

Watching Out for the Faith of Others

Jim Elliff

Paul had waited long enough. He just *had* to hear from the new believers he had left in the Macedonian capital city of Thessalonica—believers who were facing affliction for their commitment to Christ.



Paul longed to see these new Christians face to face, but it wasn't happening. "For we wanted to come to you—I Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us" (1 Thess 2:18). Regardless of Satanic opposition to his plans, he was able to send Timothy to see how they were doing. But he urged them to pray that he would be able to make his own visit soon.

What was Paul so concerned about? He states it like this:

When I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain. (1 Thess 3:5)

Do you care about the faith of others? Five times Paul mentions it:

- "Sent Timothy . . . to strengthen and encourage you as to **your faith**" (3:2)
- "I also sent to find out about **your faith**" (3:5).
- Timothy "has brought us good news of **your faith**" (3:6)
- "we were comforted about you through your affliction through **your faith**" (3:6).
- "as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in **your faith**" (3:10).

The faith of some believers is disturbed and shaken by indwelling lust, in others when false doctrines vie to discredit Bible truths in their minds, but in many because they face opposition for what they believe. Affliction on almost any level from relatives and friends can be powerful, pulling you counter to your reliance in Christ. It is at times like this that we need our church, our leaders and fellow companions in Christ for the improvement of our faith.

How do we do that?

Paul uses these words to help us see what he was doing for the faith of others: "We sent Timothy . . . to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith" (3:2).

Here are some ways we can do that.

Read Scripture together—Nothing bolsters faith like the Bible. After all, perspective is everything for the believer. So, when a Christian begins to falter, reading passages that re-tune the believer to a God-centered perspective can change everything. Think of the prophet who saw not only the enemy surrounding him, but simultaneously the angelic host surrounding the enemy. The Bible tells our failing friends the truth about the situation they are facing. Perspective makes all the difference.

Pray with them—It should encourage any believer to be helped into the throne room of God to make his requests. Sometimes afflicted believers are worn out, deflated, unenergetic. They need a friend to step with them into prayer, where God hears their petitions.

Worship God together with them—Help them to enlarge their view of God. "*Your God is too small,*" wrote J.B. Phillips years ago. By expressing together what you think of God, everything is put into the right order. Imagine praising God for the fact that He loves the believer more than the believer can even love himself, that He is more powerful than all other forces, that He is able to direct that power toward the believer's needs, and that He has a plan which is infinitely better than the plans we might make for ourselves. Worship God in truth and in sincerity. It will build faith.

Be there—a friend present during difficult times makes a difference. Years ago, when battles were fought by men standing in rows, it was important to remain close together. Why? For courage. This is one reason Paul wanted to see the Thessalonians in person.

Paul wrote, prayed, sent Timothy and planned to visit the afflicted believers himself. Why would he make such efforts? He summarized his affection for them in this statement: "For now we really live if you stand firm in the Lord" (3:8).

Paul was so intertwined with the believers there that their life was, in a way, *his* life. Real living was vicarious. He lived when they lived.

This explains his efforts. And, it will explain yours also. You will do anything for those you love.