

Series: **Confident Hope**
Today's Title: **"4 Traits of a Healthy Church"**

July 24, 2022 – 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 – Sermon 26 of 28

Objective: To help Christians know what spiritual health looks like in action.

Great to have our H.S. students back from their mission trip to Puerto Rico. We look forward to hearing more about their trip.

Prayer for our kids next Sunday – as they prepare for another school year.

Opening prayer

It takes many different forms, but over the past decades, Americans – at least a % of Americans have been on a fitness craze.

The pandemic impacted health club growth over the past 2+ years, but in 2019, the worldwide market for health clubs was \$96.7 billion.

- The U.S. has the most clubs of any nation (32,269).
- Brazil is 2nd with 29,525 clubs.

These #'s do not count the new trend in boutique studios, community rec centers, or gyms in hotels or resorts.

In addition, these #'s don't count the home gym market and the new streaming and digital technology through Peloton, LesMills, and the numerous fitness apps that connect people through their exercise routines. (<https://www.wellnesscreatives.com/fitness-industry-statistics-growth/>)

Getting into shape is a high priority for many people.

But what about getting into spiritual shape?

What about spiritual health and fitness?

Physical health is important. A healthy body enables you to do more – to pursue more opportunities – to focus more time and energy on others.

But physical health has its limits.

Mainly AGE!

Exercise and nutrition are not the fountain of youth.

They will not stop ‘father time’.

More important than physical health is your spiritual health.

1 Timothy 4:7b-8

“Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

Today we’re going to see the Apostle Paul give some spiritual health pointers.

Turn to 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 – p. 990

In our passage today, Paul gives us “4 Traits of a Healthy Church”.

4 things that will help us – they will help any church – become more healthy and more impactful in the mission.

Read 3:1-5

Trait #1 - **The practice of prayer.** vs. 1-2

“Finally, brothers, pray for us...”

Paul was extraordinarily gifted, brilliant mind, determined and driven - but he still relied heavily on the power of prayer.

He was always praying for those he ministered to.

2 Thessalonians 1:3

“We ought always to give thanks to God for you...”

2 Thessalonians 1:11

“To this end we always pray for you...”

He often – repeatedly – asked those he ministered to – for them to pray for him and his work of proclaiming the gospel.

Romans 15:30

“I appeal to you...to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf...”

2 Corinthians 1:11

“You also must help us by prayer...”

Ephesians 6:18-20

“Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion...be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere...And pray for me, too...so I can boldly explain God’s mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike...So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for Him, as I should.”

Prayer is not only for those who are spiritually weak.

It’s not only for those who lack natural talent.

The spiritually weak should pray for those who are strong.

Those who are strong should pray for those who are weak.

We all need prayer!!!

Because ministry – talking with people about Christ – about the Gospel – is a spiritual work – a spiritual battle.

Ephesians 6:12

“For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.”

Apart from the Bible itself - prayer is our most powerful weapon in our spiritual calling – in the mission of the Church.

Paul makes 2 requests for the Thessalonians to pray about.

1st request:

“...that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored as happened among you...”

Paul wanted them to pray for the Gospel message to spread quickly.

His focus was on proclaiming the Gospel to those who hadn't heard it yet.

Those who didn't know the truth about Christ.

Unfortunately, in some churches – and with some Christians – they are fully content with those that are already in the church – in the ‘fold’. Maybe the church is full – the budget is funded – and some will say,

“We don't need to reach out and share the Gospel with more people. We have plenty of people already! Where would we put more people??”

Paul wasn't content or satisfied with those who had put their faith in Christ, he was driven to keep sharing – keep proclaiming forgiveness of sins in Christ to people everywhere he went!

His strategy was to the Jew first, and then the Gentiles. When he and his team would arrive in a city they would share the good news about Jesus in the synagogues – through the Old Testament Scriptures.

When the Jews in a synagogue got angry and rejected his message about Jesus, the Jewish Messiah – they would start seeking out Gentiles who wanted to hear their message.

Paul asks them to pray for the Gospel – the “word of the Lord” – that it “may speed ahead”.

He uses a Greek word that means, *‘to run, to exercise, make progress’*.

It was a word used to describe an athlete in a race – who was running *‘with full effort and directed purpose’*.

Psalm 147:15

“He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs swiftly.”

He's asking them to pray for the Gospel of Christ to advance – to move forward –

“...and be honored as happened among you...”

Acts 17 records the Thessalonians response to the Gospel.

In the first 3 weeks a few of the Jews put their faith in Christ – this is what Luke recorded for us.

“And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.” – vs. 4

The Thessalonians “honored” the Gospel – esteemed the message about Jesus – they glorified it by believing in Jesus.

Paul asks them to pray that the gospel will spread quickly.

2nd request:

“...that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.”

Paul is not requesting they pray for his personal comfort.

He’s praying for divine protection for he and his team so the Gospel ministry will not be interrupted or stalled.

I’m sure he preferred not to be beaten, attacked, assaulted, or arrested.

But this is not only – or even primarily a plea for personal safety – for the sake of a calm life.

It’s a plea for the ministry to continue without pause.

Trait #1 – The practice of prayer.

Trait #2 - **A strong trust in God’s promises.** vs. 3

“But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.”

God is faithful.

He is truthful – He cannot lie.

He keeps His promises. He doesn't change.

So, what He said in the past still applies today.

His promises in the Gospel of His love, forgiveness of sins, His adoption of you into His family, the giving of His Spirit to guide and empower you, and your future blessing and shared glory with Christ – still applies today to those who have faith in Jesus!

This is what Paul is referring to when he says,

“He will establish you...”

“establish” is the Greek word *‘sterizo’* (*stay-rid-zo*). We get our English word ‘steroid’ from this Greek term.

It means *‘strength, fix firmly, buttress, support.’*

The root word was often used to describe *‘a support that fixes plants down.’*

Think of the ropes or cables you attach to a tree after it's planted – to keep the wind from blowing it down and uprooting it from the ground.

The ropes staked into the ground to keep a tree upright give strength to the tree so it can withstand forces which are stronger than the tree by itself could withstand.

Paul is saying the Lord strengthens us – secures us – so we won't be toppled by the storms or difficulties of life.

God is also faithful to “...guard you against the evil one.”
This is not a promise for personal safety and comfort.
It is not a promise against getting sick.
It is not a promise regarding your physical health or safety.

Why do I say that?

Why is this not a promise about physical safety and comfort?

1. Paul lived under constant threat of attack from the enemies of the Gospel (vs. 2 - “wicked and evil men”).

Over the course of his ministry he was imprisoned, beaten, scourged multiple times, shipwrecked, stoned, and left for dead, attacked by angry mobs, etc.

Paul knew this wasn't true of his life.

2. The Thessalonian Christians were enduring physical persecution at the very time Paul wrote them this letter. They had to help Paul, Silas and his team leave the city in the cover of darkness because their lives were being threatened (Acts 17:10).

If Paul was saying God would protect them from physical harm, that would be an outrageous statement / claim because of the present experience and reality of the Thessalonians daily life!

Paul is not promising their physical safety or health, but rather, he's speaking of their spiritual security and safety in Christ.

Paul is saying the Lord would guard them from the attempts of Satan to disqualify them from their salvation.

It seems Satan attempts to do this in 2 primary ways.

1) Satan tempts us to sin – to reject God – to rebel against His commands and His will for our life.

But God promises to be with us – and that we have His power to resist any temptation that comes our way.

Galatians 5:16

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

1 Corinthians 10:13

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

2 Corinthians 10:4

“We use God’s mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments.”

2) Satan also accuses believers of their sin before God in Heaven.

However, we know from the Bible that presently, Jesus is serving us by interceding on our behalf – as a defense

attorney, pointing back to the cross – which paid the price for our sins.

Hebrews 7:25

“...because He continues forever. Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

Romans 8:34

“Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

We have been pardoned – by God – of the guilt of our sins – because Jesus took our sin on Himself – He paid the price for our sins.

Trait #2 - A strong trust in God’s promises.

Trait #3 - **Obedience to God’s commands.** vs. 4

This one goes against our American, independent spirit. Our nation was founded on individual freedom and liberty.

We can pretty much do what we want – when we want – as long as we obey the laws of the land.

As a follower of Christ – you have placed yourself under another authority – Jesus.

By doing this you have committed to obey His commands – to live for him, not yourself.

Paul and the other Apostles often referred to themselves – and believers as “bondslaves of Christ”.

1 Peter 2:16

“For you are free, yet you are God’s slaves, so don’t use your freedom as an excuse to do evil.”

Jude 1:1

“This letter is from Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and a brother of James.”

2 Timothy 2:24

“The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged...”

A slave is not free.

They live under obligation.

They are required to obey what they are told to do by the person over them – by their Master or Lord.

“And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command.”

Paul affirms them here by telling them he is “confident” about them.

He’s “confident” that they are obeying what God commands them.

There is 1 problem area that Paul will address in the next section, but overall, the Thessalonians had submitted themselves to obey the commands of Christ in their daily life.

Their obedience was illustrated in Paul’s first letter to them – in **1:9** “...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God...”

This is still true for Christians today.

It's true for you – if you're a follower of Jesus.

You're called – obligated – commanded – to obey Jesus.

When I bring God's Word to you each Sunday – when you're in a small group studying the Bible – when

you're reading the Bible on your own – you are

obligated – every Christian is obligated to obey the commands of God's Word.

When Paul says “the things that we command” – he says that because they are proclaiming God's Word – God's commands to the Thessalonians.

As Paul, Silas – or one of the church planting team shares God's truth with them – obedience is the proper response.

Trait #4 - **Spiritually growing in love and endurance.** vs. 5

“May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.”

Does this mean they will love God more – or that they will grow in their understanding of God's love for them?

Yes!

It's ambiguous on purpose.

Both are true – both are important for Christian growth.

As we understand the depth and eternal nature of God's love for us – we will love Him more – and we will love others more!

“...and to the steadfastness of Christ.”

“steadfastness” is not a common word we use today.

It means, *‘to remain or endure under the challenges of life.’*

Fixed in place – immovable.

We see the same word used in **James 5:11** that Paul uses in **vs. 5** of our passage.

James 5:11

“Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast.

You have heard of the steadfastness of Job...”

What's “the steadfastness of Job”?

All the things that happened to him – all he endured and suffered – the loss of his family kids and their wives.

The loss of almost all of his possessions and his physical health and debilitating pain.

He lost just about everything he had!

Job 1:21-22

“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return.

The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.”

Nothing could deter Job from his faith and trust in God. Losing every blessing in his life could not cause Job to walk away from God.

Apply it...

Make prayer a pattern in your life.

e-mail prayer chain

Pray for those in your small group.

Pray for your church leaders – pastors / staff / church officers

Pray for the unsaved in your life.

Trust God in times of blessing and pain.

vs. 3 - “...the Lord is faithful”

Even when circumstances are difficult – trust God and trust His plan for your life.

Obey the commands of Christ.

We have made ourselves slaves to Christ.

Our job is to obey and serve Him!

Love more...be steadfast for Christ!

Love is the greatest sign of spiritual health.

Love for God.

Love for othes.

Be steadfast – strong – just like Job was!

Close in prayer