

Suppose with me for a moment that a magazine (like Time magazine) came out with an article about the **25 most influential people** in America. Now I am **not** going to have you imagine the unlikely scenario that your name or my name appears on that list... but I **would** like for you to imagine the opening sentence of that article saying: “*These are not necessarily the most **powerful** people... but they are the most **influential**.”*

... [P A U S E] ...

Would that leave you a little confused? How could a person be distinguished as one of the most **influential** persons in our nation... and not also be seen as **powerful**? Aren't these synonymous...? (Don't they go hand-in-hand?) How can you be influential... and not have power over others...?

Well... the year was 1996... and Time magazine actually **did** have such an article... and guess what... That **was** their opening sentence. (They **made** such a distinction.)

It took an intellect like Timothy Kellar (who wrote about Time's article) to explain for **me** that there **is** a difference... Furthermore... our recognizing this difference... between being powerful... and being influential... (I think) will help us appreciate (and learn from) our passage of study today in 1st Thessalonians. ... Here is what Kellar says:

Power changes people from the outside in; influence changes people from the inside out. When you have power, that means you have money or you have government behind you. In power, you bring coercive force to bear on the outside of the person, on their behavior. So they change because they have to.

In influence, you target the insides. You target the heart, the mind. You change their views. Therefore, the people change because they want

to, not because they have to. Therefore, we can actually say power changes from the outside in, influence from the inside out, but actually, only changing people from the inside out is really changing people.

Last week I was discussing with you the “Cancel Culture” we are living in today. This is where **dominate** voices in our cultural try to bully everyone into **accepting** an ever-changing narrative and belief system that they want. Right now it is a powerful tool of the progressive left. They use public shame on social media and other mass information sources to force anyone with a different view or opinion of theirs... to be silent... loose credibility... and even their job. ... I also shared with you that research out of the Michigan State University Media Center is claiming that the “Cancel Culture” has been **ineffective** at actually changing people.

(In other words)... cancel culture may be **powerful**... but it is not **influential**. ...And which do you think is more likely to bring **lasting** change (power... or influence)...? ... The answer is **influence**... of course!

One of the most well-known facts *about why communism failed in the Soviet Union* was because... though on the **outside** people mouthed the various sorts of platitudes about communism... on the **inside** they were deeply cynical. (They didn’t believe it.) They had been changed from the outside - **in**. ... Therefore... they hadn’t really been changed. If you’re going to be changed... you have to be changed - from the inside **out**.

What an example we **also** have in the Apostle Paul about the difference between power and influence. He didn’t have any power at all. He was without military... civil... and government authority. Yet he changed people. And this man went from town to town with a message that was literally an **offense** to the Jews... and was ludicrous foolishness to the

Greeks. He came preaching: “*All of you, even the most cultured, are sinners, and there is no hope for you unless you believe that an uneducated and poor Jew (Jesus) came back to life... after being killed... which proves He is the Son of God.*” ... What an extremely UNpopular message!

And yet... when Paul had gone to Thessalonica.... he began to preach this gospel... and people were converted! ... The whole town was in such an incredible uproar... Paul had to leave for his life... under cover of night. ... And every time he tried to come back... it was too dangerous.

The Apostle Paul moved on to other cities... with no power... and with a completely unpalatable message. Yet the gospel continued to convert souls. People’s lives were changed. ... How could that be?

Well... make no mistake about it. It was God Who made the change in them... But He used Paul (as His instrument) for changing people from the inside out. ... How did He use Paul for creating conditions for a change from the inside out...? ... What are those conditions? What can we do to foster such real change in others?

Every one of us has close family members... or we have other relatives... friends... or we have just people around us... that we know need to be changed. ... They’re unhappy. ... They’re miserable. ... They’re in trouble. We want to change them... and most of us have tried to change them from the outside in. ... We’ve tried the power effect. We’ve manipulated. We’ve done all sorts of things to bring them around... to do the right thing... but we can’t do it. Anybody who has any kind of concern for people is going to say: “How do I change people from the inside out?”

Today we are going to explore how Paul fostered change from the inside out. The first thing we will see is that *he gave his heart away and he let them know it*. ... The only possible explanation for why Paul was able to go into these towns with a totally unpalatable message and without any power of his own... and change people - is because his message was true (yes!) but also because he loved these people – and they knew it! ... He had given his heart away to them. He had invested in them. That’s why they listened to the truth that he gave them. Period.

There are people you can be very involved with... and yet... when you see them in trouble... it (just) doesn’t cost you. ... Your joy is not bound up with them. You haven’t really made the investment. They know it... and you know it. ... Paul... however... in his language here... shows he has made a tremendous personal investment in these people.

1 Thes 2:17

Paul hadn't moved on from Thessalonica only to forget about them. He didn't treat them like one-time customers who bought his product and were now on their own to make it work (“out of sight, not out of mind.”)

This verse is most revealing of Paul’s feelings for those believers. He used the term of endearment in addressing them again: **brothers**. And then he described his departure from them... as a turning away forced on him... by circumstances beyond his control.

To make his point... Paul uses one of the more remarkable metaphors in all his letters. The phrase “*torn away from you*” here in verse 17 is a word that is found nowhere else in the New Testament. It creates a graphic

image. The word (literally) means “we have been orphaned from you.” Paul and his companions have been “*orphaned*” (“torn away from”) these new believers.

Paul has already used several family metaphors in this letter. So far we have seen him say that he was as a “small child” among them (v. 7)... then a “nursing mother” (v. 8) and this was followed by “a caring father” (v. 11).

Returning to the family metaphor... (now) he presents himself and Silas as “orphans.” The metaphor works in this case because the two of them are the ones “*away from home*”... in terms of their relationship to the Thessalonian believers.

For most of us... it does not take much imagination to picture the powerful image that Paul had in mind. ... Just recall a child brought kicking and screaming into a church nursery... or a preschool playroom... or a kindergarten class... and then Mom and Dad tiptoeing away. ... Some children with extreme separation anxiety would spend the whole time trying to escape their perfectly safe and kid-friendly environment... to find their way back to the secure embrace of their parents' arms. ... Paul and his companion mourned ... like children who had been violently abducted. They hated to leave the Thessalonians and desperately wanted to see them again.

Because of this deep feeling... Paul and Silas had made a determined attempt to see them. The Greek word translated “*endeavored more eagerly,*” means that Paul did not delay... nor did he put forth a token effort only. ... Rather... he and Silas had used all their might and used it speedily in their efforts to come to them.

But he is not finished yet. He employs yet another strong word that we read as “*with great desire.*” This Greek word is very surprising. ἐπιθυμία You see... elsewhere in the New Testament the word is translated into English as “lust.” And sometimes “covet.” ... The vast majority of times that it is mentioned... it is in a condemning manner. However here ... it has a positive connotation. They had a very strong desire... (an almost of fierce passion.) The Apostle goes to great lengths to express the strength of his feelings for them.

1 Thes 2:18

Paul and his companions had tried to return to Thessalonica on several occasions because of the intense longing they felt for their brethren. The care and feeding of new Christians was not just an obligation those missionaries felt toward God. It was something they longed with all their hearts to be able to do. Paul’s love for them was costly and his joy was bound up with them.

Paul blamed **Satan** for his failure to be able to return. (Should we blame Satan for all our hardships?) ... Was Satan responsible(?)... or was God(?)... or were other people(?) ... Well regardless of who was involved on the human level... the ultimate leader of this kind of opposition is Satan.

Paul recognized a difference between this kind of a hardship and the hardship that Luke wrote about in Acts 16. During the second missionary journey... Paul and his team kept trying to go to different cities around Asia Minor. “*Comm’on let’s go to Mysia...*” And Paul determined that it was **God** (not Satan) Who said “*No!*” ... “*OK then let’s go to Bithinia...*” But

again God (not Satan) said “No!” And this happened several more times – and each time Paul saw that it was God preventing them from bringing the Gospel to those areas. This time... however... it was Satan who kept them from going to Thessalonica.

The Greek word translated *hindered* is a military term that referred to the breaking up of bridges and roads to slow the invading army’s progress. In spiritual terms... Satan gets in the way of God’s work. He breaks up the paths of the gospel and tears down the bridges between people that make evangelism (and all ministry) - possible.

But even when the devil tries to *chop up* the road that lies ahead... (apparently blocking our advance)... God’s hidden plan is never wrecked. Satan may *cut in on* us... preventing us from doing what (for the moment) seems best *to us*... But God’s ways are always better than ours. Stop and consider if Paul HAD been able to go and see them. He would not have needed to write this letter that we are studying. And this letter has strengthened millions of believers for 2,000 years. ... (And this letter teaches us so much about Jesus’ return... that we don’t find detailed anywhere else.)

Don’t you LOVE TO SEE Satan’s roadblocks turn into greater blessings for God’s church...? I wonder how many “better blessings” we are experiencing right now... or are about to experience... as Satan thinks he is tearing up the road before us... but God is using it for a great purpose of His... (a better blessing!) ... [P A U S E] ...

1 Thes 2:19-20

He says, *“I’m looking forward to the day when Christ comes back and his presence breaks in, and I want to stand there before the throne, and you will be my crown.”* Now this is **not** a crown like the jeweled headpiece for a king or queen. The Greek word “ στεφανοζ “ was more like a wreath awarded to the winner of an athletic contest. The Thessalonians will be Paul’s victory wreath.

Do you work for the Lord and His kingdom with any such motive or anticipation? (LISTEN!) Wanting to see those he had ministered to – *perfected and standing before the Lord with him* – was a part of Paul’s heart that brought change to the Thessalonians from the inside out. ... Do you have this vision... as you minister to others using the spiritual gifts God has given you?

Is anyone going to be in heaven that will come up to you and thank you for having a part in their spiritual development? ... Have you been seeking deep fellowship with other believers (that actually costs you something) as an investment in their life?

Do you think that you might hear: *“Thank you, my friend for that kind word of encouragement when I was about to go under!...”* ... *“Thank you, my friend. You never knew how much it meant to me when you brought that meal over to our house...”* *“...when you reached out to my wayward son/daughter...”* ... *“when you worshipped so sincerely and inspired me to focus more on being in God’s presence...”* ... *“when you prayed for me – and then followed up by asking me about it a week later...”* ... *“when you volunteered to serve in the kitchen...”* ... *“when you greeted me at the door every Sunday with a warm smile and vital handshake – even though I knew you were hurting with your own problems...”* ... *“when you sent to our*

Country the missionary who told me about Jesus...” ... “when you taught me important Bible truth in KIDS Church...”

Paul loved people. He lived for people. He spent his life winning people to Christ and building them up in the faith. His glory and joy was to see people saved and established in the things of God. His ambition was to see them (at last) - as crowns and trophies... to put at Jesus' feet.

Paul's actions were governed by what God would do in the future. He knew that Jesus Christ would return and reward him for his faithful ministry... and on that day... the saints from Thessalonica would bring glory to God and joy to Paul's heart. *“It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus.”*

1 Thes 3:1-2

Therefore—this important word ties this chapter back in with what Paul had talked about in the previous chapter: the family relationship that exists in the church. He had been a mother to the church, a father to them, and a brother. He had led them to the Lord, and he loved them. He said that they would be his glory and his joy at the coming (*parousia*) of Christ, at the appearance of the Lord Jesus when all believers will receive their rewards.

Now because Paul had a real affection for them, he was frustrated in not being able to return to them. He had been hindered by Satan. Paul had to leave Thessalonica so quickly that there were many unfinished teachings and doctrines that he had not been able to develop fully. He not only longed to return... but he wondered about the future of the believers there. Paul desired to comfort them. In other words... he was demonstrating the thing he mentioned at the beginning of the letter—a labor of love.

Love is not affection or just a nice... comfortable... warm feeling around your heart. ... Love seeks the welfare of another. And it is usually costly. If you love someone... you will seek their welfare and you actually would jeopardize your own life for the person whom you love.

Apparently neither Paul or Silas could return to Thessalonica... perhaps for legal reasons. It has been postulated that when Jason was beaten and imprisoned when they could not find Paul... that Jason was released on the condition that Paul could not come back. ... So Paul sent Timothy.

Timothy's commission was clear. He was to "establish" the Thessalonian believers. The word is $\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\iota\zeta\omega$ stērizō . It means to fix firmly.

An illustration is found in Israel's war with Amalek (Exod. 17). Joshua was down in the valley in the thick of the battle. Moses, Aaron, and Hur (the son of Caleb) were on the hilltop. As long as Moses kept his hands upraised... Israel won. ... But when his arms grew tired and dropped down... Amalek won. There was only one solution. Moses sat on a stone... and his two companions "stayed up" (stērizō) his hands. ... Timothy's mission was to hold them up... to make them firm and solid in the faith.

1 Thes 3:3-4

To further protect his readers, Paul reminds them of two important theological truths that put their suffering into perspective. First, believers have been destined for affliction (3:3). Just as Christ was destined for the Cross of suffering before receiving the crown of glory, so we also have our own crosses to endure in this life. These aren't signs of God's hatred of us or His displeasure. They're part of God's predetermined plan for making us

more like Christ. Second, Paul had clearly warned them in advance that they should be prepared because affliction would definitely come (3:4). Knowing ahead of time that persecution and affliction are on their way helps us to be ready when they come.

I realize that I have been quoting Chuck Swindoll quite a bit lately... but I hardly know of a better wordsmith when it comes to communicating God's Word. So here (once again) is Swindoll's take:

Writer Philip Yancey notes:

I have never read a poem extolling the virtues of pain, nor seen a statue erected in its honor, nor heard a hymn dedicated to it. Pain is usually defined as "unpleasantness."

Christians don't really know how to interpret pain. If you pinned them against the wall, in a dark, secret moment, many Christians would probably admit that pain was God's one mistake. He really should have worked a little harder and invented a better way of coping with the world's dangers.

Yancey's right. Pain and its companions—affliction, suffering, hardship, adversity—are often seen as the invading enemies of life. Whenever we spy one of those coming at us, we tend to turn and run. Truth be told, in our comfort-at-all-costs culture, when our comfort zones get the squeeze, we get angry. Yet according to the Bible, pain is a necessary part of life. And although we may not like it, we can learn to grow through it by learning its lessons.

While enduring trials, we can easily be disturbed by questions that shake us to the core.

- Doesn't God care about me anymore?
- Didn't He promise to never leave me or forsake me?
- How can a good, powerful God let this happen?
- If God can stop this, why doesn't He?

- Is it my fault that these things are happening to me?

When afflictions shake us... we can begin to question God's love for us... the truth of the gospel... and the hope of ever being delivered from the pain and suffering. ... This is exactly why Paul sent Timothy: to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians so doubts wouldn't cause their faith to crumble in the midst of their trials. ... (LISTEN!) Nothing happens to us accidentally. God has determined what is best for us and how we can best be formed into the image of Christ.

Human nature being what it is... we will learn some things only the hard way. ... If we are in trouble and need help and advice... we do not run over our list of friends and say: "*Ah, there's so-and-so. He's never had a day's trouble in his life: he is just the one I'll seek my help from!*"

No... because we know that there are qualities of character that are brought out only by affliction... we usually seek those who have been through the fire before. We want their help in our hour of need.

Suffering... then... is part of the very process of living out the Christian life. It makes us useful to God for His work in other people's lives. Just remember: God watches over his children... and the affliction that comes to them is only such as He permits. And know (as well) that it is inevitable. We are appointed to it.

What a good thing it was that Paul had not preached the false "name it-claim it" message that is so popular today: "*God wants you to be healthy and wealthy.*" The so-called "prosperity gospel" of men like Joel Osteen would not have taken the Thessalonians through the onslaught of the persecution that burst upon them soon after they were saved.

1 Thes 3:5-8

There is practically an audible “**whew!!!**” in the sense of relief that Paul felt when Timothy returned with the welcome news that the Thessalonians had indeed successfully resisted Satan’s temptations. Whereas Timothy had been sent to inquire about their “faith”... he reported back about their “faith **and love.**” ... “Now I live... I really live” - is a very strong word. It’s like water on a dying fish. “I’ve revived!”

Again Paul dipped his pen in the ink to assure his converts that *his life was linked with theirs.* The fact that his life was linked with theirs... is why the Thessalonians were changed from the inside out! ... Converts are not just statistics to be reported triumphantly in the next prayer and support letter. ... No... indeed! ... Paul’s converts were a vital part of his life.

... [P A U S E] ...

Today we have been noticing how Paul was used by God to initiate change from the inside out. *He gave his heart away and he let them know it.* ... He invested in them. ... And yet there is one more thing that is important for us to acknowledge. We are going to see this next week... when we cover verses 9-10.

1 Thes 3:9-10

Don’t you just love what Paul says...? “*I’m looking forward to seeing you **and addressing your shortcomings.**” ... How would you like to get a letter from a friend and have them tell you... “*Hey, I can’t wait to come and correct you on several matters!*”? “*Ooops! Sorry. I think I am out of town that week when you’re coming...*”*

But Paul could get away with it... because they knew his love for them. But here is the second important thing to note. Paul gave his heart away – but **NOT** his head! ... He keeps his head. If you give away your heart and your head... or if you keep your heart and your head... there will be no change from inside out.

So... how do you know if you've given away your heart - **and** your head? (With THIS I will conclude today...) ... When you give away your heart **and** your head... you really don't want that person's joy. You don't really want that person's holiness. You don't really want that person's health. What you **want**... is that person's approval. You might even want that person's dependence. (You want that person's needing of you.) That is self-love!

One way you can tell... is that you will not give them criticism. You're afraid to say anything negative to them about their behavior... attitudes... or beliefs... because you cannot bear the thought of their being unhappy with *you*. ... A clear sign of a person who has given away their heart **and** their head... is that they are so afraid of that person's disapproval... Verse 10 shows that THIS was not Paul.

Let God use you as His instrument for bringing real change (change from the inside out.) Give your heart away... but not your head.