



It's Mutual

But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. (1 Thessalonians 3:6-13)

It is always a little unnerving to be the first one to put yourself out there in a relationship, to be vulnerable, to state your true feelings because as we all know there's no guarantee that the feeling is mutual—we may consider a co-worker a forever-friend, but they only view us as a casual acquaintance. Last time we heard how Paul was concerned for the Thessalonians. He was anxious about the possibility that Satan might use the persecution they were experiencing to drive a wedge between themselves and Paul and moreover between them and their Savior. So Paul had decided to send Timothy from Athens back to Thessalonica to see how the church was doing in his absence. Soon after Timothy returned with the good news that not only were they standing firm in the face of persecution, the Thessalonians had mutual love and affection in their hearts for Paul as well, and that filled him with joy and reinforced his desire to willingly suffer for the sake of the gospel because he saw it couldn't be quenched by persecution.

My friends, it can be the same for us in our weakness, our trials, our sicknesses, our pains, and our rejection. God can use us to build each other up. Here's yet another good reason why we need Christian community! When we see a brother or sister in faith carrying the same crosses as we ourselves with the confidence, grace, and power that comes from God, we are emboldened to do the same. Let's not cut ourselves off from our fellow-Christians and isolate ourselves because God wants us to lift one another up!

Another important way that we can mutually encourage one another, especially while we're apart, is by the power of prayer. When the pressure of persecution is on, it's easy for us to become self-focused. Instead, we should pray that God would multiply our love for one another and make it spill over outside the church! Then we can be known as the early Christians were as a community that overflows with extraordinary love. Pray that the Lord strengthens our resolve to continue in the blameless way, blazed by our Savior. He faced the hatred and the rejection of the world with calm and grace. When threatened he didn't give in to anger; when opposed he didn't respond with force. By following his lead we will be proven to be God's holy people when our Lord Jesus returns with all his holy ones.

Prayer: *Dear Father in heaven, your love and grace for us in Jesus are such that you promise to turn our trials into tools of mutual encouragement. Open our eyes to see your blessing, even in our crosses. Amen.*