

New Hope Sermon Body Life I Thessalonians 2:17-3:11

Years ago the only means of going to the bottom of the ocean was in a diving suit. It was made of thick canvas and was complete with weighted shoes, a heavy metal headpiece with a window to look out, a long rope to jerk if something went wrong, and an air hose that supplied oxygen.

Everything about the environment into which the diver went was hostile--there were a thousand things that could go wrong and cost the diver his life. For that reason, the crews constantly monitored the air hose to make sure everything was okay and the long rope was the diver's assurance that s/he could signal for immediate help if needed, and that help would immediately be there to lift the diver back up out of the water.

That's an analogy of the Christian life – both for the Thessalonians in New Testament times and for us today. The environment in which Christians have lived through the centuries is hostile to our Christian growth and development. The world is always trying to squeeze us into its mold, the Devil is trying to lure us off track, inner corruptions of our own fleshly desires are constantly trying to sap our spiritual strength, and persecution is the effort, in the diver analogy, to cut us off from our oxygen supply.

So Paul's mission was to help- the early Christians survive all these hostile elements by keeping their connection with their life-support system – from God directly and from other Christians. We call this connection with other believers Body Life.

Paul taught his converts about this Body Life through the analogy of the Body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12 he says: *“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it...¹⁴The body is not made up of one part but of many. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don't need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don't need you!”...²⁴God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it”* (1 Cor. 12:27, 21-26).

Notice verse 26. *“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”* **I want us to hear this verse in different languages today because this is God's intent for His global church. (Indonesian, Chinese, Africaner, Spanish, etc.)** Our passage today in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10 demonstrates that teaching in action.

The first remarkable aspect of the connectedness that Paul describes is in verses 17 and 18 of chapter 2. Paul speaks of the deep concern he had for the Thessalonian believers when he was “torn away” from the fledging church through persecution. He and Timothy and Silas had “an intense longing” to be with the Thessalonians and “made every effort to get back to them” but were hindered by Satan. Paul says the Thessalonian believers are the joy, hope, crown, and glory for all of the workers in the presence of the Lord. This is strong affirmation for the new Thessalonian believers.

Second, Paul then makes the results of this relational connection even more clear in chapter 3:1-10 as he explains the visit from Timothy. Again, note the emotional words that show how deeply invested he was in them: *“When we could stand it no longer,”* repeated twice, *“I was afraid that...”* Real community has this level of depth of emotion. We hurt when we know others are hurt. We also rejoice when we hear good news of others' faith. When Timothy brought good news of the Thessalonians' positive feelings for Paul (vs. 6), this encouraged Paul (vs. 7) and gave new resolve to him and his coworkers—*“now we really live since you are standing firm in the Lord”* (vs. 8). *“Now we thank God for all the joy you bring us in the presence of God.”* Deep connection and care is a mark of healthy Body Life.

Paul had this strong emotional connection with his other church plants as well. He wrote to the Philippians: *"I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 1:3-8).

He thanks God every time he remembers these Philippian Christians. He prays with joy. He holds them in his heart. He longs for them with the affection of Christ Jesus. He says the same things to the Corinthian Christians in 2 Corinthians 7:6-7, *"Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more."* Paul says, *"You have such a place in our hearts. We would live or die with you. I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged because of you."* He admits being downcast because of the conflicts outside him and fears within him in Macedonia, but he was comforted with Titus' report that the Corinthians had deep sorrow, ardent concern, and longing for him (2 Cor. 7:7). Later in that letter, he says, *"I would gladly spend and be spent for you"* (2 Cor. 12:15). It's noteworthy that he made those affirmations at a time when there was known sin that greatly troubled him in the Corinthian church. Paul was deeply emotionally involved with his converts and kept that connection even when there were sinning and causing him distress.

But Paul was not carrying this ministry alone. He had God, certainly, but since the other leaders shared this concern for the health of the young converts, he sent Titus to Corinth, he sent Timothy to Thessalonica, and he had Silas with him in Philippi and in jail. He wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians from Corinth with Timothy and Silas. Silas was also a partner with Peter. *"With the help of Silas, I have written to you briefly"* (1 Peter 5:12). Then note, as well, that Paul began his letters to the Thessalonians and the Colossians in the "we" form—*"we always thank God, we always pray for you."* This model of Paul's relations with the young converts in Thessalonica and Philippi and Colossi and Corinth show us what Body life is like in the church. There is a reaching out, a support, a concern, a longing, much prayer, a welcoming hospitality.

When Alyssa and Jingjing got to Hong Kong last week, Alex took them to meet Lisa Jong. Chris and Lisa were members of this church four years ago when Chris was studying for his Masters in Chicago. Neither Alyssa nor Jingjing had met Lisa, but after their visit, Lisa told Jingjing, "Next time you come to Hong Kong, please come and stay with me in our apartment." Jingjing was surprised at that offer of hospitality from a woman she barely knew. It wasn't a cultural invitation Lisa extended. It was a Christian-Body-life invitation: "I belong to Jesus. You belong to Jesus. We belong to each other, so please come and stay in my apartment with me." This is a demonstration of Christ's love that binds us together in Christian community.

This understanding of Body life is explained well in a book by that title from Ray Stedman. He says: "There are over 50 'one another' commands in the New Testament. And these call us to a special kind of life together, in this book we call it Body Life...The New Testament lays heavy emphasis on the need for Christians to know each other, closely and intimately enough to be able to bare one another's burdens, confess faults one to another, encourage one another, exhort one another, admonish one another and minister to one another with the Word, song, and prayer. As we carry out the various 'one another' ministries of the New Testament-style Body life, *'we all come to comprehend with all the saints, what is the width, length, depth and height of the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge'* (Eph. 3:18-19)...This was exactly in line with the exhortation from Jesus to his disciples: *'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love*

one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35)...

Stedman goes on: “The early church relied on a twofold witness as a means of reaching and impressing a cynical and unbelieving world: *Kerygma* (proclamation) and *koinonia* (fellowship)...Pagans could easily shrug off the proclamation as simply a teaching among many, but they found it much more difficult to reject the evidence of *koinonia*. The concern of Christians for each other and the way they shared their lives in the same great family of God left the pagan world craving and envying this new experience called *koinonia*....*Koinonia* calls for honesty and openness with other Christians and a mutual recognition that it is neither abnormal or unspiritual to have burdens and problems in our day to day Christian experience...The facades that say “everything is alright” when everything is anything but right have to fall. *Koinonia* means bearing one another’s burdens; [it means] to uphold one another in prayer. It means to be willing to spend time with another person,...committing yourself to an authentic effort to relieve that person’s pressures or discouragement, offering intense prayer, practical help or wise counsel, not just a superficial word of ‘I’ll pray for you’” (Ray Stedman, *Body Life*, reprinted 19 , pp. 151-157).

Paul was developing *koinonia* with his churches. He was living out the principles of Body life where Christians love each other—in deed and truth—and are invested in the personal lives of one another. Paul demonstrated that to the Thessalonians with the emotional words he used to describe his intense longing to be with them. His concern, “*when he could stand it no longer,*” precipitated Timothy’s visit to the Thessalonians. His statement “*that now we live because you are standing in the Lord*” shows the depth of connectedness that is Body life.

And that’s the model that I believe we can demonstrate through this church. We really are called to be devoted to one another in brotherly love (Rom. 12:10), to accept one another (Rom. 15:7), to serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13), to carry each other’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), to forgive each other (Gal. 4:32), to admonish one another (Col. 3:16), to build each other up (1 Thess. 5:11), to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another (James 5:16), to use whatever gift one has to serve one another (1 Peter 4:10), to greet one another with a holy kiss (1 Peter 5:14, 1 Cor. 16:20).



These ideas are embedded in this graphic of *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is how we treat one another in and through Christ Jesus. It means being kind, accepting, and honoring one another. It is seen in our deeds of service and how we encourage, admonish and are devoted to each other. Paul talks about it in Romans and Galatians; Peter talks about it; the writer to the Hebrews deals with it. And Jesus defines it through the prism of love.

This is the model Paul lived and the model that each of his coworkers lived as well. Wayne Cordeiro, in his book, *Doing Church as a Team*, calls that being “in alignment.” “The strength of any vision lies in alignment—that is vision is caught and shared by every person involved,...everyone pulling together for the cause is alignment...You can have the most visionary ideals but without alignment you will not be able to achieve them...When everyone is in alignment, every daily activity contributes in a more meaningful way to the overall vision of the church” (pp. 150-151).

We have written a church vision to help us be in alignment with each other wherever members are in the world. It describes a Body life in alignment under the Lordship of Jesus Christ for the sake of God’s global agenda in the world. Let’s say that vision together again.

Our Church Vision:

- ❖ Grow into Christ-likeness in our character and life-purpose (2 Cor.3:18).
- ❖ Be global Christians, living by the Spirit in alignment with what God is doing and wants to do in our world
- ❖ Serve a global God who calls us onto His team.
- ❖ Be nurtured and equipped so that wherever we are, we will be able to powerfully live out the role that God has created for each of us in His world.
- ❖ Our core values are prayer and community committed whole-heartedly to Jesus Christ, as a multicultural family,
- ❖ where the whole Body ministers to the whole Body, within a global context. 3/28/17

Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Silas, Peter, Epaphroditus, Titus, Priscilla and Aquila all were working from the same vision of building new converts up in Jesus Christ. As Paul told the Colossians: *“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving”* (Col. 2:6-7).

That’s body life where Christians are growing up into maturity together. That’s the connectedness that we can have at New Hope with all of our members who come in for one or two years and graduate and go out to various countries around the world. We still care for them, we still long, intensely long, to see them. We still want to encourage them and exhort them and pray for them as Paul was doing for the early Thessalonian believers. And we do it as a team. Certainly individuals among us will connect well with other individuals who are here currently or have already gone on to other places in the world. But we also do it as a church, like Paul who opens his letters to these young church plants in the “we” form: *“we always thank God, we pray for you, we celebrate because you are our joy, and glory, and crown.”* That’s how the whole Body can minister to the whole Body at New Hope. Demonstrating Body Life to the world.

Let us pray.

Song of Response: *They’ll Know We Are Christians By Our Love.*