



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

First Sunday of Advent (C) – 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Focus: *Coming of our Lord Jesus*

word of life

“And may [the Lord] so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.” (1 Thessalonians 3:13 NRSV)

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians is considered by many scholars to be one of the earliest of Paul’s writings, if not the first letter. Paul and the Thessalonians expected Jesus to return soon—within their lifetime. Thus, there is an air of expectation in Paul’s letter. Paul writes, “And may [the Lord] so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.” (1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 NRSV)

The goal of being “blameless” is clearly placed before the Thessalonians. They are not to randomly live life without purpose, but instead make fervent preparations for the return of Jesus Christ.

1. *What does it mean to lead a blameless life?*
2. *Is the goal of a blameless life within reach?*

Although Paul sets the bar high with his invitation to live a blameless life, he also offers encouraging words based on the report of Timothy who has just visited the Thessalonians. The reports by Timothy of their faith and love provide encouragement for Paul who has suffered distress and persecution. As Paul is encouraged by them, he offers his own personal words of encouragement to them.

This congregation in particular is a source of joy as Paul waits for the return of Jesus. “For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Yes, you are our glory and joy!” (1 Thessalonians 2:19 NRSV)

Night and day, filled with thanksgiving for the ways God is at work in the Thessalonians, Paul offers a prayer of thanks for their witness. Paul also prays to see them again so they he might continue to guide them to a mature faith. Until they are reunited, Paul prays that God might direct their ways. Paul writes not just to strangers, but to a congregation which he planted, nurtured, and dearly loves.

3. *What would it have been like to plant a congregation in the first century?*
4. *What does it take to grow a church?*

Paul’s blessing to his beloved Thessalonians strikes a beautiful, lasting chord, “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.” (1 Thessalonians 3:12 NRSV) That blessing is not limited to one congregation or one time period, but holds the key to our preparations for the return of Jesus and a blameless life.

Left to our own devices, we cannot be blameless. It is God alone who can increase our love for one another and for all. Paul does not describe a one-time event, but a continual process of maturing and growing in God’s grace and reflecting God’s love. The love between Paul and the Thessalonians is just a foretaste of the abundance of the love of God.

5. *In your own words, describe a love found between brothers and sisters in Christ.*
6. *Describe what it will be like when Christ returns.*

Word among us

The day after Halloween, a downtown merchant displays a large, blinking neon sign, reminding people how many shopping days are left before Christmas. But Becca hates driving through downtown by that merchant's sign during the holiday season and avoids that intersection at all costs. Now and then, she has to travel past the sign. As she approaches the intersection, she begins to get anxious and her hands get clammy. She knows she isn't ready. She knows her to-do list is long. She knows she will be exhausted by the time Christmas arrives. She doesn't need a neon sign to increase her stress level.

1. *What kind of preparations do you make to get ready for Christmas?*
2. *Has your pattern of preparation changed during the years?*

The holidays can be overly stressful as people busy themselves getting ready for the arrival of guests – whether for an overnight visit or a meal. Sometimes the process of preparation leaves hosts too exhausted to enjoy the actual visit.

3. *What is an example of when preparations have overshadowed the actual time with the guests?*
4. *What lesson can we learn from these experiences?*
5. *What advice do you have for those preparing for the holidays?*
6. *How does preparing for the second coming of Christ fit into all the other preparations?*

Paul cuts through much of the craziness associated with our modern-day Christmas festivities by offering a lasting prayer. “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all the saints.” (1Thessalonians 3:12-13 NRSV)

7. *What part of this prayer do you find meaningful?*
8. *Do you find yourself striving to “be blameless before our God and Father”? Explain your answer.*

faith practice in daily life

Live among God's faithful people

It is a privilege to live among God's faithful people, but is not always easy to do so. Unity does not mean we always agree with those who worship at our church. Conflicts occur, adding tensions to a faith community. Thus, Paul's prayer to increase our love for one another and for all is particularly meaningful. It could easily become our Advent prayer as we light candles in our Advent wreath or have our daily devotions.

9. *Who in your life needs to know that you are praying for them?*
10. *How might you encourage someone this week?*
11. *How might you include Paul's prayer in your Advent activities?*

Prayer

Gracious God, increase and abound our love for one another, for all, and for you. Strengthen our hearts in holiness that we may be blameless before you at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all the saints. Amen

last word

Each day,
pray for God's love to increase and bound in you.

Daily Faith Practices

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