



# *MORE GIVING. LESS TAKING.*

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1 Thessalonians | September 17, 2023

Sermon Link: <https://realfaith.com/sermons/more-giving-less-taking/>

All right, good to see you all. Thanks for joining us. Um, I have a tremendous sense of expectation. I, I was praying all week and I went on a prayer hike and I had the sermon prepared, and then I felt like the Holy Spirit spoke to me and said to go a completely different direction. So I believe that God has something very unique for each of you today. I believe for some of you, it's a healing for some of you're going to become Christians. For some of you, you're gonna get unburdened. For some of you, you're gonna reconcile some strained relationships. And for others of you, God's gonna give you instruction about the next season of your life. And to do that, we're gonna open the word of God, because the best way to get a word from God is to open the Word of God. We're in a New Testament book called First Thessalonians, and we're in chapter two. As you're finding your place, what I wanna do is give you a couple of gifts, and then I'll pray and then we'll jump in. This sermon's gonna be a little bit different, but if you'd like to learn more about First Thessalonians, I'll give you a QR code, uh, study guide. And, uh, if you wanna learn more about the Holy Spirit and having a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit, I'll give you a copy of this book, uh, spirit-Filled Jesus. And like I always say, you get what you pay for. It's free, lower your expectations, but I'm trying to help. Amen. And so if you scan the QR code, we'll send the digital version to you. And if you're here today, you can grab, uh, this study guide on the way out. And if you're new and stopped by guest services, we'll give you a, a free hardbound copy of Spirit-Filled Jesus. That being said, what I wanna do now is I wanna pray for you. And I want our time to together to be one that we remember, because God met with us in this place at this time. So Holy Spirit, we invite you. You are the honored guest, Lord. These are your people. This is your house. We're opening your word. We're seeking your will. Holy Spirit, we invite you to guide us, to lead us, to empower us, to unburden us, to instruct us, to strengthen us. And Holy Spirit, as we, as we come into your word, we pray that you would do what only you can do. And that's meet with us and help us learn more about this God who loves us so deeply and dearly. And God, as we study, would you reveal to us the ways that we can be an encouragement and strength to those around us? And God, I pray for a special grace and anointing in the Holy Spirit on our time together. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Okay, so let me set this up for you. Uh, Paul plants a church in a city called Thessalonica. And then he writes them a letter because a riot broke out and he was literally driven out of town. Every time God does ministry, Satan does anti ministry. Every time the Holy Spirit has a revival on Holy Spirit show up with a riot, these new Christians, then they have a lot of questions for him. So they write him a letter and he writes a letter back. First Thessalonians, that's what we're studying. And one of the major themes in the book is about the last days or the end times, and the people are looking into the future and they're wondering, what does the future hold for us? And Paul tells them. And so we're gonna talk briefly about the last days or the end times. And according to the Bible, this is the time between the first coming of Jesus and the second coming of Jesus. Jesus came the first time humbly, he's coming again in glory. He came the first time to die for us and rise for us. And he's coming again to raise his children from the dead and to judge his enemies and to sentence people to heaven and hell forever the time between the times of the last days or the end times, that's the time in which he was writing. And that's the time in which we are living. I'll give you a few occurrences of this theme. In one Thessalonians, he says in chapter one, verse 10, to wait for his son from

heaven. Just so you know, that's what we're waiting for. And lemme just tell you, our planet has a God, God-sized problem. And it doesn't matter how many wars we wage, how many elections we hold, how many prescriptions we prescribe, or how many conflicts we have, until Jesus comes back. There is going to be a constant series of problems, pains, and perils throughout human history. We wanna do all we can to prepare for the coming of Jesus. But ultimately, there are some things that won't change until he arrives, wait for his son from heaven, raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. He says this in chapter four, verses 15 through 17, the coming of the Lord. That's his phrase. He says, the Lord himself will descend from heaven. This is gonna be an incredible moment when Jesus Christ is coming back. This is the hope of the believer. It goes on to say, the dead in Christ will rise first. Those of you who have lost people that knew Jesus and you love them, they will rise from death. They will be healed, they will be perfect, and they will be whole. And your relationship with them will be perfect, healed and restored forever and ever. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And then I love this phrase, so we will always be with the Lord, because the Lord will always be with us. And then lastly, he says this in chapter five, verses two through nine, the day of the Lord. That's the second coming of Jesus will come like a thief in the night. And people will be saying, there is peace and security. And then suddenly destruction will come upon them as labor pains. Remember that phrase we're gonna unpack that will come upon, uh, he says, will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman and they will not escape. But God is not destined to us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. If you love Jesus, his coming is the best day. If you don't love Jesus, his coming is the worst day. For those of us who are Christians, we're not going to hell, but we are going through hell until Jesus brings heaven to us. For those who don't know the Lord Jesus, this is their heaven. This is as close to glory as they will ever be, and hell awaits them. And what he's telling the Christians is to encourage one another to think in terms of the long view of things and to reverse engineer your life. Okay, Jesus is coming. History does have a purpose, and there is a Lord ruling over it. And here he said that what we're experiencing in the last days of the end times are like the birth pains of a pregnant woman. And he's echoing the Lord Jesus who said in Matthew 24, 8 that it, his coming would be like birth pains. Okay, how many, how many mothers are in the house? Okay. Uh, I, I'll be honest with you, I, I do not identify as a birthing person. I just don't. I don't, I, I've had, I've had some of the symptoms. I've had weight gain, I've had bloating, I've had, uh, heartburn. Um, but it wasn't because of pregnancy. Uh, it was a series of dietary choices. If I'm honest with you, my wife, Grace, who is a birthing person, by the way, um, she, um, and it's just crazy how it's always women. I just, something just, anyways. Um, so, um, just a weird statistical anomaly, I'm sure. So my, my wife Grace, she's given birth to five children. And, uh, and I've been there for the, uh, the pregnancy and then the birth. And here's what I've observed. It's a lot. That's what I've observed, okay? It's a lot of pressure. It's a lot of pain, it's a lot of discomfort. It's, it's, it's days of real stress and fatigue. And then the contractions start as you near the end. And the contractions are unbelievable. Like, this is why God doesn't have men birth children, because like one guy would have a baby and the rest would be like, yeah, the race is gonna end. We're not doing that. We're not doing that. And the, my so our oldest daughter, she's uh, pregnant,

she's due any, any day this week we were talking and she was sitting there and she's like, oh, I was like, what's that? She said, A contraction. I was like, ha. Hey, when your daughter has contractions, you kind of have a contraction too. That's how you feel about it. So what happens is now she's experiencing the discomfort in the beginning of contractions, and what'll happen is they'll increase with intensity and frequency until it feels like you're gonna die, right? Ladies, is that true? It's what it looks like, uh, mean, that's why they bring in the drug dealer. They're like, would you like epidural? Yes, I would. You know, I was hoping for a Groupon. Can I get one too? Just watching is kind of a lot. It's kind of a lot. Get right here, tap me. And so, but then out of the greatest pain comes what Brand new life out of the greatest pain comes new life. And what he is saying, Jesus, and here Paul, is that as we get closer to the end, it's birth pains, it's pressure, it's anxiety, it's stress, it's pain, it's difficulty. It's, it's, it feels like it's going to kill us, but ultimately it's gonna do two things. It's going to birth a brand new world around us. And before we get there, it'll birth brand new life in us. God is using all of the labor pains to birth new life in us until Jesus returns and brings new life around us. And what we're reading here is called a prophecy. For those of you who are perhaps new to the Bible, uh, the Bible is written by God, the Holy Spirit through human authors. And, uh, about 25% of the Bible when it was written, was prophetic, meaning it was telling us in advance what the future would hold. The Bible has about 2,500 prophecies. Roughly 2000 of them have been fulfilled with great specificity in human history. There's about 500 remaining to be fulfilled. One of them is the second coming of Jesus and all the events surrounding it. And what I love about the Bible, there is no other religion or quite frankly, any other ideology that has any accuracy in interpreting the future. How many of you, in recent years, you think polls are adorable? Uh, people that are telling us what's going to happen, they may as well get drunk, throw a dart at a board and just say that that's their findings. No one has any idea what the future holds, but God does. And the reason God tells us is that when we know the future, we don't have as much anxiety and fear in the present because we know what's coming. But here's what happens as well. Prophecy protects us from false prophecy and false prophets in the Bible are those who say, here's what's going to happen, and that it doesn't happen. Some of the very prevalent false prophecies in our day would include, for example, that sort of radical environmental agenda that says that human life and animal life are equal. And that ultimately, um, the planet is going to die, and human life will come to an end. Well, here's what we know. Jesus will come back before that time. We need to be good stewards of our body and our world to be sure. But even the latest findings that were reported from NASA this week say that history had a beginning and it wasn't a big bang, it was a big God. And in the end, it history is winding down and invariably it's going to come to an end. And before it comes to an end, and before our resources come to their end, our savior will return. And now we are delivered from the false prophecy. Another powerful false prophecy in our day is that we are good and getting better. It's called evolution. Okay? If you still believe that we're getting better, you're adorable. Okay? You're adorable. And what happens is we have all of this external progress technologically, but no internal progress. Morally, we can go to the moon, but we can't be nice to our neighbor, right? We can create lots of technology, but all we have is broken relationships, and we just injure one another constantly. And so this myth, Hey, we're good in getting better. I don't, I, I don't think any sane person is feeling that today.

You know, it used to be bad. It's good now, but it's gonna be awesome. In addition, there is another false prophecy, and that is we are alone in the cosmos. We have been abandoned. There is no god over human history, and there is no one coming to rescue us. Those who believe these very powerful delusional false prophecies, they live with tremendous anxiety. Because if you look into the future and you either don't know what is going to happen or you believe a false prophecy, it creates lots of stress, fear, and anxiety in the present. And uh, and just think of it in this way, um, life is hard and it's going to get harder before Jesus returns, and then he's gonna make everything better. That's what the scripture's saying. But how many of you right now, if you don't look up to God, but you just look out at the future, you get a lot of anxiety and fear in the present? How many of you right now, let's just be honest. You look at the economy and you're like, huh, inflation's up. How are we gonna pay our bills? Where are we gonna buy a hou? Like where are we going? How many of you, um, just looking into the future at culture, you're like, it feels like we are just in free full rebellion against God, morally, sexually, culturally, self-destructing. How many of you, your parents, and you've got little kids, you're like me, you're a grandparent and you've got little kids. You're like, what does it look like in 20 years for them? I mean, we're watching the purge. Will they be doing the purge? Like where, where are we going? And how many of you looking forward to the election aren't looking forward to the election? Amen. Amen. Um, Sean and I were talking about it, uh, just before the service. I'm telling you there's gonna be some increasing birth pains in this next year. You're gonna see lots of cultural conflict. You're gonna see lots of false prophets. You're gonna see lots of fear and anxiety. You are going to see the oxygen mask drop on America and the barf bags filled. That's where we're going. It's going to be turbulent, okay? The birth pains. Now, those who don't know the Lord, they are not doing well. This is actually when you feel the birth pains, but you don't know what is happening. All you do is just endure and then you start to break. So lemme just tell you how people are doing. First and foremost, mental health is plummeting, especially for younger generations. Here's the, uh, here's the statistics. Teen girls who persistently felt sad or hopeless increased dramatically from 2011 to 2021. That's from the C d C. So we're just following the science here. Um, and a lot of this was created by C O V I D and lockdowns and false prophets. That's right. And there's rumor of this happening again, just lemme just say this in advance. We will not close. We will add services, we'll add services. Um, number two, people are self-destructing by self-medicating. When you feel the birth pains and you don't know what to do, you just wanna self-medicate so you don't feel the pain. Um, here is the latest, uh, research. I'll read it to you. Uh, with us overdoses hitting, uh, US overdose deaths hitting a new high in 2022. A majority of adults have felt the impact of the substance use of cri crisis. Two thirds say either they or a family member have been addicted to alcohol or drugs, experienced homelessness due to addiction, or experienced a drug overdose leading to an emergency room visit, hospitalization or death. Mentally, people are breaking younger and younger and people are self-destructing. By self-medicating, I mean, to me as a dad, this is devastating. I've got, I've got kids. When you're in your teens and your twenties, you should be looking forward to your life and your future. You should be planning a path that you wanna run down. Instead, anxiety, fear, and depression that leads to self-medication that leads to self-destruction. And we live in this stupid day when it's like, let's decriminalize and legalize drugs. Well then

all we have is people who are self-destructing. And if we love them, we know that's not best for them. And our major cities are just filled with people who are tormented and tortured and they're self-medicating and they're self-destructing. In addition, people are losing hope and they're ending their life again. Here is the, uh, the latest research. Uh, this is suicide rates in the United States of America. And what you are seeing is a record increase in suicide. What these are, these are dear people that God loves, but Satan hates and they're feeling the birth pains, but they don't know the Lord over history. And so they have fear and anxiety about tomorrow to the degree that they don't want to see it, and they end their life. Now, I don't wanna discourage you, but I want us to deal with reality. Things aren't going well, and it doesn't seem like they're going to improve anytime soon. How many of you you sense that? Okay, so the question is, okay, well what do we do? Well, here's, here's some good news here. Christians endure the same experiences as non-Christians. We live in the same world. We experience the same birth pains. Just give you some lines from First Thessalonians. He says, we've suffered and been shamefully treated. Some of you know exactly what that feels like. He says, we've had much conflict. Some of you are fully aware of that labor and toil every day just feels like an exhausting, overwhelming burden to bear. He says, we suffered, drove us out. He literally got ran out of town. He says, Satan hindered us. Some of you, your life is like walking into a stiff headwind. And Satan and satanic forces and demonic spirits just constantly exhaust you and wear you out because they're trying to stop you from living in obedience to your God. And he says this line, and I love the fact that he's honest. Paul's one of the most significant, brilliant, courageous men in the history of the world. And here's what he said. We could bear it no longer. He reached a point where he is just like, I just don't know if I could keep doing this. He talks about distress, affliction. He uses the word grieve, faint-hearted and weak. And so the Christian and the non-Christian go through the same experiences, endure the same birth pains. The difference is the non-Christian can only look out and the result is fear. The Christian can look up and the result is faith. This is the difference. It's not that we deny the reality around us, but we acknowledge the greater reality of our God who is over everyone and everything that's around us. Okay? Um, and, and the good news is the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is alive and well right now. And he's ruling and reigning and he's seated on a throne and he's being worshiped by divine beings and departed saints. And when we sing and pray, heaven and earth get a little closer together. And there's a thin place called the Church where the presence of God drops into the people of God as they, they sing their praises to God. That's why we sing and pray so that we can have thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, as hell is around us. We need heaven to come down upon us. And as we look up to the Lord Jesus, we realize that he is in control of history. That he has a plan that he wins in the end. In the meantime, he can walk with us through this life. He can unburden us. He can heal us, he can direct us, he can love us, and he can protect us. And the result is that we, we don't need to have fear. Instead we can have faith. And the Bible says that God hasn't given us a spirit of fear. Fear literally comes with a demonic spirit. We saw what this looks like a few years ago. The entire planet was grip by a spirit of fear. People making self-destructive, short-sighted decisions. The number one command in the entire Bible. The thing that the Bible echoes the most is this fear, not because every human being, even those of us who know and love Jesus, as we look out fear, as we look

up faith. And so we need to find Jesus over it all. And we need to trust Jesus through it all so that we can be part of preparing the way for the coming of the Lord. What I want do now is I just wanna read First Thessalonians two, one through 12. Typically when I teach through a book of the Bible, I'll just break and do sections. I just wanna read the entire thing. And then I wanna share with you what the Holy Spirit shared with me as I was praying for you this week. Uh, lemme just read it. And faith comes by hearing the word of God. So thank you for listening. For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming was not in vain. Now, there are things in life. It looks like it was a waste of time and energy, but if it was for the Lord, it's never in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully, shamefully treated it Philippi, as you know, we have boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict for our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, that's the good news about the death barrel resurrection and second coming of Jesus Christ. So we speak not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts for we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed. God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, that we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you like a nursing mother, back to the birth pain language, taking care of our own children. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but but also our own selves. But because you had become very dear to us, you just need to know, that's exactly how I feel about this church family, very dear. You are wonderful people, easy to like, easy to love, easy to lead. Thank you for you. Remember brothers, our labor back to the birth pains, language and toil. We work day and night that we might not be a burden to any of you while we proclaim to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses. And God, also how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers, for you know, how like a father with his children, we exhorted each of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. Let me just summarize this for you. Paul's talking about enduring the birth pains. That's what he's talking about, the birth pains. He's feeling it and he's sensing it sometimes in church. I just feel inclined to say this. You don't need to pretend. How are you doing? Answer? What's the canned dance? How are you doing? Great. Jesus doesn't need to come back. Like it's that good, you know? And and I, and I always like it when people say this, you're doing good, right? Well, I dunno what to say here. Uh, I you you want one answer, but that's not true. Like I'm, I'm, it's so it's okay to not be okay. And then the question is be honest, and I'm gonna tell you how when you're not okay, you can become okay. Yes. And what he's suffering, he uses the word here, suffered twice. He's suffering mentally. Some of you know what this is like. He says, we were shamefully treated and had much conflict. When people shamefully treat you, they are destroying your reputation. And when you have a lot of conflict, it causes a lot of stress and anxiety. Some of you will avoid conflict at all costs. Um, I don't know what that's like, but some of you avoid conflict at all costs, right? Because what you know is mentally it's just too distressing and it's overwhelming and it's exhausting. Paul is enduring this. In addition, he's suffering physically. The story of the planting of the church at Thessalonika is found in another book of the New Testament called Acts. And it's the acts of the

Holy Spirit through the apostles. And in chapter 17 it says that Paul and, uh, Sylvanus and Timothy who are mentioned at the beginning of First Thessalonians as coworkers and co-writer of this book, they enter into the, uh, ancient town of Thessalonika. They meet at the synagogue with the Jewish people. And Paul teaches them the Bible about Jesus who is Jewish and the fulfillment of all the Jewish prophecies. The Bible says that there was a revival and a bunch of people got saved and they met Jesus. And the result was there was a riot. There was a riot. And what happened was an angry riotous mob, they wanted to close the church and they wanted to cancel. Paul cancel culture is nothing new. Ultimately, they wanted to not only cancel Paul, but crucify him. They wanted him dead. So Paul is in this difficult position where if he stays and they attack, these people that he loves are caught in the crossfire, they could be put to death perhaps along with their pastor. So he runs, he flees, he leaves town, but now his life is in danger. They want him dead. Ultimately, Paul is murdered. He is suffering physically, he's also suffering legally. In Acts chapter 17, when he planted the church, there was a man named Jason who brought Paul into his house and was a friend and a generous partner in ministry. Well, the government showed up and they punished Jason. And he actually had to pay a fine for just supporting the ministry of Paul. What that means is, now Paul has problems with the government, the Roman government, the most powerful authority on the earth after the Holy Spirit is looking for Paul. Eventually they have him arrested multiple times and history outside of the Bible says they had him beheaded. In addition, he was suffering spiritually because he obeyed God. He did exactly what God said, but it appeared like he had failed and lost. That's what it appeared like. God, I went into town, you told me to go. I said what you told me to say, and now I'm being attacked. And now I'm running for my life. And now I got legal bills I can't afford. And now the headlines are trashing me and my enemies are celebrating. And the church I planted is suffering. And the people that I love, I can't even be there to look 'em in the eye and tell 'em how precious and dear they are to me. Sometimes you get in trouble for doing the wrong thing. Sometimes you get in trouble for doing the right thing. And sometimes you just need to know this friend. Lemme lemme just say it this way. As a believer in Jesus Christ, our goal is not winning. It's worshipping. It's not winning. It's worshipping. And here it looks like Paul was losing, but he was worshipping. He did exactly what God had told him to do. My, my my encouragement to you is this, don't worry about being successful. Focus on being faithful. Okay? And that's Paul. He lost his church. He lost his reputation, he lost his platform. He lost his friends, but he was obedient to his God. And when he died, he heard well done good and faithful servant. Professionally, he is suffering. If you read ahead a little bit in Second Thessalonians, the next book that we'll get into next in chapter two verses one through three, Paul says, Hey, that other letter you got that wasn't for me. So Paul's job, he's a preacher and a teacher and a pastor. He writes books of the Bible. That's what he does. He writes at least 13 books of the New Testament. There's 27 books of the New Testament. He writes at least 13 of them. And there is a book called Hebrews. The name of the author is Unknown something, it's Paul If So, that's 14 books of the New Testament. And so he has the highest credibility and the greatest authority. And what happened was the church sent him a letter with a bunch of questions. So he wrote a letter back 'cause he couldn't be there to answer the questions. Well, then his critics and enemies heard. Well, Paul wrote a letter and he sent it to the church. We should write a letter, pretend it's from Paul and



send it to the church. This is a, this is an ancient deep fake. This is a, this is a Russian dossier, right? Um, this is fake news. This is an anonymous source. This is all of that false witness and lying. So they write a letter, they send it to the church. The church would've gotten together as you are. They would've heard, Hey, we got, we, we got a second letter from Paul. Now you can assume and presume that everything in that letter contradicted everything that Paul believed. Now they have a crisis in the church. And now the headline is Paul has denied the faith. Paul, everything he wrote, he's deconstructed. He's, he's an apostate, he's abandoned. Team Jesus. Here, here we have it. He's written an apology for everything he is ever said and done. And it was all a lie. If this is believed, his entire life's work is in jeopardy. Everything that the Holy Spirit gave him to write that has been preserved as the sacred perfect word of God is at, is at risk in jeopardy. In addition, financially he is suffering. Again, we're just talking about the birth pains. What they said was, Paul came into town, preached some of you trusted him. He stole all your money and left town. He's a conman. That's what they said. That's what they said. These are people that he baptized. These are people that he loved. These are people that he hugged and prayed for and introduced to Jesus. And the poor dear people in the church are thinking, oh my gosh. Our our founding pastor has denied the faith. And he's, he's embezzled a bunch of money. This is a crisis. Did Paul take a dime? No. No, he didn't. But they lied about him. And so what he says as you read the book, he says right here in this section of, uh, one Thessalonians chapter two, he says, quote, we work day and night not to be a burden. He's like, yes, we got a full-time job and volunteered at the church. We didn't take anything. We gave everything. And then lastly, he is suffering and feeling the birth pains relationally. To me, this had to be perhaps the most devastating for Paul. What they said was, do you know why Paul left doesn't love you? He's like that deadbeat dad that walked out when you were a little kid and he never looked back. That's the kind of spiritual father he is. Paul didn't leave because he disliked the people, but because he deeply loved the people, he knew that if he stayed, the government would come and they would seek to Perhaps kill him. And then they would punish, possibly even kill the Christians who stood with him. As I said last week, this is like somebody pulls a gun and between you and them or your children, you're like, I'm not on hol stringing because my kids are in the crossfire. I need to deescalate the situation. And even if it looks like I'm losing, if they're living, then we're winning. But what they told him was, Paul doesn't love you. And so what he tells them throughout the letter, you're very dear to us, we love you. We miss you. I care about you. The language is very fatherly and very loving. But I'll, I'll just say this. If somebody starts a church, it's for two reasons. They love God and they love people. That's why when you start a church, it's a lot of work. And, and it's not a lot of benefit. Like most businesses, 75 to 80% of church plants fail. It's about the same percentage as a small business. Apostle Paul didn't start this church because he was greedy and didn't love people. He worked for free and he sacrificed his own life and he gave them everything he had 'cause he cared very deeply about them. Couple of life lessons. When a Christian leader is attacked, consider the source. See, we know who Paul is. We don't know who his critics are. We know that he planted a church. Doesn't seem like they did. People became Christians because of his ministry, not because of their ministry. And 2000 years later, the Holy Spirit kept his book, but not their book. Right? We're not reading first and second critics. We're reading first and second Thessalonians to be sure. There

are times that Christian leaders will say and do things that they shouldn't. Sometimes it's true, sometimes it's kind of true. Sometimes it's not true at all. Be careful not to believe everything you hear in that day. The headlines about Paul, they were devastating, apostate, crook, running from the law, abandoning his church. Number two, um, sometimes God gets you out of suffering. Most of the time God gets you through suffering, Okay? And some of you, you grew up with a, a theology in the Holy Spirit that if you just have enough faith and you pray and you cry and you scream and you claim the promise, the problem will go away. The truth is, sometimes the Holy Spirit will get you around the suffering. Usually the Holy Spirit will get you through the suffering. And this is what's gonna happen for Paul. His problems don't all get fixed, but his soul does. Things don't improve around him, but they improve in him. Lemme just tell you this friend, you can't improve around you much of what you experience during the birth pains as we're awaiting the second coming of Jesus. But the Holy Spirit can improve what's happening in you. In addition, um, when opposition gets harder, your obedience needs to go deeper. Hall here is in a season of deeper obedience. Um, and some of you are in a season right now where this is a difficult season for you. What you're facing is something you've never faced. What you're dealing with is something you've never dealt with. Um, let me encourage you. You're ready. The reason it hasn't occurred previously is it would've broken you. Not built you, you weren't ready for it. Now God sees that you are at a place that you are going to be strengthened through your suffering. And what, what you previously would've been broken by, you'll now be built by. Amen. In addition, give yourself to, uh, Another one. Uh, your test is for your testimony. Yes. Okay? How many of you wanna have a testimony? Okay, how many of you don't want to go through a test to have a testimony? You can't have one without the other. What he says is, God tests our hearts. That's what he's talking about. And what he's saying is that the test is for his testimony. And here's the, here's the difference between a biography and a testimony. The world tells stories about human life and conquest and victory and its biography. And it is, here's what I did and here's how I did it. A testimony is here's what God did and here's how he did it. The difference between a biography and a testimony is who's the hero? A biography. I'm the hero. Testimony. God's the hero. And what Paul is going through here is a test. And it's for his testimony. Um, and, and here, I've said this before, but um, I use this analogy a lot. Um, this is my water bottle for the, uh, series. It's, uh, Jesus is coming look busy. Um, and so I use this analogy a lot, but, uh, there's water in the bottle. What happens when I bump the bottle? What comes out? Whatever's in the bottle. When you get pressure, when you get pushed, when you get pressed, what's in comes out. It could be bitterness or forgiveness. It could be anger or joy. It could be love or vengeance. And what Paul is saying is all of this pressure and all of this pushing and pressing, it is revealing who I am. And that's my testimony thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit in me. And then lastly, God will vindicate you. There's this stupid idea that you should be on the right side of history. You should be on the right side of eternity. There are beliefs and behaviors right now that you will be celebrated in this world, but you will be judged by God. And now, 2000 years later, God has vindicated Paul. He's, he's, he's in the Bible. We we're still learning from him 2000 years later. And we're honoring his faithfulness to the Lord. Don't worry about your reputation. Worry about the reputation of your God. And then let your God defend your reputation. And so, um, the reason I titled this sermon, I

went a completely different direction. I'll, I'll explain that in a moment. Um, more giving, less taking is, um, here's what happens when you're hurting, when you're struggling, when you're suffering, when you're feeling the birth pains, The natural instinct is to get more selfish, to stop thinking about other people. Giving to other people, pursuing other people, loving other people, helping other people, and being completely self-consumed. And what Paul is not doing, he's not ignoring his struggles, but he is also acknowledging the struggles of others. And the reason that he writes the letter is to use what he is experiencing through his suffering, to then minister to others through their suffering. Um, and he says, I'm acting like a mother and like a father. That's the language that he uses. Okay? Um, can you be a selfish mother and a good mother? No. Can you be a selfish father and a good father? No. Our oldest, uh, son has a baby boy. He's little and he's got a great mom and dad. And here's what I've seen so far. They have a one-way relationship. They serve him. He doesn't really serve them. They lift burdens for him. He doesn't really lift burdens for them. They generate revenue for him. He's not very good at generating revenue. When you think like a mother or a father, you're thinking about others and you put their needs first. And this is the sign of Christian maturity. And so, um, here's what Paul is demonstrating. Number one, whatever you're in or going through, give yourself to the Lord. First and foremost, just consecrate and dedicate yourself. I belong to Jesus Christ. That's my allegiance, that's my loyalty. And he says here, my aim is to please God. Okay? Now, if you're going to please God, lemme just say this. Some other people are gonna be very displeased because they want you to please them. But sometimes you gotta decide, well, am I gonna please them or am I gonna please him? And you say, well, I don't wanna, I wanna please them so they're not displeased with me. Well, then he'll be displeased with you. I've got a friend, he's a single dad. He's literally in the fight of his life. And uh, he asked me, he's like, I'm overwhelmed. I don't know what to do. Here's what I said. Get up every day. Meet with the Lord during the day, every decision, just try and find what would please God and do that. And then go to bed and get up the next day and try again. Too. Oftentimes we live in the future. We don't live in the present. And we're thinking, how can I make things work rather than thinking what will please God? Now, okay, in addition, here's what Paul models for us. Give yourself to the quote unquote gospel. This is the good news about Jesus Christ. Um, some of you need to become a Christian today. You're a sinner. Your biggest problem is with God, that you're going to hell unless you receive Jesus. And before you are ready to deal with any problem. That problem should be your first priority. Get right with God and then God will help you get the rest of your life. Right? Jesus is God. He's the only founder of any major world religion who declared himself to be God. He lived without sin perfect. He died in our place for our sins, that Jesus went through everything that we are going through. And on the cross, Jesus took your place and put you in his place. He died so you could live. He endured the wrath of God so you could receive the grace of God. He was separated from the Father so you could be reconciled to the Father. And then three days later, Jesus rose from death. He conquered Satan sin, death, hell, and the wrath of God. Jesus alone is Savior. Jesus is the hope of the world. Jesus is our plan. A, and we have no plan B For those of us who are Christians. Just imagine if you didn't know Jesus, imagine if you didn't know the word of God. Imagine if you didn't know that there was a God who was over this world and was coming again to rescue and bless you. People need Jesus.

Friends, we're living in a day when people have lost hope in pretty much everyone and everything. And I think that's a good thing because like, I don't think anything's gonna work. Right? We need Jesus. We need Jesus to rule now and we need him to return soon. Yes. In addition, give yourself to a few godly good friends. The Bible says that if you have a lot of companions, you're gonna come to ruin. You don't need a lot of friends. In fact, time and energy only requires you to have a few. He told us at the beginning, I'm Paul and I'm with Sylvanus and Timothy. These are his friends. I always like to say, get your crew before your crisis. Right? And these are the guys who he can trust. He can depend on. They're in it with him. Be one of those people and find those people. And let me just say this. Paul is a man. And statistically men don't have friends. There was a report that came out this week. 15% of men have zero friends, 15%. And most men, the friends they do have are not that helpful. You're like, yeah, we drink together. Not that helpful. We yell at each other on Twitter. Not that helpful. We commiserate about our wives. Not that helpful. For those of you men who wanna find a few brothers for the battle, join us at Real Men this week. You're gonna find the best men in the world and we'll get you your crew. And what Paul is saying is, give yourself to a good church family. I've said this before, that's the world. The world isn't our home. This is the church. You're the children of God. This is the household of God. Like I've told you previously, the the line between the world and the church is the word of God. That's why there's always an attack, a criticism, a deconstruction of the word of God. Yeah. And, and, and the world isn't our home. The church is, I I I said it last week, but it's like you guys took the, I mean the world, they took the whole month of June, they screwed up Disneyland. We can't even go to Target. You know, you got everything. Just stay in your lane. You know, the church is not yours. It's just not yours. That's God's house. And, and Paul here is modeling. Just be honest about how you're doing with yourself, with God and others. And it's okay to not be okay. But God doesn't want you to stay that way. I'm gonna invite the band up at this point. And, um, and here's what I, I wanna share with you. I was, I was hiking and walking in the woods this week. I I need to listen a lot 'cause I talk a lot. Um, and I need to listen before I talk. Otherwise, I'm pretty sure what I say is not gonna be very helpful. And the Holy Spirit, as I was walking in the woods praying for you, he pulled a theme and a thread throughout the book of Thessalonians that I wanna share with you. It's how to live by the power of the Holy Spirit. Um, it's, it's how to have not the reality around you determine how you're doing, but the reality in you change how you're doing. As I told you, the, the non-Christian only has the flesh and they can only look out. The Christian has the spirit and they can look up. And here's the theme and thread, chapter one, verse five. Paul talked about the word and power in the Holy Spirit. And so I want us to be a church. And I want you to be people who are strong in the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. And the power of the Holy Spirit is how Jesus lived. The Bible says that Jesus was anointed in the spirit. Christ means anointed in the Spirit. It says that Jesus was filled with the spirit. That Jesus was led by the Spirit. One of my favorite lines in the whole scripture is Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit. We wanna open the word of God and then we wanna open ourselves to the spirit of God. And he says, it is the power. So it is God, the Holy Spirit who is the presence of God that brings the power of God. Here's the next line you received, chapter one, verse six, the word in much affliction with the joy. This is the phrase that exploded in my walk in prayer with God this week. Much affliction and what?

With the joy of the Holy Spirit. So how many of you right now, you would say that somewhere in your life there's some affliction. And what that affliction does, it causes you to live in fear or anxiety, not in joy. My wife, grace and I were talking about this and she brought something up that was very helpful to me. Um, you were made for joy. You were made for joy. Your emotional life, your decision making, your relationships. They only work when fueled by joy. When God finished his work, everything and everyone was good and very good, and all there was was joy. And then Satan showed up and we sinned against God. And there was shame and there was hiding and there was anxiety and there was fear, and there was the beginning of the birth pains. And what's gonna happen in your life? The affliction will come, it's going to come. Did it come for Paul and the church at Thessalonica? Yes. But then the Holy Spirit came and what he allowed them to do was return to joy. The key to the Christian life. And the key to living through the birth pains until the Lord returns is determining that we are going to return to joy, that we may deviate from it. Circumstances and afflictions may cause us to for a moment, uh, vacate that place of joy. But then we meet with the Holy Spirit. We say, restore to me the joy of my salvation. The fruit of the Spirit is joy. The joy of the Lord is my strength. Yes Lord, return me to joy. Give me the joy of the Holy Spirit so that I can live and return to joy and the brain science in our day. It's so remarkable. They say that if you want to return to joy and to create new neural pathways and habits in the soul, you need to take at least five minutes each day and just do two things, appreciation and expectation. So just stop. And, and as the Christian, here's what we're gonna do. Now we're gonna stop. We're gonna invite the Holy Spirit. We're gonna return to joy. We're going to remember, we're going to appreciate the times that God has spoken, the times that God has delivered, the times that God has answered prayer, the God, the times that God has directed steps. And we're gonna live in that. And we're gonna let our mind soak on that truth so that then not only with appreciation for what God is doing, but with expectation that God is not done. That God has a hope for you, that God has a future for you, that God has a purpose for you, that God has a destiny for you, that God has a plan for you. That he is your father, you're his child. He's gonna take your hand and walk you through it all until Jesus returns. And he's going to walk you into the forever home. That's what our God does. And then the last two, uh, scriptures, he says in four eight, uh, God gives His Holy Spirit to you. Jesus says in Luke 11, A good father gives gifts to his children. All they gotta do is ask him. And he says, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask? I want this to be a fresh anointing for you. I want you to ask God to send you the Holy Spirit. And then lastly, here's what he says. Uh, do not, I love this slide. Do not quench the Holy Spirit. So my question to you, friend, is what is the Holy Spirit calling you to? Now, for some of you, you need to sing. You don't sing, you need to sing. Some of you be like, but people will think I'm weird. We already know you're weird. You need to say some of you. You need to raise your hands. 'cause the Holy Spirit is saying surrender like a, like a child reaches up to a father. That's what you need to do in worship. Some of you need to kneel in prayer and just me with God. Some of you need to own some sin and say, God, I I, I, I've walked away from you today. I'm returning to you. Some of you, there are people in the room that you need to go to and say, I'm sorry I was wrong. Please forgive me. For some of you, you need to ask God for physical healing. Holy Spirit strengthen my body. We had a woman here recently during worship, the

Holy Spirit spoke to her and said, ask me to heal you. And she did. And God healed her right in this room. I'm telling you, when we meet heaven and earth, come together, there's a thin place where the Holy Spirit joins us with Jesus in glory and our prayers and our songs, they go into the presence of God and the presence of God comes down to us. For some of you, you need to pray for those who are around you. You know that they've had a great week and you just need to thank God. Some of you, you know that they've had a hard week and they need you to intercede for them. And I'm gonna close my sermon here and pray for us. But here's what I want you to know. This is where you meet with the Holy Spirit. Do not quench the Holy Spirit. I don't know what he wants to do for you or do in you or do through you, but I'm telling you, this is the moment to surrender to him and see what he does. Father, as we come into worship, we invite your presence, holy Spirit, we invite you to be strong in our midst, we invite heaven to come to Earth. And we ask Holy Spirit that our prayers and our songs would ascend into Jesus' presence. God, there's no way that we can get through this world unless we have the power of the Holy Spirit. And we're asking just like you told us to, father, please send us, please give us the Holy Spirit, a fresh anointing, a fresh encouragement, a fresh freedom, so that we can live in joy, that we could return to joy, that we could enjoy Jesus in whose name we pray, amen.