

How to Stay Close to God

2 Thessalonians 3

INTRODUCTION:

- There's an old tale about an old farmer and his wife driving down a long country road. They had been married for years, they had raised their children, and they worked closely together on the farm daily.
- As they were driving, the woman began to think back over the years and how things had changed. About that time, they passed another truck with a much younger couple who were obviously in love. While the young man sat proudly in the driver's seat, his sweetheart sat right in the middle of the front seat snuggled up under his free arm.
- At that moment, the lady said to her husband, "We used to sit like that, but we never do anymore. Why don't we sit like that anymore?"
- The farmer simply replied, "Well, I haven't moved."
- This funny story reminds us of a simple truth: *When we don't feel close to God, we need to be reminded that it wasn't God that moved.*
- One of the challenges we all face is staying close to the Lord. As we finish 2 Thessalonians, Paul presents three practical principles that will help believers stay close to God.

BIBLE STUDY:

1. Focus on Prayer (vs. 1-2)
 - a. Paul opens the last chapter with a call to pray.
 - b. First, Paul encourages them to pray for the proclamation of the message (vs. 1).
 - i. The term "free course" is a word taken from athletic games that simply means "to run." Paul desired the Gospel to freely sprint all over the Roman Empire.
 - ii. Paul understood that if the Gospel had the freedom to run God would "be glorified."
 - c. Second, Paul encourages them to pray for the protection of the messenger (vs. 2).
 - i. Paul desired to be "delivered." This carries the idea of being rescued from danger.
 - ii. We live in a world that is hostile toward true, biblical Christianity. There is an increase of "unreasonable" and "wicked" men.
 - d. God's people must pray.
 - i. Isn't it an incredible thought that the Apostle Paul wanted these Thessalonian Christians to pray for him?
 - ii. What does it mean to you when someone asks you to pray for them?
 - iii. What does it mean to you when someone says they have prayed for you?
 - iv. Do you pray for your pastor as he proclaims the Gospel?
 - v. TIP: Use this to promote the monthly day of prayer – do we take advantage of this? If we are too busy to pray, we are too busy.
2. Trust God's Promises (vs. 3)
 - a. Christians must believe God daily. His promises should be our daily nourishment that we feed on for our sustenance.
 - b. The promises of God teach us Who God is.
 - i. The character of God is the basis for our Christian confidence.
 - ii. This verse tells us that God is faithful. This is Who God is – it doesn't matter what we think or how we feel. Read 2 Timothy 2:13.
 - c. The promises of God teach us what God does.
 - i. He establishes us – He sets us firm in Him. God puts a guard around His own.
 - ii. Read Job 1:10 and discuss the implications.
 - d. If you are going to stay close to God, you must learn to believe God's every promise.
 - e. Discuss: What are your favorite promises of God? Why?

- f. Application: Take a verse like Philippians 4:13. Read through the verse multiple times, emphasizing a different word each time.
 - i. My: I am God's child – I belong to Him and He belongs to me...
 - ii. God: The Creator and Sustainer of the universe; the One True God...
 - iii. Shall: God will do this!
 - iv. Etc.
3. Follow God's Prescription (vs. 4-18)
 - a. If we want to stay close to God, we must do so on His terms. We don't get to follow God any way that we choose. God is God. He is the Creator and we are accountable to Him.
 - b. God's prescription begins with a commitment to do His will (vs. 4-5). Vs. 4 makes it clear that we cannot be passive in obeying the Lord. We must make up our minds that we want to do God's will. Our motto regarding God's will should be "nothing more, nothing less, nothing else."
 - c. Discuss: What does the Bible say about God's will for our lives? It's actually not that mysterious! It is God's will that we are:
 - i. Saved – 1 Timothy 2:3; 2 Peter 3:9
 - ii. Spirit-Filled – Ephesians 5:17
 - iii. Sanctification (separation from sin) – 1 Thessalonians 4:3
 - iv. Submissive to: God (James 4:7); one another (Eph. 5); spiritual leaders (Hebrews 13:7, 17); government (Romans 13
 - v. Suffer – 1 Peter 3:17
 - vi. Thankful – 1 Thessalonians 5:18
 - d. We cannot be passive about God's will, we must determine to be productive (vs. 6-18). In these verses, Paul speaks out against laziness.
 - i. In vs. 6-11 Paul instructs us to avoid the lazy.
 - ii. In vs. 12-15 Paul instructs us to admonish the lazy.

CONCLUSION:

- In verses 16-18 Paul closes with a prayer for the Thessalonians to experience the peace that only God can provide. They needed it in their day; we need it in ours.
- Thousands of people each year visit the Winchester Mansion in San Jose, California. This massive structure was built by Sarah Winchester, the widow of the gun company owner. For thirty-eight years, from 1884 until her death in 1922, the house was under constant construction. Teams of carpenters, masons and other workers were employed around the clock. Various stories have been told about the reason for this unusual practice. Most center on Mrs. Winchester's belief that she either was haunted or would be haunted by the ghosts of those killed by her husband's weapons unless she kept building her house. Others claim that she thought she would not die as long as building continued.
- Whatever the reason, she continued ordering more renovations and construction as long as she lived. There are more than 10,000 windows in the Winchester Mansion, doorways and stairs that lead to blank walls, and some 160 rooms in total. It is estimated that she spent more than \$70,000,000 in today's money on largely pointless construction—all in a desperate search for peace that was ultimately doomed to fail.
- Many people today are seeking peace through equally fruitless means. They turn to pleasure, drugs, alcohol, immorality, wealth and other dead-end avenues. Like the staircases that lead nowhere in the Winchester Mansion, pursuing such paths will never bring peace. Instead we find peace when we follow the path that God has given us in His Word. Those who keep the law of God in their hearts and obey it in their actions add peace to their lives.

APPLICATION: Choose 1 or more of the lesson points and discuss how they can go to work in that area:

- Prayer
- Exercising belief in the promises of God
- Following God's plan for peace