

Qualities of A Missions-Minded Church
1 Thessalonians 1

This is a special day for Highlands as we host our 1st Annual Missions Sunday. Does this mean that Highlands has not been interested or involved in “missions” until today? NO. Have we never had missionaries here until today? NO

But it marks a new impetus and initiative by the missions committee team to bring a “missions focus” to the overall life of the church.

Let’s clear up the possible confusion about missionaries. In one important sense, ALL believers are, or should be ON MISSION. We have ALL BEEN CALLED to follow Christ, make disciples, and to bear witness to Christ as king.

EVERY MEMBER IS A MINISTER, A MESSENGER, AND A MANAGER of his/her life and the time, talents, and treasure entrusted to you by God.

The fear that some have with a “missions” focus is detracting from the calling that all believers have to be engaged in the mission of the kingdom. It’s too easy to think, “We pay people to do that so I don’t have to.” (Missionaries are not Super Saints – they are a slice of the church).

SOME are called to serve in a full-time capacity in a ministry at home or abroad while being supported in prayer and finances by others in the body of Christ. We call them “missionaries”.

Linda and I did that for several years with CCC and 11 years with MTW. Today I’m a “missionary” in the traditional role of a pastor of a local church.

This type of missionary calling has various faces to it:

Church planters

Puppet ministry

Camp ministry

Crisis pregnancy ministry

From the pages of scripture, we see that God is a missionary God; the church is a missionary body. Christ came to purchase a bride from every nation, tongue, and tribe and he gives us a part to play. We don’t all do the same thing, but we can all be involved in the mission.

I Thess. 1:1-3 Acts 17

1Paul and Silvanus and Timothy,

**To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace to you and peace.**

2We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, 4knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;

Lets note the salutation; GRACE AND PEACE

GRACE AND PEACE ARE TRUTHS THAT LIBERATE US from the accusations of men and of Satan. Because salvation is by grace through faith I can admit my sins before God and others. My standing before God is not based on my merits or de-merits. I have nothing to hide, because I no longer have to build my record before God and men; I don’t have to establish my reputation in order to be accepted by our heavenly Father.

I hope you know this Grace and Peace in Christ this morning. I hope you haven't forgotten it. God's grace in Christ forms the foundation of the Christian life, and the missions minded church.

Now let's look at the three qualities that cause Paul to thank God always for the church of Thessalonica. ***Who has God used that you are thankful for??? Have you thanked them?

I. WORK OF FAITH

A true faith works works. Faith without works is dead. – James 2:17 Let's not use Eph. 2:8,9 as an excuse for avoiding works of faith. In fact, faith which does not produce or give rise to works is not a true faith. **LUTHER: "SALVATION IS BY FAITH ALONE, BUT NOT BY A FAITH THAT IS ALONE.** True faith manifests itself in works.

The Thessalonians worked the works of faith. How? We can't be sure. Perhaps among the poor, or among the sick or among those in prison. Paul give some idea in verses 6-10. They were imitators of Christ and announced the gospel amidst tribulation. They had a vision for reaching the unreached; they were missions-minded - Macedonia, Achaia, every place...

I imagine that this was a church made up of people who had a FATIH WALK. i.e. taking bigger and bigger steps of faith as you grow in Christ. Breaking faith barriers. Faith is like a muscle; it must be exercised in order to grow and stay healthy.

EX: I LEARNED THIS IS MY LIFE AS A YOUNG CHRISTIAN. Bible study--evang. group-- lead a group-- staff with CCC --campus director --Youth ministry--seminary-- MTW--France – return to the States not knowing where we were going... Even as we approach the final chapter(s) of ministry, we want to stay on the edge of our faith, out on a limb. That's where the fruit is.

How do you identify your faith barriers? Ask, "What am I afraid to do, but feel called to do for the kingdom?" Fear is a signal to step out in faith, and God honors and rewards the faith of those who seek Him. Heb.11:6 A faith barrier is something out of your comfort zone. . Jesus left his comfort zone for us.

What is "A call?" **"A persistent sense of oughtness."** WE don't all have the same call. We have different gifts and functions in the body, but we all need to respond in faith to what we think God may be leading us to do.

Is your faith working? In your church, at home, at the office, in your neighborhood? Are you breaking faith barriers? Is the word going forth from us.to every place? Maybe a faith barrier is going overseas for a short-term missions project, or long-term missions service. Maybe it is going across town to serve those in need, or just going across the street to invite a neighbor to church or to a gathering where he/she can meet God's Word and God's people.

For some here, your faith barrier is the nursery or children's ministry. You feel that you ought to do something, but the ideas are scary, the commitment is scary. For some the barrier is in finances. You haven't really started to trust God to provide, so you're not giving as you should.

What is your faith barrier? Are you willing to let your faith work? Get into an accountability relationship with someone, share your fears and pray together about ways in which you can be involved in works of faith.

Is there someone today who could give thanks for the work of faith manifested in your life?

II. LABOR OF LOVE

True love requires labor; it takes work. It is difficult and goes against the grain of human nature. It goes against my nature. Love is hard, but it is possible by the grace of God and it is our vocation in Christ.

A PRINCIPLE: **It is hard to truly love without recognizing just how hard it really is.** If you think that love is easy, I'd say that you have never tried to love, or you are a lot more sanctified than I am.

Agape love (I Cor.13) is an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, it doesn't come naturally to men or women. We learn to love through encounters with unlovable people and difficult situations. The presence or absence of love shows itself during stressful times in our relationships. It shows itself when my wife, or my kids or a colleague or a stranger does something that I don't like. That is the moment for AGAPE LOVE.

It is the moment when we discover whether or not we are living by the power of the Spirit or by power of the flesh.

AGAPE, unconditional love works, it bears all things, it thinks the best, it considers the needs of others. Natural human love, based on the behavior of the other person, doesn't endure hardship and doesn't cover a multitude of sins.

To live above with saints I love, oh that will be glory,
But to live below with saints I know, well, that's another story.

Is there someone today who could give thanks for the labor of love manifested in your life?

III. STEADFASTNESS OF HOPE

Like love and faith, hope reveals itself during trials and it enables us to endure them with joy..
v.6

Paul gave thanks for their perseverance of faith. It was a perseverance that persevered, a hope that held firm despite the circumstances. True hope survives tribulations. It is attacked, it grows weak, but at the end it endures, unshakable like the God who is its object.

PAUL AND SILAS ARRIVE IN THESSALONICA AS MODELS OF A COUNTER-CULTURAL HOPE. How do we know this? Acts 17:6-7

Their message and practice were upsetting the world because they were following the path of a new king, Jesus.

Believers who follow Christ will be counter cultural, even, or especially if the culture is "churched". Why? Because they have an allegiance to another King and kingdom. They, WE, have a HOPE that is not rooted in the promises of this world and this life. Our hope is in Christ.

1 Thess 1:9-10

9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

Missions, whether foreign or domestic, involves living with and telling others about an eternal hope found in King Jesus. Today we focus on some of those we support as "missionaries", but don't think that lets us off the hook. We are to be "on mission" ourselves in our daily lives by practicing biblical counter-cultural values – in how we invest our time, talent, and treasure. Biblical values are counter-cultural when it comes to our understanding of ultimate truth, marriage, singleness, sexual purity, money, power, our approach to work, to play, to engagement with culture, what we expect from government or societal institutions.

Some criticize missions as seeking to “impose western practices on other cultures”. Sadly, there have been instances of that in the past, but the reality is that the bible will be counter-cultural to every society in various ways.

What IS THE HOPE THAT SHAPES BELIEVERS?

Faith in the true and living God, after turning from idols.
Waiting for Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

What we believe about our future determines how we handle circumstances now.

Christians have assurance that their future is infinite personal love from God. We aren't better people, we just have a better hope. This should shape our lives – how we deal with death, life, sex, money, power, and our time, talent, and treasure.

When we face tribulations and persecutions a pure hope in God upholds us so that we might face our trials. The Thessalonians faced trials with a living hope in Christ and they received the Word of God with joy amidst many trials.

It is not a doctrine of hope that changes us, but the experience of HOPE, and the Thessalonians had a real experience of this hope that was remarkable.

Verse 3 tells us the key to this hope: Its unique object, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. The hope which glorifies God is a hope centered on Christ alone. The hope which pleases God is a hope focused on Christ alone. The hope which remains in the midst of trials is a hope in Christ alone, and the hope which gives us joy in the face of tribulations is a hope in Christ alone. Where is your hope this morning? In your health? In your job? In your friends? In your money, your plans for the future, your kids, or your spouse? I trust that all of these are going well with you, but if so, it may be hard for you to know where your hope is.

A PRINCIPLE: GOD IS GLORIFIED MOST IN US WHEN WE HOPE MORE IN HIM. (Piper)

I believe that God uses trials in order to purify and simplify our hope. Psalms 73:25 "Who have I in heaven but thee, and besides thee I desire nothing on earth." To glorify God and enjoy Him forever means that we hope in God alone. The foundation of our hope is the grace of God in Christ.

VoV THE SAVIOR

May thy dear Son preserve me from this present evil world,
So that its smiles never allure,
Nor its frowns terrify,
Nor its vices defile,
Nor its errors delude me.
May I feel that I am a stranger and a pilgrim
On earth,
Declaring plainly that I seek a country,
My title to it becoming daily more clear,
My meetness for it more perfect,
My foretaste of it more abundant;
And whatsoever I do may it be done
In the Savior's name.

Is there someone today who could give thanks for the steadfastness of hope manifested in your life?

Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope. Those qualities are ALREADY OURS IN Christ.

To the degree that we abide in Him and His grace, these qualities will be ours in practice.

Faith, love, and hope are SOMEONE YOU MEET before they are things you practice.

Do you know HIM?

I can't tell you that all will be well tomorrow, but if you know Christ, I can tell you that He is picking out wallpaper in your mansion and is fluffing up pillows as He awaits your arrival. That is our ultimate eternal hope.

EX: 1976 CCC Thompson Canyon flood <<<MELANIE I'M GOING TO SEE JESUS. I'M SO EXCITED>>>

That kind of supernatural Hope bears witness to another king, Jesus.

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