

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

Love for Others

Image Church // Prayers for the Church: Week 5

Introduction

Good morning Image Family, I hope you're doing well! So good to be back with you! Grateful for my good friend Nathan stepping in and bringing the word while I was away!

The McKee family has multiplied... My wife gave birth to our 3rd child, I want to introduce you to him, his name is Cole Harvey McKee

[Picture on screen] He and Ashley are both doing well.

- We are so thankful for the way you guys have loved on us during this time!

Hey, there's **2 things** I want to make you aware of before we jump in this mooring...

1. Lent prayer and reading guide...

As you heard a few minutes ago, we are launching a reading plan for Lent beginning this Wednesday that will take us all the way to Easter.

We will be reading and studying the books of Luke and Isaiah, as well as praying and fasting together as a church.

We want to take our focus away from lesser things and increase our focus on Christ by being filled with the gospel. We're excited to have the opportunity to take this journey together as a church, so look for it on the website and app this Wednesday

2. We are moving forward in our regathering plan

Which means this... **We're moving NEXT WEEKEND...**

Now, here's why this is exciting... right now we have reached our socially distanced capacity in the space where we're gathering right here at OHBC...

We want to be able to expand our weekend gathering numbers in a safe and socially distanced way... And we also want to be in a more centralized location...

In addition to that this space also gives us the ability to launch **Guest Services** and **Image Kids** which is a big step forward for us...

So, **NEXT WEEKEND** we're going to be shifting over to a larger space that is right by the braves Stadium.

[Pictures of inside the space]

[2581 Spring Rd SE, Smyrna, GA 30080] - leave it up there for a while

It's a church building that seats *over 400* with kids' space that we can safely use...

And so, here's the way this is going to work, once we transition next weekend, we're going to begin hosting a series of **interest meetings** over the next **several weeks** to being recruiting for the relaunch of **Guest Services** and **Image Kids**.

As you know, we haven't had these up to this point during COVID, so to get this up and running we have to have the people in place to make that happen...

And then once we have the people and teams set up, they'll undergo training for our new **safely and sanitation protocol** so that we can comply with all of the **CDC guidelines** along with the internal recommendations of our own medical experts here at Image Church.

We're still going to continue to ***ask that you wear a mask*** even though we are moving to a much larger space. We want to do all we can to be as loving as possible to those around us.

But one thing we will be dropping is the **RSVP's**- you will no longer have to RSVP for the gathering each week due to the size of the space we will be moving to...

Also, and this is big, we won't have to set up and tear down here, we will be able to leave everything up each week so that is a huge blessing as well!

So again, here's what we got- **NEXT WEEKEND February 21**, we're going to be meeting over by the Braves Stadium... *So, don't show up here next weekend!*

Once we make that move, we're going to begin a series of interest meetings and training sessions to get Image Kids and Guest Services back up and running!

Now, real quick, I know some of you are like what about the permanent space?? That's still moving forward, our legal team has been back and forth with the contract and it is currently under what we hope to be the final review. *Don't worry I will keep you posted on that!*

There's a lot happening, and I am excited about it! Know that everything that I covered today will be reflected on the website **imageatl.com...**

- Later this week you'll be able to see a full layout of what our gathering will look like, all the safety measures in place, and what we're going to be rolling out in the days ahead.

Also, please, if you haven't already, make sure to sign up for the **weekly update**, and READ it when it goes out. You can also follow us on social media and stay looped in there as well!

Family, we've been on one incredible Journey over ***the short 3 years of our existence*** and God has been faithful every step of the way...

And this morning, I want to take some time to reflect specifically over the past year... It was hard, and still is hard, we've had to adapt and improvise more than ever before, and ***though our methods changed, our mission didn't***... And God continued to go before us building and establishing His church in one of the most difficult seasons our nation has seen in a long time...

One of the things that we say here all the time is that ***the church isn't a destination, it's a group of people***... And it's in times like we've experienced that show's us why this has to be true...

Our team has put together, what I believe to be, one of the most powerful videos in the history of our church looking back over the past year at the faithful hand of God at work in His church...

And so, in just a second we're going to show it, and here's my prayer...

- That the affections of your heart will be stirred...
- and that you would be reminded of what you're part of and
- that you would see tangible evidence of the hand of God, and that you would taste and see the goodness of God through the beauty of His bride the church!

Show Video [video is 13 min. long]

WOW!! What an amazing depiction of what it means to be the church, to endure through difficulties, to pray together, to be committed together... Such a powerful and hopeful reminder that is refreshing...

Well, we're actually going to continue in that vein today as we wrap up our series ***Prayers for the church***...

Next week we're going to be kicking off a series through the book of Luke! Really excited about that!

But the way we're going to close out this series is by looking at the prayer that Paul prays for the church in **Thessalonica**... And I am going to tell you in just a little bit why this is such a timely way to close out this series...

If you have your Bibles go ahead and turn to 1 Thessalonians... We're going to be in chapter 3...

Let me give you some context...

The backstory for this letter is in **Acts 17**... The gist is that Paul and Silas went to the Greek city of **Thessalonica** on one of their missionary journeys...

Not long in tons of Greeks and Jews get saved and the church begins to flourish...

Problems: Word gets out that Paul was announcing Jesus as the one true King of the World... This got the attention of the government and they were accused of defying Caesar because they claimed that there was another King...

This led to intense persecution so much so that Paul and Silas had to flee the city- this was hard for them because they very much loved the church in **Thessalonica**...

Paul eventually sends Timothy to them and Timothy reports that the church is thriving, and so Paul writes them this letter to reconnect and to continue to encourage them in the gospel!

And the letter tracks that way, **Ch. 1-** Thanksgiving, **Ch. 2-** remember our time together, and how much we love you... **Ch. 3-** I just couldn't stand it anymore, we sent Timothy he tells us great things...

Paul finishes out the first half of the letter with a essentially **a prayer for endurance** which is what we're going to be looking at today...

And I think that this is so timely for us... Because, we like the Church in **Thessalonica** have been in a difficult season (not persecution, but still a very difficult season) and we have thrived together...

And it can be easy to mission drift, to allow the pressing realities, or the exhaustion of endurance to cause us to begin to fade... And that's not where we want to go, we don't want Gods past faithfulness to cause us to put it on cruise control but to cause us to be committed even more knowing that He's going to work in the midst of it!

Ok, let's look at Paul's prayer that he prays for the church...

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you. **12** And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we do for you. **13** May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen.

Very short and sweet here... *This is a good mealtime prayer... Joke about the other day at lunch...*

Ok, let's look at what we see here... really just **1 major thing here**... I'm going to us proactive language like I've done before for the sake of application...

Would we grow in our capacity to love others

12 And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for **one another** and for **everyone**, just as we do for you.

One another... inside the church, **Everyone**... those outside the church... A pattern you will see in the NT...

Now, I want to show you importance of this here... Why it's so important that we are abounding in Love... And then we can talk about practically applying this...

But here's what I want you to see... It's that **love for others is tethered to our holiness**... *Let me show you and then unpack it...*

12 And may **the Lord** cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we do for you. **13** May **he** make your hearts **blameless in holiness** before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen.

I love this verse because it gives us handles on a bible word that's thrown around a lot... **Holiness**...

Holiness by definition- set apart, devoted to God...

Explain... *May= so that: purpose*

God causes us to overflow with love for others as a means to bring about holiness in us... One of the way that he sets us apart as His people is though love for others...

GOSPEL

- *Our life together originates in the covenant love of God and so one essential mark of our covenant relationships in church is love. And this love is the work of God. - Piper*
- Progress through the gospel to show how this works...

Quote to help drive it home:

- **John Piper:** *We will be holy in the presence of God if we become the kind of people, by the Lords work, that increase in love.*

Application:

What does it look like to love one another?

What does it look like to love others??

What is a common denominator?

- ***The first part of loving well is being present...***

Examples:

- Marriage, you don't say I love you and never engage
- You kids, you don't tell them you love them and then separate yourself from them...

My fear is the drift that can happen as a result of what we've been through...

Appeal to our people about being present, moving forward in love for one another and others...

Cam Triggs:

"When you stream, you can't physically hug a widow processing her recent loss, you can't look a teen in the eyes and tell them about the beauty of Christ, you can't hold a dear friend's baby and bless them in the presence of their parents. When you stream, you can't look a row ahead of you and see something is off with your Sunday School classmate, you can't notice good news hiding in the smile of a new couple, and you can't encourage the pastor preaching a hard truth from a difficult passage with a heart-felt amen. When you stream you can pray along but seldom pray with."

It has become increasingly more dangerous for the church to not gather than it is to risk COVID exposure.

Risk-free Christianity does not exist.

Conclusion [VAMP]

When will you be present again? What is the event or mandate or precaution? What is the line you have deemed is necessary for your return to gathering in various capacities within the church?

How can you move forward in LOVE?? What does forward progress look like??

Would we grow in our capacity to love others