

Shared Lives

Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-10

Song: “People Need the Lord”

Loving people can be inconvenient. The apostle Paul was familiar with inconvenient love. Today’s passage recounts Paul’s relationship to the Thessalonians and reminds us that shared love involves shared lives.

Paul could have asked for financial support as he lived among and taught the Thessalonians. He was, after all, an apostle who risked his life for the gospel. Paul, however, took pains to ensure that his efforts to communicate the gospel to the Thessalonians wouldn’t be hindered by perceptions of ulterior motives, such as greed or seeking glory for himself. He and his companions worked among the Thessalonians day and night in order to support themselves. Paul also ministered to others according to their needs, not his. That is why Paul behaved both with the humility of a child and the attentive care of a nursing mother. And Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica, though inconvenient, was both fruitful and regret-free.

All believers share their everyday lives with someone. Sharing our lives well, however, requires humility and wisdom from God. Jesus, at great cost, came to this earth to demonstrate the ultimate example of inconvenient love.

Father, help me to share my life with others faithfully. In Jesus’ name, amen.

November 9–15. **Maureen Fowler** is a sinner saved by grace who shares life with her husband, two children, and a couple of mischievous cats.

Light and Darkness

You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth (Ephesians 5:8-9).

Scripture: Ephesians 5:8-16

Song: “Like a Skin”

A butterfly can't turn back into a caterpillar. Its body is permanently transformed. Similarly, Christians have been fundamentally changed from people of spiritual darkness to people who have the light of Christ. However, while the butterfly has only to follow instinct after its transformation, the Christian's life journey involves more.

Today's passage clarifies a believer's call to live a transformed life. Although the Christian life is one of dependence on God, it is not a passive life. For the Christian to reflect the light of Christ, he or she must “find out what pleases the Lord” (5:10). Believers must also live wisely while “making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil” (v. 16). Furthermore, Christians must “have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them” (v. 11).

Actively following God brings His light and love to others. And, Christian, this fallen world contains plenty of darkness that needs to be scattered! God knows you need His help to fight evil, and He doesn't make it burdensome to find out what pleases Him. He wants His children to be fruitful and blessed. He gives us His Spirit, His Word, and a church of fellow transformed travelers to encourage and nourish us in our Christian walk.

Father, help me to embrace Your call to be among those who reflect You well in the world. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Whoevers

Whoever believes in [Jesus] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:18).

Scripture: John 3:16-21

Song: "God So Loved"

Where is the most unusual place you've seen John 3:16 posted? Perhaps you've noticed it printed on the bottom of a fast-food drink cup or written on the black under-eye lines of a professional athlete. John 3:16 is undoubtedly a highly recognized Bible verse. However, recognition is not the same as understanding. John 3:16 doesn't refer to a feel-good love capable of replication by human effort. It's about the fierce, divine, sacrificial, committed love God has for all the "whoevers" in the world.

Jesus came to sacrifice himself because God's perfectly intertwined love and justice required it. Otherwise, all the whoevers would remain hopelessly separated from God by sin. The verses that comes after John 3:16 remind us that while Jesus died to save everyone, it is those who believe in Him who move from "whoever does not believe stands condemned" (v. 18) to "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (v. 16).

Jesus came to rescue the world because the world needed a rescuer. People who don't believe they are sick don't go to the doctor. People who don't believe they have sinned against God won't respond to a Savior. Which kind of "whoever" are you?

Father God, thank You for sending Your one and only Son to be the world's Savior. Help many more whoevers see their need for reconciliation with You—and then believe. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Big Reveal

We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3).

Scripture: 1 John 2:28—3:10

Song: “There Will Be a Day”

I confess to crying like a baby after watching videos of soldiers’ surprise homecomings. The surprise of loved ones at the moment they realize who is standing before them captivates me. The post-reveal joy of these family members, who have often endured long and difficult periods of separation, is contagious.

Christians must also endure a waiting period for Christ’s return, which seems long and difficult at times. However, believers will experience an unimaginably glorious reunion with Christ when He comes. The big reveal will be worth the wait.

When Christ appears, we will be transformed bodily and be able to “see him as he is.” Human limitations prevent us from conceptualizing just how wonderful seeing Christ will be. It will exceed our greatest expectations. The hope of Christ’s return helps sustain and guide believers during the wait.

God calls us to follow Christ and love each other until His return. That’s not always easy because the world that was hostile to Christ is often hostile to Christians. However, obeying God and loving fellow brothers and sisters in Christ strengthens our hope and reflects genuine faith. It will also help us to be “confident and unashamed” (2:28) when He returns.

Father, please help me follow You faithfully with a heart filled with hopeful anticipation for Your Son’s return. In Jesus’ name, amen.

No Greater Joy

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth (3 John 4).

Scripture: 3 John 1-4

Song: “Thy Word”

In 2019, several parents were forced to take down joy-filled social media posts announcing their children’s college acceptance letters. These families had been caught in a college admissions scandal that exposed a sad truth: their children’s places at universities were secured by fraud and bribery instead of merit. Their joy, rooted in lies, was short-lived. Today’s passage reminds us that true and lasting joy is found in gospel truth.

John wrote to commend Gaius, one of his “sons” in faith. Other believers had testified to John of Gaius’s faithful adherence to God’s truth. John expresses himself as a parent delighting in the fruit of loving, sacrificial investment in a child’s life. He declares, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

John understood that following God yields benefits that last for eternity, including joy that no earthly achievement can give. Diligently pursuing vocational and educational achievement is not wrong to the extent that believers glorify God and live in a manner consistent with His Word. Indeed, God generously gives people gifts and talents to nurture and develop according to His will and wisdom. However, attempting to engineer true joy apart from God will fail.

God created people to function in relationship with himself and others. Parents are mentors, but not all mentors have to be parents. How can you encourage faithful, godly living in someone’s life today?

Father, help me to walk in truth alongside others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Loving First Place

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us (3 John 9).

Scripture: 3 John 9-12

Song: “Sisters and Brothers”

Some marathon runners go to great lengths, including cheating, as part of their efforts to win a race. Marathon cheaters will ride buses or subways for part of the course and swap bibs with other runners. Cheating at the expense of honest competitors is wrong. However, striving to be first at all costs is a particularly ineffective strategy for advancing God’s kingdom.

The apostle John knew something about dealing with church leaders who liked the praise and position of first place. Today’s passage reminds us of what not to do to support the ministries of fellow believers. Diotrephes liked being first so much that he refused to welcome the apostle John and his companions to his local church. (Imagine viewing the apostle John as an interloper!) Moreover, Diotrephes spread nasty gossip about them and threatened members in the church who wanted to welcome these believers. Diotrephes wanted to protect his own glory instead of supporting the efforts of his Christian brothers and sisters to expand God’s kingdom.

Christians should encourage and support each other’s God-honoring ministries. My church periodically sets time aside for the entire congregation to pray for other ministries in our valley. God’s glory is more important than the glory of any local church or their leaders. The authentic ministries of other believers don’t pose a threat. They are cause for celebration.

Father, help me to heartily encourage and support the ministries of my fellow believers. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Sibling Love

Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other (1 John 3:13-14).

Scripture: 1 John 3:11-24

Song: “Love One Another”

After a much beloved and wanted baby was stillborn, my brothers and sisters in Christ demonstrated God’s love to me. Believers from my church babysat our oldest daughter while we made funeral arrangements and attended doctor visits. Two weeks of meals were quietly delivered to our home. Fellow believers I hadn’t seen in years showed up in support at my daughter’s funeral. The love and care I received from my brothers and sisters in Christ illustrate an important truth from today’s passage: a mark of authentic Christian faith is love for other believers.

God is serious about believers loving one another. Jesus laid down His life for us, and we are to follow Him in sacrificial love for our brothers and sisters. How that love is demonstrated varies according to the individual person and the need. However, the Scripture says, “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (3:18).

I marvel at how God makes believers His children through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and consequently, those believers are brothers and sisters to each other. Not that relating to each other is always easy. I confess to being both blessed and hurt by people in the church. Still, I wouldn’t trade my perfectly imperfect family in Christ for the world.

Father, help me to love my brothers and sisters the way that You love me. In Jesus’ name, amen.