

# Will Jesus Direct Your Hearts?

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**2 Thessalonians 3:1 - 5 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup>Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. <sup>2</sup>And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. <sup>3</sup>But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. <sup>4</sup>We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. <sup>5</sup>May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

What do you pour into your marriage? What gets poured into your life from your marriage? How do you build up the lives of your friends? How do your friends build up your life? How do you give to your children? How do your children give to you? What value do you build into your company? What value does your company build into you?

Relationships are like a seesaw of give and take. Sometimes you rise to the top because the other person keeps pouring love, friendship, prayers, and value into your life. Other times your spouse, your teenager, your friend, and your company rises to the top because you pour into their lives. How do others lift you up to the top? How are you lifting others to the top?

The Apostle Paul is on a relationship seesaw with the Christians in Thessalonica. He has and is pouring into their lives. He has poured friendship and love. He poured the truth of the good news of the life, death, resurrection, and continuing life of Jesus. He poured teaching about how to practically live out faith in Jesus in their lives. He poured out his presence as the Holy Spirit showed up to bring out a spirit of worship and joy in their life as a church. Though he has moved on from their city, he kept pouring prayers and these letters of encouragement and truth into their lives.

The Thessalonians poured into his life. They welcomed him into their city and their homes. They responded to his love and his preaching by opening their life to Jesus. They helped him connect with a wide variety of people in Thessalonica. They protected him from a rioting mob that was out to hurt or even kill him. Some of them even spent a night in jail on his behalf. At this point let's stop for a little aside and let me say that I am so glad that over the last 10 years none of you ever had to spend a night in jail on my behalf? Nor was I ever asked to spend a night on your behalf!

Paul comes to the end of what for all we know is the last written and very possibility the last communication of any type with the Thessalonian Christians still riding their relationship seesaw. He writes several prayers for these friends and fellow Christians. Last week we looked at the

prayer Paul prayed asking the Lord to strengthen his friends so their life would be overflowing with good deeds. The prayer we look at this morning starts with Paul telling his friends he needs them to keep pouring into his life through their prayers.

Listen again to what Paul asks from his friends. “Pray that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith.” Paul does ask for prayer for himself but only in the context of continuing to fulfill the purpose and the passion of his heart. Friends pray that the truth and the life of Jesus gets shared. Fellow friends of Jesus, pray that Jesus is honored. Pray that more and more people experience the love, mercy, and power of the living Jesus. Pray, that just as the hand of the Lord was on us together in Thessalonica when the rioting mob wanted to harm us all, the Lord’s hand will cover and fight for me and my traveling companions as we continue to face hostile and evil men.

I want to stop here to speak to you my fellow friends of Jesus. Thank you for praying for me, Renee, David, and for Taryn in the past ten years. You prayed for Renee, David, and me when we arrived. You prayed prayers of joy that Friday morning in April 2000 when we got the news that Taryn was going to be born that day. You prayed for us when David had surgery.

Sunday Prayer Team you prayed over every sermon I have preached. Friends, you have prayed as I taught Bible 101, Beyond the Sermon SS class, Disciple Bible Study, Experiencing God, the Purpose Driven Life, Monday night Brotherhood Bible Studies, and Preparing for Marriage Weekend retreats.

I need you to keep praying as we move to Carlsbad. One of the great joys of being a pastor of LakeRidge is all the affirmation you give when I preach. There is a part of me that is a little scared. You see it is pretty easy to save up great ideas and great words when all you have to preach is 6 times a year. Now I have to step up and do the hard work like Bill and preach just about every Sunday. Will you pray for me that I don’t run out of words? Will you pray for me that Jesus is honored in what and how I preach? I need it.

Will you also pray that the heart-changing and evil conquering power of the Lord goes before and with us as we move into life and ministry with the people of Carlsbad? Now I don’t expect that in three months you are going to get a report that a rioting mob has run me out of town. I don’t think that Carlsbad is full of wicked and evil men.

Now if you asked Taryn she might tell you different. Several months ago when we first told the kids of the upcoming move, Taryn boldly proclaimed that no where could ever be as good as

LakeRidge and Lubbock. She said she would never make new friends because Carlsbad must be full of bad people. Name withstanding; we know Jesus has a lot of great people and new friends for all of us in Carlsbad.

However, prayers for protection and power are going to be needed. We are going to a church and a community where Jesus is working to bring more and more of the Kingdom of God into the lives of people and the life of that town. They are involved and we are ready to join them to do great things for Jesus in Carlsbad. When the followers of Jesus start doing great things for Him, Satan and persons trapped in evil fight back. Evil does not want love to be shared in this world. The Evil one hates it when people open their hearts and lives to Jesus. The evil one does not want Jesus to be honored in the church and in the community. Just like you have prayed for the fullness of the Kingdom in and through LakeRidge, pray for the Lord's protection and strength for us in Carlsbad. As you pray I want you to see Dan, Renee, David, and Taryn rising up to the top side of the seesaw.

Paul first asked for prayers from his friends. Paul then turned the focus from himself to his friends. One more time he pours truth and prayers about what Jesus will do into the life of his friends. Listen to how Paul focuses on His friends and Jesus. "The Lord is faithful and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."

Paul first pours a word of encouragement into his friend's life. Friends, no matter what trials you face, the Lord will be faithful. Friends, no matter what evil men or rioting crowds you face, the Lord is faithful. Friends even though you may have to go to jail again for honoring Jesus and taking care of his people, the Lord will be faithful.

I proclaim to LakeRidge UMC, "Jesus is Faithful!" Jesus has led you forward in faith. Jesus is faithful today. Jesus will be faithful in all the days ahead.

I also proclaim that I am confident that you will continue to do that which Jesus commands you to do. You will love the Lord your God with all you heart, soul, mind and strength. You will love your neighbors as yourself. You will continue to grow as people who live not to be served but to serve others and give your life away for their benefit. You will continue to grow as a people who pray in season and out of season. You will continue to grow as a people who seek the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of this congregation.

Paul encourages his friends. Paul then proclaims in prayer that Jesus will direct their hearts into God's love. This is what I want to focus on for the rest of the morning. What does it mean for our hearts to be directed into God's love?

When Paul and other writers of the Bible use the term "heart" they are not just speaking about our emotions. They are not just talking about that place in us that gets infatuated and falls in love. The heart is the connection of the emotions, the intellect, and the spirit. The heart is the place out of which your character is born and revealed. The heart is who you are and what you think when only you and God are looking. The heart is your deepest core identity. The heart is the full, inner man.

Paul writes this prayer for the Thessalonians asking them to believe that the Lord has the intention and desire to enter into their lives in such a deep and powerful way so as to direct their full inner being. This word we interpret as direct is full of three great word pictures. Sometimes it is used to describe a powerful individual who helps remove physical barriers that block a person's goal to get from one place to another. To direct is to remove the fallen tree from blocking the passage along a road. This word is used to describe the actions of a ship's mate who uses the power of the rudder to steer a ship through currents and winds and stormy seas so as to direct the ship to its intended safe harbor. My favorite picture is that of a mighty charioteer who uses the strength of his arms, the tension and release of tension, the sounds of a whistle, clicks and shouts to direct the power and drive of a team of chariot stallions as they run to victory around the hippodromes of Rome and Greece.

As I have thought about those three pictures of directing, I asked myself what kind of heart would need each of those different ways of providing and applying direction. What kind of heart would need a barrier removed so that it could reach the love of God?

I thought of the Biblical picture of a cold, stone-hard heart. Rock hard hearts need barriers removed to reach the love of God. The dynamic of the hard heart is that the barrier is not outside the heart. The hard heart is the barrier. Jesus gives us this description of the spirit and the heart of a hard-hearted person.

**Matthew 13:15 (NIV) <sup>15</sup> For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'**

Hard hearts can get to the love of God because hard hearts don't want to get to the love of God. Hard hearts simply want to love themselves. Hard hearts don't want to know the love of God because the hard heart wants to be God for itself.

Hard hearts don't want God, but God loves hard-hearted people. God says this about himself,

**I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:25-26)**

Is your heart hard? Hard hearts are hearts which have never opened up to the love and grace of God. Hard hearts can be hearts who in the past opened up to the love and mercy of God but have since allowed shallow pursuits and the deceitfulness of sin to build from the inside out a barrier of selfishness around the heart.

If your heart is hard, why are you living with a hard heart? God did not make your heart to be hard. God made your heart to be full of love. God made your heart to beat with peace and joy. You don't have to live and die with a hard heart.

Did you know that there is only one force that can change stone? Fire. Do you know one of the strongest Biblical pictures of the Spirit of God? Fire. One of the most powerful dynamics of worship is that God can look around and see who has a hard heart. God can also reach down and pour out the fire of love and the fire of forgiveness. God loves to melt the hard heart and cause it to flow and beat with the fire and power of love. Will you let God direct your hard heart into a heart of love?

There is another type of heart that faces a lot of barriers on its journey to love. Wounded and bruised hearts have a terrible time receiving and flowing with the love of God. Do you have a wounded heart this morning? God knows if the absence of love from your parents wounded your heart. God knows if barrages of negative criticism from significant family members or friends bruised your heart. God knows if abuse from a boyfriend or a teacher damaged your soul. God knows if the break up of your marriage wounded your spirit. God knows if you have taken a very small wound and by holding on to it and failing to release it you have magnified that wound beyond its true power so that it is a growing sore spot in your heart.

Jesus loves to heal wounded hearts. Jesus loves to announce to you and me that we are loved and accepted. Jesus says, "Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. The Bible uses oil to represent the healing presence of the Spirit of God. Jesus loves to pour the oil of love and acceptance into wounded hearts.

If your heart is wounded, can you envision Jesus directing your heart into the love of God because he pours the healing oil of love into your life?

Hard hearts need change. Wounded hearts need healing. Powerful hearts also need direction. What are powerful hearts? Powerful hearts know how blessed and loved they are. Powerful hearts know how much impact they can have on people and their world. Powerful hearts like to run hard, beat fast, and claim the prize of life.

Problems come when powerful hearts run the wrong race. Many powerful hearts look back at the end of life only to discover they wasted too much energy, too much time, too much life running after career, money, pleasure, and worldly dreams.

Powerful hearts are so eager to run and win that they too easily forget that they were made to race for God and Godly victories. Powerful hearts need Jesus to be their charioteer to direct them to run the right race.

Do you have a powerful heart? Do you like to run wild and strong? Do you like to win at life? God desires to direct your heart so that you will not waste your life. If you have a powerful heart, God knows how to let you know if you are wasting your life? The only question is, "Will you let him direct you in the right race to run?"