

# Acts 16-17

by Daniel Punnose

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life that glorifies God, focusing on faith, love, and hope in Jesus Christ. It highlights the significance of seeking God's honor over man's approval, the impact of genuine love for God on our relationships, and the transformation that comes from experiencing God's grace. The message encourages consistent prayer for others, working with faith, laboring with love, and enduring with hope in Christ, ultimately leading to a life that serves as a testimony for Jesus.*

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 1 Corinthians 13:13, James 2:17, Revelation 2:4, Romans 5:2, Proverbs 3:5, Ephesians 2:8, Colossians 3:23, 1 Thessalonians 5:16

**Topics:** "Glorifying God", "Living a Life of Faith and Love"

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## Description

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## Transcript

When you think of great men and women in history like Mahatma Gandhi or Mother Teresa or maybe Abraham Lincoln or maybe some teacher that you admire very much or some person that was very inspirational into your life, what are the things that stand out about their life? Usually it's some event or some character that they have or some strength that they have. We admire the things that inspire us. We see Paul writing to the believers in Thessalonica, this small group of believers that he was only able to spend a few weeks with them before persecution followed them there and he had to run to another place and bury them.

We read these things in the Book of Acts, chapters 16 and 17. The Book of Acts is just after the Gospels, it's the history of God's work in the beginnings of the church. You see the Holy Spirit is poured out on the disciples and others gathered in the upper room.

You see Peter standing up with the other apostles and giving a short message and 3,000 people were added to the church. We see the problems beginning and how they were solved. God doing miracles through the disciples and others.

You see Paul the Apostle, the great persecutor of the church, now becomes the great proclaimer of the church and he is the one who brings the message of Jesus to so many different places and he ends up writing much of the epistles of the New Testament. One of the small little postcards, epistles, letters that he writes is to the Thessalonica believers and he was not able to spend much time with them so he sends some words of encouragement and instruction because he had to run from there very quickly. But one of the things he tells them is that their testimony and their character of their hope in God, their faithfulness, and all that they do has become a great encouragement for all the other believers who are worshipping Jesus.

This is an incredible challenge for even us to live our life in such a way that we seek the honor and acceptance of God rather than the honor and acceptance of man. The Bible tells us if we seek the honor of men, we will not get the honor of men nor the honor of God. But if we seek the honor of God and seek to please him in all things, we will please God and we will find favor with man.

It's an important aspect of our Christian life that we must recognize our life's purpose is to glorify God in all things. A lawyer came to Jesus and asked a question more like to stumble Jesus but Jesus always was able to give the right answer. He said, what is the greatest commandment? And Jesus said, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and as second as like it, love your neighbor as yourself.

See, our love for God, if it's genuine, reflects in our love for others. The Bible tells us how can we say that we love God and hate our neighbor or how can we say we love God and neglect the poor. The Bible tells us that our love for God is reflected in our everyday activities and this is something that many people make a mistake.

They think what happens on Sunday morning during the worship service is what defines their spiritual life. But in fact, what defines our spiritual life is our words, are they kind or are they slanderous? How we deal with money? Do we maintain unforgiveness and bitterness and jealousy in our heart? Are we conniving? Are we deceitful? See, those are the things that God knows about us and what happens on Sunday is what people see about us or they think about us. And Paul tells these believers in Thessalonica that their testimony, their character has become such an example for everyone else that they are so encouraged.

I would encourage you as you read through the epistles, one of the things you want to do is go back to the book of Acts and find where that epistle is mentioned or the place that it's mentioned that Paul was there or that he was writing a certain letter or whether he was in prison. It helps you to know more of the background and context. Paul was in Philippi and a great persecution broke out and he had to flee to Thessalonica.

While he was in Thessalonica, he would go to the synagogue and he would preach from God's word and teach and have great discussions. This is his normal practice. And the persecution that was in Philippi also followed them into Thessalonica and Paul had to run to the Barian believers.

And there, the Barian believers were appreciated because their testimony was this, whatever Paul spoke, they checked God's word to see if it was accurate or not. Paul did not feel bad that they were checking to see in God's word if what he was speaking was the truth. In fact, he appreciated them for that.

Jesus told us that we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Heart, soul, mind, and strength. Our mind is part of our worship of God.

We are to become students of God's word. We must study God's word not for just our devotion time, but for life in understanding and for correction and for guidance for our life. The book of Proverbs is a wonderful book.

Has so much wisdom wrapped up in there. Very wise counsel on marriage, raising children, money, dealing with others, using our words carefully, not being lazy, work, all these different things. If you don't know where the book of Proverbs is, if you close the Bible and open it almost to the middle, you will find it right after the Psalms.

If you don't have a Bible of your own, please write to us or call us and we will help you to get a copy of the Bible so that you can read it for yourself and be encouraged. Paul the Apostle writing to the Thessalonian believers in verse 1 of chapter 1, he says this, Paul, Silas, or Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace and peace to you. We find that Paul is identifying himself as the writer of the letter, but he is also mentioning his co-workers, Timothy and Silas, and he says grace and peace to you.

My brothers and sisters, when you experience the grace of God in your life, it is the only thing that brings the peace of God in your life. We experience the grace of God through what Jesus Christ did on the cross of Calvary. It is nothing on our own that we can experience the peace of God in our life.

It's quite funny, there are those who actually will not keep their money in the bank because they fear that their money will be lost either by a robbery or some credit card scam or some kind of financial disaster or maybe the bank will burn down. So what do they do? They take all their money and they keep it under the mattress of their bed. There are thousands and thousands and thousands of people around the world who actually keep their cash under their bed and they don't care about keeping it in the bank because they're so worried.

Now here's the problem, they never can get a good night's sleep because they're sleeping on top of their money and while they are sleeping they're worried about their money and they're fearful that someone may come into their house and break in and take their money. So they have fear of keeping the money at the bank, they also have fear of keeping the money under the bed and it leaves them with no peace. You can have all the money you want, but you cannot buy peace.

You can have a girlfriend, a boyfriend, but they will not bring that peace that only God can give. You can have houses, cars, everything you ever wanted, great position, and yet you find yourself lonely and empty. See man was created for a relationship with God and he was provided through Jesus Christ going to the cross, taking our sins upon himself so that relationship could be mended once again and if we try to find purpose in life in anything else except a relationship with God fulfilling the purpose of our life, it leaves us empty.

You hear people once in a while saying something called the human condition, talking about the problems we see in the human race, especially if you are studying literature, you are a lit major, you will probably read books on politics, on science, technology, on relationships, on sex, and all kinds of different things to try to answer and solve the human condition. Why do you read books on these different subjects? Probably because the professor is trying to see if politics and having the right rules and regulations and right systems in place will solve the problems that humans have. Books on technology, having the right science and discoveries, maybe one more discovery, a medical discovery, maybe that will solve our problems, maybe robots will solve our problems.

Looking at relationships and why relationships break down and trying to understand that, is that the right way to understand how to solve man's problem? And then also looking at books on pleasure where you are reading about, fine, science doesn't answer it, the economy doesn't answer it, technology doesn't answer it, maybe it's just pleasure in the world, food, relationships, sex, everything I ever wanted, and these things we think that will solve our problem because hopefully those things make us happy and then that will solve our problem. But yet we find in all those things it is empty. It leaves us with a temporary happiness based on the circumstances, but when our circumstances change, what happens? We are the same, down, low again, empty on the inside.

Why is that? Because money has no value if you have no peace. Relationships cannot be understood fully until you actually understand your relationship with God. Even marriage, relationships, sex, and all these things don't have any meaning and leave you empty unless you understand your purpose by God and the context in which those things are to be lived out.

Jesus came so that he could take our sins upon himself to bridge that gap once again, mending that relationship with God and man, that we could respond to God's love, and this is what Jesus said, peace I leave with you, not as the world gives, but a lasting peace. See the peace that the world offers is a temporary happiness, but once that wears off, so does our peace. Man was made for a relationship with God and if we try to find our fulfillment in anything else, we find ourselves empty.

A fish was made for the water. A bird was made to fly. Yeah, granted there are little weird fish that jump up on land and come back and there are birds that don't fly like ostriches, granted, but the principle is this, birds are made to fly, fish are made to swim, and man was made to have a relationship with God, it fits and makes sense.

And Paul the Apostle tells us that this grace and peace is from our Lord Jesus Christ and it is only through the grace of God that we find we actually can experience the peace of God in our life. If you have never experienced the grace of God in your life, the Bible tells us today is a day of salvation. Not to put it off, it says also that it is appointed for man to die once and then comes the judgment, then we stand before God and our life will be given account, whether we accepted the free gift of God to us of salvation that comes through Jesus Christ or we rejected it on our own free will.

The grace of God is not simply overlooking our sin, but the grace of God is that He does not give up on us and He continues to work in us and refine us and make us more and more like Jesus. The problem with us is no matter how we try, we cannot improve ourselves. No matter how many self-help books you read, it can help you on the outside, but the character, the human condition, will not change in us.

The only thing that will change in us is when Jesus comes into our life and changes us on the inside out, where we are a new creation. The old is gone and the new has come, the Bible says. Just like a caterpillar spinning a small cocoon and inside the cocoon a metamorphosis takes place, a change takes place, an entire new nature is developed and out comes a butterfly, not a caterpillar.

And a butterfly is not meant to sit on the ground and eat leaves, the butterfly is meant to fly and soar in the sky. That is what God wants for us, that our nature is changed completely. It is through the grace of God that He not only overlooks our sin, forgives our sin, remembers them no more, but He allows us to receive the free gift of salvation that comes through Jesus Christ and that God would stand with us and consistently work in us, making us, changing us into the kind of person He wants us to be.

And in that we find the peace and joy that only comes through God. And in verse 2, Paul mentions, we always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your works produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul mentions three specific things that he remembers about them. He also mentions that he prays for them often, and that is a very good example that we always need to be praying for other people consistently, not just once in a while, but consistently praying and seeking the Lord for others. And it's not praying about them, but praying for them.

Very often when we have a problem with someone, we pray about them, oh Lord, change them. They have this problem, that problem, this problem, that problem, rather than praying for them, Lord, bless them, take care of them. Talking to a young person sometime back, they had a real difficulty with their stepfather.

There was a divorce in the family, and her mother got remarried, and had a very difficult time with the stepfather. And I said, you know what, the answer is, in all of this, is pray for your stepfather, that God would bless him, that God would help him with his job. Don't just pray about the things you don't like, that he's mean, and he does this, and he's not kind, and not wise.

Don't pray about him, but pray for him. Sometime later, this young person came back to me and said, you won't believe what happened. God changed his heart, and changed my heart.

That's exactly what C.S. Lewis said. Prayer changes me. When I begin to pray, and I ask for God's blessings on someone else, what happens is even my own heart is changed.

Maybe there is a struggle in the marriage that you're facing right now. Instead of praying about your husband, or about your wife, why don't you pray for your husband? Pray for your wife. I'm not saying I know all the answers, but I do know that God knows the answers.

And he can answer your prayer. And as you ask for God's blessings on them, not just behavioral change, ask for God's blessings. Ask for wisdom.

Ask for grace. Ask for all the mercies of God on their life. And what you will find is that God will begin to change their heart, and your heart.

Maybe you have a very difficult teacher at school. Instead of praying about them and against them, pray for them. Ask for God's blessings on them.

You will find that relationships can be strengthened if we pray, and we ask for God's blessings on them. Even if you are jealous of someone, and you are comparing yourself about someone, maybe their beautiful hair, maybe the way they sing, or their talents and giftings, begin thanking God for them, and asking for God's blessings. And you will see that God begins to change them, and you, and it's for the best.

Paul not only mentions about how they pray for them, and appreciate them, but he also mentions that they always remember their works produced by faith, their labor prompted by love, and their endurance inspired by hope in Jesus Christ. When Paul talks about work produced by faith, their labor prompted by love, and their endurance and patience produced by hope in Jesus Christ. Work is what we usually do for

money.

We work for payment. There is a reason why we work. There is a motivation that we go to work, that we go to the office.

For a student, they go to school so they can pass with good grades. There is a motivation behind it. I go to the factory so I can earn my money, so I can pay for the food at home.

The work that they are doing is not motivated by the need of money, but the good works they are doing is motivated by their faith in God. James tells us that our faith in God is demonstrated in our good works, not just in our words. My brothers and sisters, the Bible tells us very clearly that our actions must prove the faith that we have on the inside.

It is not enough to say Bible verses. It must be motivated by God that we do good works. Every single day, we should be looking for doing good for the glory of God.

Not only is their work produced by faith, the motivation is faith, trusting God, but their labor is prompted by love. Labor is the effort that you give. It's kind of like the car engine.

It is the fuel that makes the engine to run. The fuel is love. What motivates you to consistently keep going and not giving up? It is love.

Love for God and love for others. And then Paul mentions that their patience and endurance is their hope in Jesus Christ. Hope in Christ is not an empty hope, but it is a looking forward and an active patience of consistently moving forward, trusting God for His perfect timing and trusting God for His will and His promises to come true.

I want you to notice something. Paul mentions faith, hope, and love, which is the same thing that is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13. At the end of the chapter of love, he says, faith, hope, and love.

And the greatest of these is love. And of course, we need these things in our life. We need to have the motivation of our faith in God be the reason why we work.

Even if it is at a job or at school, can your motivation be that I want to serve the Lord even in my job. I want to please the Lord in my studies. I want to do the best that I can for the glory of God in my home.

That I want to teach my Sunday school the best I can for the glory of God. That my labor, my effort, is motivated by my love for God. The Bible tells us, do everything as if it was unto the Lord.

Simply means, no matter what work we're doing, labor we're doing, effort we're doing, if it is for the love of God, it will motivate us. Think about this. When a new couple gets married and they're so excited and they're all over themselves and all they're saying is all these funny things.

And you can tell a new couple, they're always together and saying funny things. And the wife will make tea and she makes it lovingly for her husband. And the husband will do things lovingly for the wife.

But after some time, if they're not careful, the tea will be made. Good, but it is not motivated by love. It's motivated by duty.

The husband will do things for the wife, but often it will be motivated by duty, not love. And this is where Jesus mentioned to the churches in Revelation when he was writing to them. He said, I appreciate everything you're doing, all the good things, but it has become duty because you have left or forgotten your first love.

Everything that we have in our life is motivated. The effort is our love for God. And the endurance and patience that we have is our hope in Christ.

Everything that we are is to know that Christ came, he rose again, and that one day we will spend all of eternity with him. My children have this hope that there will be breakfast for them. They have this love that they know and they respond to because they know their mommy and daddy love them.

And they trust us. Even when we discipline them, they trust us. And that is the heart of these Thessalonian believers.

They trust God completely. They work and move forward because they love God. And they have this enduring hope and looking forward in this patience that is an active patience, not a passive patience, waiting for the Lord to do his will in their life.

My brother, my sister, this testimony of great faith, great love, and great hope in the Lord has gone through all the areas where the other believers are and their life was so encouraged. And this too can be a great testimony for us. Live your life in such a way that other people praise God for you, that you are a man or woman of encouragement, that what comes out of your mouth encourages others, blesses others, that you are actively praying for other people and blessing them, that you are looking to do good, not for the appreciation of people, but because you love the Lord.

I promise you, if you live this way, your life will be a great testimony for Jesus Christ. And many people will be blessed because of you. Let's pray and ask the Lord to help us in these things.

Father, we thank you for your grace and your mercy. We ask, Lord, that you would help us as we learn to walk by faith, we labor in love, and we have consistent patience and the hope in Jesus Christ. I pray for your blessings upon each of my brothers and sisters.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Remember this, the Bible has the answers for life and God's promises always come true.

May the Lord bless you as you experience His grace in life and strength in your life today.

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