

The Necessity of Meeting Together
 3 Reasons Why Believers Should Desire and Make Diligent Effort to Meet Together
 1st Thessalonians 2:17-3:8

1. Intro: "Individualism is all about taking care of yourself; it is the belief and practice that every person is unique and self-reliant." (from vocabulary.com). Individualism pervades America.
 - a. America's Individualism:
 - i. "America is one of the most individualistic societies in the world. That means Americans care more about themselves and less about larger collectives... Because of this, Americans have come to believe that they exert complete autonomy over their lives" - <http://www.dbknews.com/2017/05/13/individualism-destroyed-american-leadership/>
 - ii. "America is increasingly a lonely nation. The proportion of American adults who are lonely has increased from 20 percent to 40 percent since the 1980's... Consider that just three decades ago, the typical American had a little over three close friends. Today, he or she barely has one confidant. Often someone's closest companion is staring at him in the mirror" <https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2018/04/16/lonely-america/>
 - b. Sometimes, as American Christians, our culture seeps into our lives. If we aren't careful, individualism can seep into the church.
 - c. Individualism in the church –
 - i. "God works especially through community. The individualism that pervades our culture and that works against community and having a commitment to it also works against developing spiritual growth" – Darrel Block, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*
 - ii. "the role of community is often lost, and our personal sanctification suffers for it" - <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/from-we-to-me> - Tony Reinke
 - iii. "My identity and calling as a believer is inseparably bound to this community because it is Christ's body, just as I am" Darrel Block, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 113
 - d. **TRANS:** As believers in Jesus, we cannot do the Christian life alone. We desperately need each other. Paul knew this and he desired and made diligent effort to meet with the newly founded Thessalonian church.
 - e. Affliction of Paul in Thessalonica – Acts 17
 - i. Paul arrives in Thessalonica, likely there for less than a month
 1. Some Jews, many of the devout greeks and not a few of the leading women come to know the Lord
 2. Out of Jealousy, the Jews form a mob, set the city in an uproar, attack the house of Jason, drag Jason and believers to city

authorities, accuse them of acting against Rome, preach another King named Jesus

3. People/city authorities disturbed
 4. Paul, Silas and Timothy sent away by night
 - ii. Go to Berea,
 1. Preach there
 2. Many believe
 3. The Jews from Thessalonica, stir up crowds, Paul gets taken to Athens, Silas and Timothy are left behind
 - f. Paul desired and made diligent effort to meet with them
 - i. "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you" – 1st Thessalonians 2:17
 - g. **TRANS:** The question for us today is why did Paul desire and make diligent effort to meet with them? In a similar way we ask for ourselves, why should we desire and make diligent effort to meet with other believers? Today, we will look at three reasons why meeting with other believers is a necessity. First, Believers are our Joy and Reward. Second, we need encouragement from believers in affliction. Third, we need other believers in order to persevere in our faith.
 - i. **Read 1st Thessalonians 2:17-3:10**. First of all, Believers are our joy and reward.
2. Believers are our Joy and Reward
- a. "For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy." – 1st Thessalonians 2:19-20
 - i. Coming of Christ
 1. Christ will come from heaven, take believers who are alive and those who have passed away to be with him forever and save us from God's wrath.
 2. After Jesus comes again, there will be judgment for believers. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" – 2 Cor 5:10
 3. Believers will be rewarded for what they did with what they had.
 - a. **Credit card analogy?**
 4. Some of those rewards will be the lives of the believers we invested into. It will be our joy to see other believers in heaven and to know that they remained steadfast in the faith, to hear how God sustained them and to know that God's efforts though us is what helped them continue and grow in their faith. They will be our crown of boasting or our reward. We will say, look at what God did in your life through us, praise the Lord!
 - ii. **APP –** Persist in meeting with others, it will have eternal results
 1. If God has called you to invest in someone, don't quit.

- a. Are you discouraged, know you are supposed to invest into that person, but there isn't breakthrough yet? Are you questioning, is it really worth it? Don't quit!
 2. There will be eternal results. They may invest into others and so on. When we see them walking with the Lord now, there is incredible joy, but when we get to heaven, imagine the overwhelming, neverending joy of knowing God used us to help them grow, to see the ripple effect of the gospel in their lives, touching others. It will be worth it.
 - iii. **TRANS:** The Thessalonians were Paul's joy and reward. though there was resistance, though Satan hindered them meeting with the Thessalonians, Paul persisted to meet with them. In fact, he sent timothy in his stead to encourage and strengthen the believers since they were afflicted for the gospel. Just like them, we need encouragement from other believers in affliction. *Read 3:1-5.*
3. We Need Encouragement from other Believers in Affliction
 - a. We need Encouragement - "We sent timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith"
 - i. exhort = parakaleo – speak to someone in a way of exhortation, comfort, instruction, encouragement.
 - ii. Example of Ben's life
 1. **Listen to the Spirit** - When things have happened to me and I can a heavy weight, its really rough to move forward, when my heart is in turmoil even when I'm struggling and wrestling with my sin. Most deeply, I need the Lord's help, I need his encouragement and comfort in places only he can go. But I also need the fellowship of believers. I need to be able to talk over my messes with others be honest and have someone to listen and someone to strengthen me.
 2. **TRANS:** We often need this encouragement in affliction. Notice what Paul says next.
 - b. Affliction often moves us - "That no one may be moved by these afflictions"
 - i. affliction – a pressing upon
 - ii. their affliction was caused by being persecuted for the gospel. Paul did not want that affliction to move or discourage them
 1. "For you, brother, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews" – 2:14-15
 2. because of this, he sent timothy to strengthen and encourage them in these afflictions.
 - c. **APP:** Affliction tends to move us. We need the encouragement of other believers in affliction.
 - i. Life is filled with affliction
 1. Persecution for faith

2. Health issues
 3. Financial issues
 4. Family struggles
 5. Massive amounts of responsibility
 6. Situations caused by our own sin
 7. Pressure to compromise our faith
 8. They come from all over, what we need is the encouragement of other Christians is the midst of this
- ii. How does affliction move us?
 1. Satan often appears in our affliction and tempts us.
 - a. Example of Jesus in the wilderness. Tempted by Satan when fasting 40 days and 40 nights. Looks for when we are weak.
 2. How does he tempt us? to walk away from pure and sincere devotion to God. Tempted to distrust God's plan and his goodness. These temptations and tests can eat our faith. (3:5)
 - iii. We need the encouragement of other believers in affliction
 1. Who around you is stuck in a difficult life circumstances, being pressed by affliction? Do they need your encouragement?
 2. Are you stuck in affliction and need encouragement? Ask for it. Find someone you can be real honest with and ask for their encouragement and help.
 - iv. **TRANS:** So far, we've seen that we need to meet with believers because they are our joy and reward and because we need encouragement in difficult times. We also need believers to persevere in our faith.
4. We Need Other Believers in order to persevere in our faith
 - a. Our Goal is to Persevere in our faith - "For we live if you are standing fast in the Lord" (3:8)
 - i. To stand = to stand firm, persevere, persist. A faith that doesn't quit but keeps trusting, relying and loving the lord from now until the day we die.
 - ii. We need Marathon Christians
 1. "What the church and the world need today is marathoners, not just sprinters. People who find the pace to finish the lifelong race" – John Piper, *Life as a Vapor*
 - b. We need others to do this
 - i. "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called, 'toady,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end" – Hebrews 3:12-14
 1. sin lies to us and turns us away from the Lord
 2. Believers step in and give us the truth of God's word so that we aren't hardened by sin's lies.

- c. **App:** Are you persevering in your faith?
 - i. Are you doing well spiritually? Keep going!
 - ii. Did you walk with him when you were young but now you aren't?
 - iii. Are you about to be in a new transition of life? Are you going to college, moving, switching jobs to another area of the state, going into the military soon? Your goal is to persist in your faith at all costs. You need community and the fellowship of other believers to do this well. Look for them, seek them.
- 5. Conclusion: We are to desire and make diligent effort to meet with other Christians. We've seen several reasons for this from this text, that believers are our joy and reward, that we need encouragement from believers in our affliction and that we need other believers in order to persevere in our faith.
 - a. Ben's example
 - i. Meeting with Lehi
 - ii. Meeting with young men on Friday nights
 - b. Where is this place of meeting for you? If you are meeting with other believers and being encouraged, comforted and strengthened, don't quit! If you aren't find those people to meet with, to encourage because unlike the individualistic American mindset, you cannot do the Christian life alone.