



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA



By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5

June 7, 2009
English Standard Version

“Longing for Joy”

This is the 4th sermon in the series on 1 & 2 Thessalonians entitled,
“Life for the Long Haul.”

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

“But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face,¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you — I, Paul, again and again — but Satan hindered us.¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at His coming? Is it not you?²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.”

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

“Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone,² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith,³ that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.⁵ For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.”

Heavenly Father, we have come to Your Word again this morning and we find that we still need to learn a lot about the Christian life. We don’t understand why hard things come into our lives and what they’re supposed to be teaching us. We need to know Your Word and why it’s so much more important than what the world says. So Lord, once again open our eyes and ears to truly

hear and understand and apply this Word to our lives. Do this for each of us, this morning, in His name, and for His glory, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: Thank you, Natasha, wherever you are.¹

This is one of those hard passages of Scripture that touches on two topics that one would think don't normally go together. And yet Scripture puts them together in such a way that it's presented as **the norm** for the Christian life. In our passage this morning, the two topics presented are **joy** and **suffering**.

And as I was researching how suffering is one of **the causes** of joy, I came across this story as retold by John Piper in his book *Desiring God*. So I went and grabbed my copy of the book and ... the story wasn't there. Ah, I have the 1st edition of the book, so I went and borrowed Dave Dorst's copy, since he has the 2nd edition of the book ... still no story. And then I discovered that the story is only in the 3rd edition. You see, one of the key themes of the book is finding joy in all the different aspects of the Christian life, such as prayer, worship, and missions. However, in the 2nd edition of the book, Piper added a chapter on "**Suffering**" and it deals with how suffering leads to joy. Then in the 3rd edition, Piper **expanded** the chapter on suffering ... so much so that the 3rd edition is about 100 pages longer than the 1st edition ... with smaller print. Piper obviously felt that something was missing as he went through two revisions. The 1st rewrite he added an entire chapter on suffering and in the 2nd rewrite he expanded that chapter to further show how God **uses** suffering as a **means** of enabling us to glorify Him and **enjoy** Him forever. We often view joy as the **antidote** to suffering, but the Bible doesn't seem to be making that case. More often, the Bible seems to teach that **we won't know** what true joy is ... **we won't know** what it really means to glorify God ... **until we have experienced suffering**.

Let me share with you this story that reflects how suffering glorifies God. Now I have to warn you ... this is an account of persecution and it's a little rough ... but it's a true story of suffering for the faith ... and I think we need to know what it can be like to be a follower of Christ in other parts of the world.

One of the most moving and incredible accounts of suffering [being used by God] is found in Sergei Kourdakov's autobiography, *The Persecutor*. Kourdakov was commissioned by the Russian secret police to raid prayer gatherings and persecute believers with extraordinary brutality. But the afflictions of one believer **changed his life**. He writes about raiding a prayer meeting ...

"I saw Victor Matveyev reach and grab for a young girl [Natasha Zhdanova] who was trying to escape to another room. She was a beautiful young girl. *What a waste to be a Believer*. Victor caught her, picked her up above his head, and held her high in the air for a second. She was pleading, "Don't, please don't. Dear God, help us!" Victor threw her so hard she hit the wall at the same height she was thrown, then dropped to the floor, semiconscious, moaning. Victor turned and laughed and exclaimed, "I'll bet the idea of God went flying out of her head."

On a later raid, Sergei was **shocked** to see Natasha again. He goes on ...

"I quickly surveyed the room and saw a sight I couldn't believe! There she was, the same girl! It couldn't be. But it was. Only three nights before, she had been at the other meeting and had been viciously thrown across the room. It was the first time I really got a good look at her.

¹ The Introduction is adapted from *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (3rd Edition) by John Piper, pages 253-287. We should all own and read this book – make sure you get the 3rd edition (2003).

She was more beautiful than I had first remembered — a very beautiful girl with long, flowing, blond hair, large blue eyes, and smooth skin, one of the most naturally beautiful girls I have ever seen. ...

I picked her up and flung her on a table facedown. Two of us stripped her clothes off. One of my men held her down and I began to beat her again and again. My hands began to sting under the blows. Her skin started to blister. I continued to beat her, until pieces of bloody flesh came off on my hand. She moaned but fought desperately not to cry. To suppress her cries, she bit her lower lip until it was bitten through and blood ran down her chin.

At last she gave in and began sobbing. When I was so exhausted I couldn't raise my arm for even one more blow, and her backside was a mass of raw flesh, I pushed her off the table, and she collapsed on the floor."

To Sergei's shock, he later encountered her **at yet another** prayer meeting. But this time something was different. Again he writes ...

"There **she** was again—Natasha Zhdanova! Several of the guys saw her too. Alex Gulyaev moved toward Natasha, hatred filling his face, his club raised above his head. Then something I never expected to see suddenly happened.

Without warning, Victor (the man who had picked her up and thrown her against the wall during the first raid) — Victor, jumped between Natasha and Alex, facing Alex head-on.

"Get out of my way," Alex shouted angrily.

Victor's feet didn't move. He raised his club and said menacingly, "Alex, I'm telling you, don't touch her! No one touches her!"

I listened in amazement. Incredibly, one of my most brutal men was protecting one of the Believers! "Get back!" he shouted to Alex. "Get back or I'll let you have it." He shielded Natasha, who was cowering on the floor.

Angered, Alex shouted, "You want her for yourself, don't you?"

"No," Victor shouted back. "She has something **we don't have!** Nobody touches her! Nobody!"

... For one of the first times in my life, I was deeply moved ... Natasha **did** have something! She had been beaten horribly. She had been warned and threatened. She had gone through unbelievable suffering, but here she was again. Even Victor had been moved and recognized it. She had something **we didn't have**. I wanted to run after her and ask, "**What is it?**" I wanted to talk to her, but she was gone. This heroic Christian girl who had suffered so much at our hands somehow touched and troubled me very much."

The Lord later opened Sergei's heart to the glorious good news of Jesus Christ. As he later reflected on Natasha, whom he never saw again, he wrote ...

"And, finally, to Natasha, whom I beat terribly and who was willing to be beaten a third time for her faith, I want to say, Natasha, largely because of you, my life is now changed and I am a fellow Believer in Christ with you. I have a new life before me. God has forgiven me; I hope you can also. Thank you, Natasha, wherever you are. I will never, never forget you."

God **allows** suffering, God **ordains** suffering, God **uses** suffering, and the Bible calls us to **suffering** as part and parcel of the Christian life. Some of you remember that classic Christian book *In His Steps*. The point of the book being that we're to walk in His steps, that is, we are to do what Jesus did. What most people don't remember is that **the context of that verse is suffering**. **1 Peter 2:21**, "*For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps.*"

The letters of the Apostle Peter were written to a suffering church. And he never **blames** them for suffering. He never tells them they're suffering because of their **sin**. He never tells them to try and **avoid** suffering. He never tells them that real Christians are healthy and wealthy and have **no hardship** in their life. And telling the church in 1st Century Rome to have **Your Best Life Now** would have been considered **utterly ludicrous**. What does he tell them?

1 Peter 1:6-7, “*In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*”

1 Peter 4:12-14, 19, “*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ... Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.*”

And that’s what today’s passage is all about ... suffering, rejoicing, and trusting God. Paul starts by telling us about ...

2:17-18: HIS LOVE²

“*But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face,¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you — I, Paul, again and again — but Satan hindered us.*”

Paul expresses his concern that the missionaries’ premature departure from Thessalonica, the length of the absence, and his own failure to return should not be misinterpreted as evidence of a lack of pastoral concern. He wants them to know that the missionaries left Thessalonica against their will in the face of persecution. The phrase “**Torn away,**” (*aporphanizō* in the Greek) literally means “to be orphaned” and this is the **only** place it’s used in the New Testament.

Having called himself their father, mother, and brother in this chapter, he now pictures himself as their orphaned child. But the word has a wider sense than children deprived of their parents; it ‘applies also to parents deprived of children.’ The emphasis is on an unnatural separation, both forcible and painful. To Paul it was as though his family were being **torn** apart when he left them.

And it suggests deep distress at their involuntary separation. He wants them to know that his physical absence didn’t reflect a lack of concern. He says, “*we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you.*” Contrary to what the Thessalonians might think, the missionaries had repeatedly tried to get back to Thessalonica.

And just to be sure, he identifies himself — **I, Paul**. This reveals that Paul is the author

² The Exposition of the text are adapted from *The Gospel & The End of Time: The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians* by Dr. John R. W. Stott, pages 60-65; *The Communicator’s Commentary: 1, 2 Thessalonians / 1, 2 Timothy / Titus* by Dr. Gary Demarest, pages 64-67; *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of The Scriptures* (Volume 2), notes on 1 Thessalonians by Dr. Thomas Constable, pages 697-698; *The ESV Study Bible*, notes on 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Dr. Colin Nicholl. John Calvin quote comes from his book *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, page 351.

of this letter and that he feels the need to defend himself with respect to the period of absence. It's unusual that Paul inserted his name in the letter at this point; he rarely did so in his letters. The reason here may be that he wished to emphasize in another way that it was really he himself who felt this way.

And he explains his inability to come back to them by saying — *but Satan hindered us*. It's not known what means Satan used to prevent a reunion, just that he would do everything in his power to prevent Paul from building up a church he was working so hard to lead astray.

Paul's reason for wanting to return was to provide additional spiritual help for these new believers. This by itself is clearly the will of God in any situation. Seen as such, any hindrance becomes opposition to the will of God. Regardless of who was involved on the human level, the ultimate leader of this kind of opposition is Satan. As John Calvin wrote, "Whenever the ungodly cause us trouble, they are fighting under the banner of Satan, and are his instruments for harassing us." God permitted this to happen, but He is no more responsible for it than He is for any sin which His people commit and which He permits.

And this was so important to Paul that he didn't try to return just once, but he says, "*again and again*" he sought to get back to Thessalonica. But he wasn't able to ... so he does the next best thing ... he sends them ...

3:1-3a: HIS HELPER

"Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone,² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith,³ that no one be moved by these afflictions."

The sending of Timothy was due to Paul's inability to endure any longer his separation from the Thessalonians, and not knowing how they were doing. Moreover, it was a sacrificial act, reflecting deep pastoral love, since Paul was *left behind at Athens alone*. And he didn't send just anybody. He sent his helper, his protégé, "*Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ.*" It's a rather remarkable title. Paul seems to be highlighting Timothy's credentials to offset any negative sentiment on the part of the Thessalonians at Paul's sending his younger associate to them instead of coming himself.

Paul's motive for sending Timothy was to strengthen the persecuted Thessalonians. He says "*that no one be moved by these afflictions.*" He will say later in **2 Thessalonians 1:5-7**, "*This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels.*"

Much of the ministry of the apostles was devoted to grounding young believers in the faith, a ministry as necessary today as it was then in the first century. Timothy's mission was to be a help to the Thessalonian Christians. He was to **establish** them, which means to make them firm and solid in the faith. He was sent to **exhort** them by providing what they needed to fight the good fight of **faith**, both individually and corporately. The word translated "*exhort*" is *parakeleō*, the same term Jesus used to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit in John 14. It literally means, "*One called alongside to help.*"

The need for constant strengthening and support is an integral part of the church. There's a tendency to portray the ideal Christian as a pioneer, one who stands alone with no need for help. **That's totally wrong**. The reality is that each and every one of us needs support. The recognition of **need** is the beginning of trust. The acceptance of **weakness** is the beginning of

faith.

One of the great discoveries in my Christian life has been that I am **always** in need of the church and need the people in the church for strengthening and encouragement — and I always will. To know and accept that about each other is the basis for all growing Christian relationships.

Not only do they need to be established and strengthened in the faith; not only do they need to be exhorted and encouraged in ministry; they need to be reminded of ...

3:3b-4: HIS TEACHING

“For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. ⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.”

Another purpose of Timothy’s visit was that the Christians would not lose their spiritual balance and stability as a result of the **afflictions** they were experiencing. Paul added his own stabilizing reminder that trials are not necessarily a sign of God’s disfavor, but are part of every Christian’s legacy.

When trouble comes, Christians often react by doubting that **they are** where God wants them to be; they often think that they’ve done something wrong and that God must be displeased with them. Even some mature Christians react this way, as evidenced by Paul’s words to Timothy many years later, **2 Timothy 3:12**, *“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*

Paul was worried that the Thessalonians’ sufferings might lead them astray. Perhaps the best way to protect people from being upset by tribulation is to remind them that **it is a necessary part** of our calling as Christians. He wants them to know that storms often come to believers to make them able to **stand firm**, rather than to blow them away. Apparently the Thessalonians had been taken aback by the unrelenting persecution. Paul reminded them that when he was with them he kept telling them to expect persecution. And circumstances had turned out just as he had said. This reminder of his teaching would have helped calm them down.

The idea of being **“destined”** to suffer is a hard pill to swallow. Many preachers today are all too prone to present the gospel as a way out of suffering — as an antidote to pain. Not so in the New Testament. Afflictions are a **necessary** part of our growth and they come by **divine appointment**. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who walks with us **through** the valleys of darkness. **His cross** becomes **the theme** of Christian discipleship. This is why our support for one another is so crucial. And it’s not like Paul didn’t need that ... he did.

And so in a very personal way, he shares with them ...

3:5: HIS FEAR

“For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.”

Satan is the tempter. He tempted Jesus in Matthew 4 and Paul tells us that he tempts Christians in 1 Corinthians 7. Here we see some of the basic humanity of Paul as he shares **his fear** for this young church ... that **“our labor would be in vain.”** If Satan had succeeded in tempting the Thessalonians to abandon their newfound faith, Paul’s missionary work would have been fruitless.

Remember that this is one of Paul’s earliest letters to the churches. He was to fight this battle and face this fear many more times to come. He would come to know that the power of

the Holy Spirit was more than enough to keep him from giving in to his fears. So much so, that years later, in one of his last letters, he would be able to write, **Romans 5:2-5**, “*Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*”³ *More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,*⁴ *and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,*⁵ *and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*

And because of the work of the Holy Spirit ... and because of his trust in the promises of God ... Paul lets them know that not only are they his family, they are ...

2:19-20: HIS BLESSING

*“For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at His coming? Is it not you?”*²⁰ *For you are our glory and joy.”*

The word used here for Jesus’ coming is *Parousia*. This is the earliest reference **in all Christian writing to the Second Coming of Christ**.

Presenting his converts to Jesus at the Second Coming of Christ is an integral part of Paul’s Christian hope. In effect he asked what would be the greatest blessing he could possibly receive at the judgment seat of Christ. **They were!** They were **everything** that was worth **anything** to Paul. They were his **hope**; their development was what he lived for as a parent lives to see his children grow to maturity. They were his **joy**; they filled his life with delight as he thought of what they used to be, what they had become, and what they would be by the grace of God. They were his **crown** (the word is *stephanos* — we get the names Stephen and Stephanie from that); they themselves were the symbol of God’s blessing on his life and ministry. They were his **glory and joy**, and not only his but also the glory and joy of his companions in the ministry.

Paul said in essence, “When life is over and we stand in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming, you Thessalonians will be our source of glory and joy; you mean that much to us.”

What will that be like for us? There’s no way we can know this side of heaven, but perhaps this story will shed a little light on what that day might be like.

CONCLUSION: A Day of Sweet Surprises³

Oskar Schindler had his share of less-than-noteworthy characteristics. He was a womanizer and a heavy drinker. He bribed officials and was a member of the German Nazi Party. But buried in the dark of his heart was a diamond of compassion for the condemned Jews of Krakow, Poland.

The ones Hitler sought to kill, Schindler sought to save. He couldn’t save them all, but he could save a few, and so he did what he could. What began as a factory for profit became a haven for eleven hundred fortunate souls whose names found their way onto his list — Schindler’s list.

If you saw the movie by the same name, you’ll remember how the story ends. With the defeat of the Nazis came the reversal of roles. Now Schindler would be hunted and the prisoners would be free. Oskar Schindler prepares to slip into the night. As he walks to his car, his factory workers line both sides of the road. They have come to thank the man who saved them. One of the Jews presents Schindler with a letter signed by each person, documenting his deed.

He is also given a ring, formed out of the gold extracted from a worker’s tooth. On it is

³ The Conclusion is adapted from *When Christ Comes: The Beginning of The Very Best* by Max Lucado, pages 75ff.

carved a verse from the Talmud, *“He who saves a single life saves the world entire.”*

In that moment, in the brisk air of the Polish night, Schindler is surrounded by the liberated. Row after row of faces. Husbands with wives. Parents with children. They know what Schindler did for them. They will never forget.

What thoughts raced through Schindler’s mind in that moment? What emotions surface when a person finds himself face to face with lives he’s changed?

Someday you’ll find out. Schindler saw the faces of the delivered; you will, too. Schindler heard the gratitude of the redeemed; you’ll hear the same. He stood in a community of rescued souls; the same is reserved for you.

When will this occur? It will occur when Christ comes. The promise of **1 Thessalonians 2:19-20** isn’t limited to the apostle Paul. *“For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at His coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.”*

Those verses conjure up an image akin to the one of Schindler and the survivors. An encounter between those freed and the one who led them to freedom. A moment in which those saved can meet the one who led them to salvation. In this case Paul will meet with the Thessalonians. He will search the sea of faces for his friends. They will find him, and he will find them. And, in the presence of Christ, they will enjoy an eternal reunion.

Try to imagine doing the same. Think about the day Christ comes. There you are in the great circle of the redeemed. Your body has been made new — no more pain or suffering. Your mind has been made new — what you once understood in part, you now understand clearly. You feel no fear, no danger, no sorrow. Though you are just one of a massive throng of people, it’s as if you and Jesus are all alone. And He asks you a question. I’m speculating now, the Bible doesn’t say this, but I wonder if Christ might say something like this to you: “I’m so proud that you let Me use you. Because of you, others are here today. Would you like to meet them?”

Chances are you’d be surprised at such a statement. It’s one thing for the Apostle Paul to hear such words. He was an apostle. We can imagine a missionary or famous evangelist hearing these words — but us?

At that point Jesus might — again, this is mere speculation — but Jesus might turn to the crowd and invite them. With His hand on your shoulder, He announces, “Do we have any here who were influenced by this child of Mine?” One by one, they begin to step out and walk forward.

The first is your neighbor, a crusty old sort who lived next door. To be frank, you didn’t expect to see him. “You never knew I was watching,” he explains, “but I was. And because of you, I’m here.”

And then comes a cluster of people, a half-dozen or so. One speaks for the others and says, “You helped out with the youth program when we were kids. You didn’t open your mouth much, but you opened your home. We became Christians in your basement.”

The line continues. A coworker noticed how you controlled your temper. A receptionist remarks how you greeted her each morning. Someone you don’t even remember reminds you of the time you saw her in the hospital. You came to visit a friend in the next bed, but on the way out you stopped and spoke a word of hope with this stranger who looked lonely.

You are most amazed by the people from other countries. After all, you never even traveled to Asia or Africa or Latin America, but look! Cambodians, Nigerians, Colombians. How did you influence them? Christ reminds you of the missionaries who came your way. Your friends said you had a soft spot for them. You always gave money. “I can’t go, but I can send,”

you'd say. Now you understand; you didn't have a soft spot. You had the Spirit of God. And because you were obedient to the Spirit, Utan from Cambodia wants to say thanks. So does Kinsley from Nigeria and Maria from Colombia.

It's not long before you and your Savior are encircled by the delightful collection of souls you've touched. Some you know, most you don't, but for each you feel the same. You feel what Paul felt for the Thessalonians. You now understand what he meant when he said, "*For you are our glory and joy.*"

But Jesus isn't finished. He loves to save the best for last, and I can't help but imagine Him doing the same in heaven. You've seen the neighbors, the coworkers, the people you hardly knew, the foreigners you never knew, but there is one more group. And Jesus parts the crowd so you will see them. Your family.

Your spouse is the first to embrace you. There were times when you wondered if either of you would make it. But now you hear the words whispered in your ear, "Thanks for not giving up on me."

Then your parents. No longer frail like you last saw them, but robust and renewed. "We're proud of you," they say. Next come your children. Children for whom you cared and over whom you prayed. They thank you; over and over they thank you. They know how hard it was, and how hard you tried, and they thank you. And then some faces you don't recognize. You have to be told — these are grandchildren and great-grandchildren and descendants you never saw until today. They, like the others, thank you for an inherited legacy of **faith**. They thank you.

Will such a moment occur? I don't know. If it does, you can be certain of two things. First, its grandeur and glory will far outstrip any description these words can carry. **1 Corinthians 2:9** says, "*... no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man **imagined**, what God has prepared for those who love Him.*"

Second, if such a reunion occurs, you can be certain you won't regret any sacrifice you made for the kingdom. The hours of service for Christ? You won't regret them. The money you gave? You'd give it a thousand times over. The times you helped the poor and loved the lost? You'd do it again.

Oskar Schindler would have. Earlier we wondered about Schindler's final thoughts. We wondered how he felt; surrounded by the people he'd saved. We don't know for sure, but his last appearance in the movie gives us a good idea. There, in the presence of the survivors, he tucks the letter away in his coat. He accepts the ring, and looks from face to face. For the first time, he shows emotion. He leans toward Isaac Stern, the factory foreman, and says something in a voice so low, Stern asks him to repeat it. He does. "I could have done more," he says, gesturing toward a car he could have sold. "That would have released ten prisoners." The gold pin on his lapel would have bribed an official to release two more. In that moment, Schindler's life is reduced to one value. Profit is forgotten. The factory doesn't matter. All the tears and tragedy of the nightmare are distilled into one truth. **People**. Only one thing counts — people.

I think you'll feel the same. Oh, you won't feel the regrets. **Heaven knows no regret**. Our God is too kind to let us face the opportunities we missed. But He is happy to let us see the ones we seized. In that moment, when you see the people God let you love, I dare say, you'd do it all again **in a heartbeat**.

You'd change the diapers, fix the cars, write the checks, prepare the lessons, pray the prayers, teach the Word, and tell others about Jesus. One look into the faces of the ones you

love, and **you'd do it all again**.

And your **joy** will be **full** ... and your **suffering** will be **forgotten**.

Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the church in Thessalonica. Thank You for their faithfulness in the face of affliction. Thank You that they received and accepted the Word of God and it changed their lives. May we do the same. We ask that You would do this within us ... in the Name of Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

This message has been lightly edited and formatted for the web page. No attempt has been made to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template. There may be slight differences with the audio version. Should there be any questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any error to be with the original speaker and should contact him directly. For full copyright, reproduction and permissions information, please visit the PHPC Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement at www.PotomacHills.com.

3 John 1:3-4

“For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”