous verse: They belong to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the key to all peace! There is only one thing in life that can bring true peace, and it is being a child of God. Without that, peace is completely impossible! Yes, the devil can create the false illusion of peace, but it's just a facade. Under that illusion, demonic unrest broods!

What makes divine peace so unique? Worldly peace is maintained through violence. There must be a strict police force and military that enforces peace, or everything falls apart! There must be strict

laws to be followed and punitive measures if anyone deviates. Without that, there is chaos! What does divine peace entail? One word: Love! First and foremost, there is God's boundless love for His children, love that is full of grace and forgives unconditionally. God does not force His will on His children through laws and punitive measures. However, His love is so great that we cannot help but live out that love and obey His commandments!

The question is: what does that love entail? In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul explains: It is patient, kind, tolerant, selfless, forgiving, and many other beautiful things. If everyone lived out these qualities, the world would have been a wonderful, peaceful place. The breathtaking part is also true: when you and I, as believers, live out this love, we not only achieve peace between us and those we deal with but at the same time, we discover the wonderful, all-encompassing peace that God gives us. Seek peace - God's peace - with all that you have, and God will multiply it

for you, far beyond all your expectations!

Prayer:

Lord, I seek Your peace - please guide me to live out Your love with all my heart, mind, and strength, so that I may taste Your full peace!

A Candle in the Dark

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

The sun casts its final rays between the sickle bushes, and night drapes a pitch-black blanket over the Lowveld. Suddenly, it's night. Pitch dark, coal-black, heart-clenching night. The moon rises late at night and there is not the faintest glimmer of light anywhere, only the dark, foreboding forest. A lion roars. Another lion joins in with its mate. And then the whole pride joins in, roaring at the top of their lungs, making the windows rattle! There's no power, and our little flickering candle struggles against the darkness of the night, but its feeble light doesn't reach much farther than the edge of the porch.

Somewhere in the foreboding woods, a hyena cries out, "Hoeeeep, hoeeeeep!" Its otherworldly cries echo through the thorny branches. A night jar sings ominously, "Please kill the widower!" I hastily grab more

firewood, and its crackling flames provide a bit of reassurance in my heart. The lions start to roar again this time much closer, and my heart skips a few beats. One night, barely half a kilometer from the house, the lions tore a man apart and devoured him. A shiver runs down my spine! How dreadful! Yes, he was indeed a man of the night, and the things he stole that night lay close to his remains. But he was still a human, one with a soul like mine, with fears and surely also hope.

A twig cracks - I startle, and I reach for the flashlight: three kudus are standing very close to us. The lions' roars resound once more. And then it's quiet, ominously quiet. And dark... pitch dark!

"Look!" I hear Mosbolletjie sigh. Through the pale silhouettes of trees, the moon peeks over the horizon. With great anticipation, we watch as she gracefully rises from the clutches of the thorn trees until she shines brilliantly in the sky, high above the dark things of the forest. With relief, we see how the world around us unfolds in the bright

moonlight. The darkness is overcome!

In a certain sense, persecution and suffering are the same as such a terrifying darkness. Sometimes, it feels like an overpowering darkness against which you're struggling, but you're getting nowhere because the opposition is simply too great. You try to make your little candle shine in the dark, but its light doesn't reach much farther than right beside you. When you look around and see the sins of corruption, murder, theft, hijackings, and rape, it feels like you're fighting against a terrible force. What's the use of even trying anymore? Does it ever help to let your candle glow? Does it make any difference at all? Can a single tiny light change anything in the overpowering darkness?

I've forgotten how much light a simple tiny candle can produce. On the porch, there are just two ordinary candles and although they don't light up the forest outside, there's a bright glow on the porch - enough for our needs. Some time ago, someone sent me a

series of photos taken from space of the world at night. It's absolutely incredible to see how the major cities stand out as bright light clusters in the darkness. Many lights together make a huge difference! If every believer would just let their faith candle shine, a bright glow of faith would illuminate the world!

Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica that he is very proud of them because, amid all the persecution they endure, they continue to radiate their faith light. He thanks God because they persevere, and their love for one another keeps growing. When we sometimes become disheartened by all the injustice around us, we must remember Paul's words to the Thessalonians: "This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering" (verse 5). Yes, the wheel is turning - perhaps slowly, but it's turning!

Just as moonlight dispels the darkness, we also see how injustice often comes to light and the wrongdoers are severely punished.

Of course, it's not nearly enough to erase all injustice. But the bright sun of God's judgment day will rise one day. Then every shadow of darkness will be wiped out. How terrible the judgment will be for those who persisted in their sins - those who flatly refused to accept God's offer of grace. But how glorious it will be for every believer - the wonderful knowledge that all unrighteousness is finally and completely erased!

The night has come, and the night has gone - a brand new day has dawned. The beauty of the forest is delightful: a plumb-coloured starling with its snow-white shirt and gleaming purple jacket, two black-collared barbets with their flaming red scarves sing a duet, a group of guineafowl, a comical kurrichane thrush, and even a little duiker - oh, they're all here to celebrate the brilliantly clear day! The Lord is great and good and wonderful! Thank you, Lord!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for being the light in my life.
Please give me the strength to let my candle
shine in all circumstances, for the honor and
glory of Your wonderful name!

Promises of Rain

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

The relentless drought continues. The parched earth sighs, thirsting for a drop of rain. Mercilessly, the intense sun drains every ounce of life from everything where there's a flow of vitality. Imphala rams, once proud sultans with delightful harems, are now listless walking skeletons that aimlessly wander, searching for some greenery that doesn't exist. Where just a few months ago, wildflowers were laughing cheerfully, there's now only barren red soil, lifeless and baked. As the imphala shuffles forward with weary feet, the dust kicks up from her sluggish steps.

A few warthogs plow the hard red soil with their tough snouts. There must be something edible buried beneath. Rocks are unearthed with large, curved tusks. Every now and then, they nibble on something imaginary. But

tempers are short. A sidelong glance is all it takes for a warthog to let out a furious squeal at its mate, wielding those deadly weapons. If the mate dares to react, a fierce fight breaks out, and in a cloud of dust, the weaker one is chased until it disappears from view.

A kudu comes begging for food. "There's nothing in the veldt to eat," her sad eyes say. "How am I supposed to survive?" On the porch stands a large pot of porridge. From this, the duikertjie, the bushbuck, the warthogs, and the guineafowl have all received their daily rations. I lift the lid and she approaches. She eagerly aims at the porridge while it's still on the wooden spoon, and barely does it hit the ground before it disappears into her hungry throat. Two young warthogs inch closer for their share. One uses some unsavoury language towards the kudu, who's greedily consuming everything, and the kudu gets irritated. The next moment, a thunderous roaring bark resounds and the piglets scramble away, but they soon shuffle back closer. Mrs. Kudu glares at them

with fiery eyes. The piglet snores like a small jack russell in her face. Again, the kudu roars and turns away. She sees the wooden spoon on the porridge pot, deftly grabs it with her rasp-like tongue, and starts chewing till the splinters fly!

Everyone is hungry!

The past few days have been unbearably hot. From time to time, a few promising clouds form in the sky, only to evaporate again in the scorching sun. When it started to cloud over on Wednesday, I wanted to cheer, but unfortunately, by the time the moon rose, the sky was already clear - not a cloud in sight.

The new day starts like any other bushveld morning, filled with the promise of another scorching, bone-dry day. Yet, there's something different - something filled with anticipation. The heat becomes oppressive and unbearable. And then, I notice it: a faint darkness that is creeping up on us. I walk around the house, a dark bank of clouds

bubbles and boils in the south. A faint rumbling is music to my ears. Inside, I'm exulting! Maybe, just maybe, it's going to rain today!

The black-grey clouds rumble over us, roaring and flashing. A promise of the heavens opening trickles into the dust. As the earth shakes and trembles with powerful electrical discharges exploding the sky around the rays, the rain gently begins to fall. The delightful scent of raindrops moistening the dust fills the air. I take a deep breath to savour every drop. Pure bliss!

But alas: the storm rages on, past, deep into Kruger National Park, without the gates of heaven opening for us. For a long while, the raindrops keep falling gently, moistening the suffocating layer of dust so that the veldt smells heavenly fresh.

There is joy in the air, even though it hasn't truly rained. The birds chirp merrily, and it seems like there's new life, new hope in the veldt. A family of babblers are loudly playing

a game of hide-and-seek in the holes of a knobthorn tree. They laugh and joke and squawk and make a deafening noise. Who knows, tomorrow, maybe the day after tomorrow, the big rain will come...

Paul is now getting to the point he wanted to write about: Jesus' return. Many believers are eagerly anticipating Jesus' return. Just as the dry earth is thirsting for rain, so is creation longing for Jesus to come because things are becoming too much for many believers. The terrible violence, wars, injustice, murder, rape, and climate change - it all makes us want to plead, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!" And then we see the signs of the times, as described in Revelation, like thunderclouds, full of the promise of rain. But this is not the end yet. It's just the comfort that we must hold onto, and that it's very, very close!

We must not let these signs make us fearful or overwhelmed. Just as the imphalas hop and play exuberantly when the clouds gather, so should these signs excite us as believers

and fill us with joy because they are part of the great promise.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, my whole being longs for Your speedy return. The entire creation is already waiting in anticipation!

The Antichrist

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Finally, the long-awaited rain arrived. It was just the next day when the storm began to build up late in the afternoon. All day long, there was an ominous, oppressive silence. Something was brewing! Then, late in the afternoon, lightning began to flash over the Lebombo Mountains beyond Komatipoort. Without warning, the wind suddenly picked up in gusts. Choking dust and dry leaves and twigs swirled. Then, the first large drops fell in the bone-dry dust. Within minutes, it came down in buckets. The abundant refreshing rain quenched the thirst of the parched earth. I pray gratefully, "Thank you, thank you, Lord, You are faithful!" Now, everyone can live!

Within a single week, the entire arid plain is covered with a fuzzy green carpet of brand-new plants!

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian

church, he told them about the return of Jesus. People were so excited about it that they actually overreacted and saw signs of Jesus possibly coming the very next day in everything. Yes of course, it's good to have a lively expectation of the future but we must be careful that it doesn't dominate our whole lives. There must be a healthy balance in your life. We must not be so heavenly-bound that we are of no earthly use! It is for this reason that Paul, in his second letter to the church, writes that they should take it calmly and settle down on this matter. He tries to give them a new perspective on the issue. Paul is not trying to spell out the signs of the times for the church; he simply says that they are wrong to expect Jesus' return before the great apostasy has occurred.

What is this "great apostasy" about? Paul speaks of the "lawless man" who will make his appearance. This is, of course, the same as the "Antichrist" that John writes about in Revelation. Throughout the centuries, there have been several "Antichrists" who have

stood out. To tell the truth, almost every generation over the past 2000 years has had its prominent Antichrists. These people are opponents of Christ and personify evil. In Paul's time, there were a number of emperors who clearly fell into this category and it was especially the cruel Nero who stood out like a sore thumb. The life of a Christian was absolutely worthless to him and he had them burned by the dozen, smearing them with tar to serve as streetlights, much to the amusement of the Romans. These are the ones who escaped the lions and gladiators. Hitler was also classified as "The Antichrist," and so were the Russian and Chinese Communist leaders who cruelly persecuted Christians in their countries.

And today? Wait, I'd rather not mention names! Who am I to judge anyway? We must be very careful not to just label anyone who appears wicked in your eyes as the Antichrist and then try to predict when Jesus will return based on that person's actions!

What should we know about this "lawless man" that Paul writes about? First of all, we know that he is destined for destruction, and he is the Antichrist. We also know that he is the ultimate deceiver. However, believers need not be afraid of him because, according to 2 Thessalonians 2:10, he misleads those who are perishing because they have not accepted Jesus. We can thus understand from this passage that the Antichrist further leads those who refused to acknowledge and accept Jesus as their Saviour into damnation and uses them for his evil plan of world domination through evil means.

"But won't God prevent innocent people from perishing like this?" we might exclaim. "What about all the people who have never heard the gospel?" In Mark 13:10 Jesus says that the whole world will hear the gospel before He comes. In other words, the lawless man will only become visible after the gospel has already been preached, after the gospel has been proclaimed all over the world. Only then will Christ allow the lawless man to take over.

This Antichrist will present himself as God, with great displays of power and miracles. But it will be his last gasp because on the day when Jesus appears, the Antichrist, along with Satan and all unbelievers, will be wiped out by God's judgment!

The time of Jesus' return has never been as close in history as it is right now. All the signs are already there. The gospel has already been proclaimed all over the world, and with the technological explosion of the past few years, where the gospel can reach almost every home through radio, TV, the internet, and mobile phones, all the prophecies are unfolding before our eyes. The question you should ask yourself this morning is, "Am I ready?" Many people have asked me for help in coming to Jesus over the past few years. What are you waiting for?

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that we can eagerly anticipate Your return. Please keep us ready!

Thank You for Being Part

2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

Believers need each other! We strengthen one another and encourage each other in life. One last story from the bush before we conclude with Thessalonians.

I sit dreamily on the porch in the woods after the rain has refreshed the earth. The veldt has a green glow, but it will be weeks before there is enough food for the animals again. The soft murmuring of banded mongoose pups excites me. In a way, they are for me a personification of believers. The forerunners show up loudly to see if there is anything to eat. Then the message is spread far and wide. Like lightning, the rest of the herd storms out of the undergrowth, and they all chatter and chirp together. They discover a piece of old stale bread, and each one grabs a piece and runs off to eat it in peace. But there isn't much peace, because there's a

struggle over who will get the biggest and juiciest piece of bread!

When the bread is gone, the bunch is still hungry. One little guy climbs the tree in front of the porch and skillfully snatches the apple meant for the birds. This treasure is worth gold to him and he runs off so fast to where no one will bother him. Soon I realize that each of these fascinating little creatures has its own personality. One seeks conflict with everyone, while another is peaceful. Some are very brave, while others are timid and will run away at the slightest movement.

When the food is gone, they diligently search for holes under the trees. Not a single pebble or speck of dust is left untouched. And all of a sudden they are tired. One little guy lies flat on his belly, paws outstretched in all directions. Before long before he finds a buddy, and eventually, the whole lot lies bundled together, sleeping. They coo encouragingly in each other's ears, and there is no sign of that arguing, bustling commotion from a little while ago. It's so peaceful!

In a way, believers are very much like these mongoose. Just as a single mongoose cannot survive on its own, a believer cannot thrive in isolation. Of course, your faith is built through your personal relationship with God. But it is your interaction with other believers that brings this faith to life and helps it grow. Someone told me that they haven't been to church in years. They feel like they've ended up in a dark hole and are now spiritually tired and numb. The worst part is that they have lost hope and have absolutely no faith assurance. That's what happens when you don't have other believers around you to encourage and strengthen you.

I can only testify to what it means to me personally to be able to share my thoughts with you every morning. It feels to me as if there is a crowd of believers standing around me, strengthening and encouraging me. The messages - often just a single line - that I receive daily, just to say that the daily reflection meant something to them, confirm that I am so wonderfully privileged to have a

large crowd of believers who care about me. And even though I only know a few, the care is still there.

Paul writes that he is thankful to the Lord for the believers in Thessalonica. Today, I want to proclaim loudly that I am also grateful to the Lord for you, dear reader, dear listener. The Lord loves you! But it is crucial to know that you are needed and are a part of God's Kingdom. In a Kingdom, everyone has a task to perform, some are significant tasks, and others are small. However, everyone's task is important, no matter how minor. You not only act on behalf of the Kingdom, but you are also strengthened through it. Using myself as an example again: since I started with wobbly steps to write daily reflections, there has been a spiritual explosion in my life. By sharing what I experience spiritually with other people, I also grow spiritually myself.

This does not mean that everyone has to write or preach! By doing what the Lord asks you to do, you become part of that Royal army. By radiating love and kindness, even

without words, you have already accomplished a huge task because in doing so, you reflect God's love. At the same time, it does wonders for yourself because suddenly your life is positive and purposeful. By praying for someone, you not only lift that person in prayer but also strengthen your own faith.

A simple act of faith can often perform miracles. Over the years, several people have sent me addresses of people who might also want to receive the daily reflections. I often receive letters from new recipients saying, "I don't know who gave my address to you, but I am eternally grateful..." I could also share the gospel message with several people. Without you, my work is futile. I am eternally grateful to God for you because you are an indispensable link in the chain of faith!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for each recipient of this daily reflection. Thank you for the wonderful strength it gives me, and for the

indescribable privilege of being able to serve
in Your Kingdom!

Hard Work and Loafers

2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

Today, we conclude the series on Paul's letters to the Thessalonians with Paul's command to work hard. Paul did not write this without reason: Some of the believers in Thessalonica believed that, since Jesus' return could happen any day, it was necessary for all believers to quit their jobs. Furthermore, they could neglect all their responsibilities. Future planning was now entirely unnecessary. All they had to do was passively wait for Jesus' return! They literally sat around, waiting for Jesus to come!

"Satan finds mischief for idle hands to do" So goes the well-known proverb, and this is precisely where the pawpaw hits the fan because instead of focusing on Jesus, these idlers made a nuisence of themselves. They meddled in other people's affairs and became a burden to the church because they

could no longer provide for their own needs. Other believers and family members had to take care of them!

I think back to a visit, many years ago, to the farm of an old Frenchman, Charlie de Charmois. He was a young man when he arrived in the country from Mauritius and began working as a labourer on a sugar farm. Through hard work, he eventually managed to buy his own small farm. When I met him, old Charlie was already in his eighties, and he didn't know the end of his treasures. His farms stretched from horizon to horizon. What struck me, however, was that he excitedly showed me where he had planted a row of very special trees. He would see these trees bear the most wonderful fruit within twenty years. Of course, old Charlie would be long gone by then, but he was still excited about his planning. Charlie lived each day as if he would live for another eighty years!

The secret is to plan as if you are going to live to be 120 years old and live as if you are

going to die tomorrow.

Paul did not mince words about the idlers. He commanded them, by the authority of Christ, to roll up their sleeves and earn their own bread. Living with an expectation of Jesus means that you should live your life as Jesus wants it. You should put your shoulder to the wheel and not be lazy, and you should not grow weary of doing good to others. This is also the way you should approach your work, to show that you truly belong to Jesus.

The immediate question that arises is whether it is wrong to take a vacation or relax. The fact is that there is a vast difference between relaxation and idleness. Relaxation is resting, and especially in our hectic society it is an essential thing to bring balance to your life. However, you can only relax if you have already worked hard. It is your responsibility to use your time and abilities as efficiently as possible to provide for yourself and those dependent on you.

Of course, there is the bitter issue of

unemployment today. You cannot work if you cannot find work. Unfortunately, there are people who hide behind the issue of unemployment and pray fervently that they will never find work!

The other issue that Paul mentions, which goes hand in hand with idleness, is meddling in other people's affairs. It's nothing but gossip! It's enjoyable if you have "classified information" and you can share it with relish. It's exciting and makes you feel important. However, gossip stories break people down and can cause a lot of harm. If you are busy with such things, it often means that you have too much free time on your hands! Use that time positively to do Kingdom work! Approach that task with zeal and wholehearted dedication.

How do we handle idlers? Paul says, "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat." Of course, you should help the truly needy, but we must be very careful not to encourage idlers in their wrongdoing. And by idlers, I mean someone who is just too lazy to work.

Laziness should never be rewarded! Unfortunately, it is often challenging to distinguish between laziness and genuine need. Is the beggar genuinely in need, or is he begging because he is too lazy to work? We should always make a decision on this with prayer.

I want to conclude this short series with Paul's words: "May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all!" (Verse 16). Make this blessing your own.

Prayer:

Please make me willing to work hard today Lord, and keep me from engaging in gossip!

If you enjoyed this book,
please consider making a
donation using this
ZAPPER QR code.
Part of your donation will
go towards Bible
distribution.



MOSBOLLETJIE BOEKE
zapperTM