

Faith, Love, and Hope

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

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Sermon by Ken King

As a gardener, I always enjoyed seeing the fruits of my labor. You know what I mean. The prize tomato or pepper from the garden, or the largest zucchini that you showed off to as many people as you could. Or as parents the pride you had when your children accomplished something in school or in life.

That is the way Paul felt about the church he had planted in Thessalonica on one of his missionary journeys. He was proud of how effective they were and even considered them a model church. In today's scripture, Paul points out three things that had been made possible through the Holy Spirit to the believers:

The WORK OF FAITH - not focusing on idols but focusing on the true God;

The LABOR OF LOVE – caring and serving others and sharing the love of Christ

The ENDURANCE OF HOPE - Hope of looking to the future coming of our Lord.

Did you notice that Paul makes us aware that being a Christian isn't a passive situation? It is active:

WORK of FAITH, LABOR of LOVE, and ENDURANCE of HOPE? Let's look more at these.

First, the WORK of FAITH.

I remember tossing my children up in the air and the smiles and laughs that came. They had blind faith, believing that I would catch them, and protect them. They trusted me. Likewise, we have been given that same trust, belief and faith when we turn our lives over to Jesus. We can believe that the works we do with faith, the Holy Spirit will reinforce. That doesn't mean we will get our way but God's way. That might lead to disappointment or despair, or criticism about our faith, but our faith must be strong to accept the will of God. There is a reason and purpose for everything in our lives. We need to rely on the Holy Spirit to help us understand each moment and each incident.

There is the story of the man who was on the edge of a cliff admiring the beauty of God's

creation, when he slipped and fell off the edge of that cliff. As he was falling, he was able to grab onto a small tree that was growing in the rock of the cliff. Being extremely scared, as I know I would be, he called out for help. “Help, Help! Is anyone up there who can help me?” A deep caring voice responded with, “Yes, just let go and I will save you.”

Climber: “who are you?”

Response: “This is God, let go and I will save you.”

After a minute contemplating his situation, the climber responded, “Is there anyone **else** up there?”

Have you found yourself in a similar situation? You see, when our life is changed with the Holy Spirit, we become an imitator of the Lord. Think of the faith that Jesus had in God, that His will would be done. Are we willing to let His will be done in our lives? Are we living the faith? Remember – you never stand alone; Christ is always there.

You see the “work of faith” refers not only to the works that resulted from our faith, but to our decision to believe in Jesus.

Second – the LABOR of LOVE

Love is one of those things with a really broad meaning. We are told to love our neighbor, love one another, love our enemies, and to love yourself. Some pretty big orders. But a LABOR of LOVE implies two things; first we have to work at it - it isn't going to be easy and second, it is has to be on-going. Then the Holy Spirit kicks in to help us.

You know it is the little things that make you aware of simple acts of kindness. A man walked into a bar one day. There was this bowl of snacks on the bar, so he helped himself and a voice came from inside the bowl said, ‘You are a very polite person.’ Now that caught him a little off guard. He then took another pretzel out of the bowl and the voice said, ‘You are a very kind individual.’ So he asked the bar tender what the deal was with the talking snack bowl. And he said, ‘Oh, it’s a complimentary snack bowl.’

Sometimes it is the little things we do for others that need to be part of our labor of love. Maybe it is just being complimentary every once and awhile.

The LABOR of LOVE for everyone we meet can be for those who don't like us as well as those who do. How do we show it? Maybe by volunteering in the community, or visiting a friend or calling a shut-in or member of the church, just to check on them?

I personally like working on the Community Meal, because I get to see Christian love at work. It's working at helping others, in some way.

Fact is, it is a lot easier loving your friends than it is your enemies. That is a labor of love that takes some real work.

And sometimes, it is hard to even love God, especially if we don't get our way. It's also hard to love ourselves sometimes, but God always loves us. There may be times we think life isn't fair, it's not right, not just. We might be asking "WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?" When that happens take some time to think about all of the blessings God has given you. Think about the missed opportunities to share Christ and the love God has given us. Think about all of your blessings.

There was a point in my life that I had considered suicide. It was a brief moment, I thought I might asphyxiate myself in my car. Now I look at that moment and realize there were some problems. I didn't have a garage to put the car in, the car was low on gas, and I had to be to work early the next day. What I remember most about that episode while I was sitting in the car thinking about killing myself, was the Holy Spirit entering my mind and saying to me, GOD LOVES YOU. HE NEEDS YOU TO LOVE YOUR FAMILY. The Labor of Love is something we have to work at every day.

When you have put your faith in Christ, and when you experience the Holy Spirit you can be motivated to actively give HIS love away to other people who desperately need it. Knowing that we are completely taken care of and provided for by the Lord, then we can take our eyes off of us and serve others.

Last is the ENDURANCE of HOPE.

Endurance means “hanging in there,” the power to keep your head above water in the midst of life's storms so you can keep doing what God wants you to do.

Now endurance implies pressure, adversity, and opposition. Once you have accepted Christ as your Savior, God does not exempt you from suffering – physically, financially or emotionally. You are going to experience the same accidents, illnesses, domestic challenges, hostile work situations, and criticisms as anyone else. And in addition, your faith in Christ will bring extra adversity your way - flak from family and friends, or spiritual opposition from others.

But if you look at a diamond, you realize it is a piece of coal that was under a lot of pressure, and under an intense heat for a long period of time. It didn't just happen. You see in the midst of our weaknesses and suffering, God's Spirit can give us hope and peace and even joy.

Sometimes we as Christians need to stop along life's road and look back. Although it might have been winding and steep along the way, we can see how God directed us by His faithfulness. When we face difficulties, we sometimes forget God's past faithfulness. We see only the detours and the dangerous path. But look back and you will also see the joy of victory, the challenge of the climb, and the presence of your traveling Companion (Jesus) who has promised never to leave you nor forsake you.

We are going to have situations that we need help to get through. That is when we come to the realization that our prayers have to change from “Why me? Why is this happening now? How could God do this to me? Or if there was a God He wouldn't have done this.” Those prayers need to change to, “God, please give me the strength and courage to make it through this situation, whether it is health, marital conflict, a financial situation.”

When we take it all to God, He will give us what we need to make it through. That's enduring HOPE, that we will be taken care of and the promise of the resurrection and everlasting life. It's hope of the resurrection, knowing that we will be with God, after our job of working in faith, laboring in love and holding to the hope of the kingdom.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

And then the Holy Spirit also gives us the desire to know and do the will of God and sometimes that means doing what He wants, rather than what I want.

I remember an experience on one of the mission trips we made to Haiti. There was a group of volunteers from Doctors Without Borders who were with us that week. One of the nurses in the group came down with a high fever and after two days the medications didn't seem to be having any effect. It was a Wednesday, our group had finished our morning assignments, and the pastor suggested that we go to the cabin where the nurse was staying. We knocked on the door and asked if it would be okay to pray. She invited us in. We put our hands on her head and prayed that the Holy Spirit be present and that the fever would go away and she would be restored to health.

After about 3 minutes of prayer, we felt the heat from her head pass through our hands. I had never experienced that healing power or the power of the Holy Spirit. Since then I have realized that the Holy Spirit had previously, and since then, effected many things in my life. Many of them I had taken for granted.

Doing God's will doesn't always mean you get to do what you want to do; but you do get to do what He created you to do. We didn't always get to go where we wanted but we did go where we were needed to be and, in the end, God met our needs as well.

The same God who raised Jesus from the dead and took him to heaven will do the same for us. No matter what we just have to keep on going, no matter what happens, because we know Jesus will return any day.

The Thessalonians saw the evidence of Jesus' power to change lives because of the loving lifestyle of Paul and his friends. How many people has God brought into your lives so you can be an example of his reality of faith, love and hope?

Here is a closing thought: God made you to be the answer to someone else's prayer. Keep your eyes and heart open so the Holy Spirit can lead you to them. Let us pray.

Dear Lord we give You thanks for Your son, Jesus, our Lord and Savior. We ask that You

continue to bless us with the Holy Spirit, allowing us to work in faith, labor in love, and be enduring in the Hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, for Your glory. This we pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.