

**Don't Be Fooled**  
**The Marks of a Healthy Church**  
**2 Thessalonians 1:1-4**

**Introduction:** Last month, Thomas Crane preached a sermon on the Mission of the Church, and in it, he said something about the work of Satan that was particularly fitting for this series. Crane said,

**“Satan is doing his best work when he sticks closest to the truth.”<sup>1</sup>**

That is such a true statement about the work of Satan, and it's why christian religion is so effective at destroying Christians. Satan's Plan A to steal, kill, and destroy; his Plan A to try and point the world away from the life that only comes through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is not to thrust atheism to the forefront of society because he knows that will never work. In general, mankind knows there is a creator, even if they refuse to live like it.

Therefore, the way to lead people to live like atheists is to fool them into moving away from the eternal life of God that is only experienced by His grace through faith as we walk in submission to the leadership of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 2:20; 5:1-26) and into something they believe is better. Specifically, the best way to derail the abundant life of Christ from flourishing in and through a local church is to offer it a pseudo gospel called Christian religion that gets them consumed with all kinds of things they claim to be doing in the name of Jesus, rather than being consumed with Jesus.

When Satan can get Christians to be consumed with the power and prestige they find in the institutions they made in the name of Jesus; when he can get them to be allegiant to the customs, traditions, and practices they made in the name of Jesus; when he can get them consumed with rules and regulations that they believe make them more righteous and deserving of God, more reflective of the glory of God; then he can lead them straight away from the joy and power of the abundant eternal life of God that is experienced only in an abiding relationship with Jesus and into a lifeless man dependent religious death in the name of Jesus.

As infamously illustrated in the 1970s Monty Python movie, “The Life of Brian,” a guy named Brian was running away from a group of people who believed him to be the Messiah. As he ran away, one of his sandals came off. When he went back to get it, he realized the mob would catch him if he tried to put it back on, so he took off running again. However, in seeing Brian leave the shoe, the group of people chasing him stopped to pick it up and ended up in a massive argument on whether or not Brian left the shoe as a sign for them to only wear one shoe, spend their life gathering shoes, or live a life focused on their head and face instead of their feet. Meanwhile, another person argued that they didn't need to be concerned about the shoe at all because they needed to focus on lifting up the gourd that Brian once held. The entire movie is a well-deserved mockumentary of

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<sup>1</sup> Crane, Thomas. 29 June 2025. <https://daretoventure.org/sermons/the-mission-of-the-church/>

Christian religion, a religion that the atheists and agnostics who comprised Monty Python sadly saw on full display in the culture around them.

Now, at first glance, that sounds like a massively exaggerated mockery of Christians being consumed with everything but Jesus while claiming it's all about Jesus, but sadly, it isn't. I'm not going to take the time to point out specific examples because history, as well as the current culture, has enough examples that anybody willing to look at things objectively will easily see them. The specifics are not my point anyway, but rather the predictable tendency that Satan takes advantage of. He doesn't offer the church atheism, he offers the church Christian religion that in all practical ways functions like atheism while claiming to be the ultimate form of faith in Christ!

**“Satan is doing his best work when he sticks closest to the truth.”<sup>2</sup>**

Satan doesn't have to come right out and offer people a life without God because he can fool people into ending up in the same place by simply offering them a life consumed with things about or for Christ rather than Christ Himself; a life consumed or defined by the things they do in the name of Christ rather than being in a relationship with Christ.

This has been Plan A of Satan from day one, and it's why so many of the teachings of Christ were trying to get his listeners to realize how they had willingly been fooled into thinking religion and a relationship with God were one and the same. It's why so many of the letters in the New Testament address the subject, and it's why Paul found himself needing to write another letter to the church in Thessalonica not long after he wrote them the first one.

“Almost all conservative scholars believe that 2 Thessalonians was written from Corinth. The basis for this conclusion is that Paul, Silas, and Timothy were present together in Corinth (Acts 18:5). They are not referred to in the Bible as being together thereafter, though they might have been. Since 1 Thessalonians was written from Corinth (see *Introduction* to 1 Thes.), and since the topics treated in the second epistle seem to grow out of situations alluded to in the first epistle and reflect a very similar situation in the Thessalonian church, Corinth seems the logical site of composition. For the reasons mentioned above, it appears that 2 Thessalonians was written quite soon after 1 Thessalonians, perhaps within 12 months. This would place the date of composition in the early a.d. 50s and would make this epistle the third of Paul's canonical writings (assuming Galatians was his first).”<sup>3</sup>

“In the time since Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, it seems that several factors he addressed in that letter had intensified: persecution, uncertainty about Christ's return, and idleness in the church. The persecution and suffering mentioned in the first letter were still continuing (2 Thess 1:5–6; 1 Thess 1:6;

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<sup>2</sup> Crane, Thomas. 29 June 2025. <https://daretoventure.org/sermons/the-mission-of-the-church/>

<sup>3</sup> Constable, T. L. (1985). [2 Thessalonians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 712–713). Victor Books.

2:14; 3:3–4). Despite Paul’s teaching, some people in the community were apparently saying that the Day of the Lord had already come (2 Thess 2:1–2; compare 1 Thess 5:1–11). In addition, some of the Thessalonian Christians apparently had decided that they did not need to work for a living (2 Thess 3:10–12; compare 1 Thess 4:11–12; 5:14).”<sup>4</sup>

In the church in Thessalonica, there was a pronounced effort to fool people into believing things that were entirely false. However, as Satan often does, these falsehoods were camouflaged with enough bits and pieces of the truth that some people began to believe them, and they were trying to persuade others to do the same. As such, Paul writes a letter to them that both applauds what is true and right about the Gospel and within the Church of Thessalonica, while pointing out what is false—that is, what some had been fooled into believing is true when, in fact, it is not.

So, let’s jump into Paul’s second letter to the church in Thessalonica and start unpackaging what he sent them to try and keep them from being fooled by Satan. As with any good letter, the first part is a greeting; however, as it is with every greeting in the epistles of the Bible, it’s not simply a polite formality, but rather a Holy Spirit-inspired statement that provides nourishment for our faith. Specifically,

**Proposition: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4 provides us with three clear testimonies of a healthy church that should guard us from being fooled into thinking otherwise.**

**The first testimony of a healthy church is that,**

**(1) Its glad submission to Christ is increasing. (1:1-3a)**

- A. 1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly,**
- B. Now let’s dig into this a little.**
- C. 1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:**
- D. First, I want you to notice who wrote it. Paul is the author, but it’s not just coming from him. It’s coming from himself and two others who have invested in the Mission of The Church in Thessalonica—**Silvanus** and **Timothy**.**
  - 1. “Accompanying Paul on his journey were two evangelists. **Silvanus**, also called Silas, was chosen by Paul as a companion after John Mark left him. He

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<sup>4</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [\*Faithlife Study Bible\*](#). Lexham Press.

was a leading brother and a prophet (Acts 15:22, 32). The second was **Timothy**, who was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother, and who had been brought up in a devout way by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5), being instructed in the Old Testament Scriptures from childhood (2 Tim. 3:14–15). These three Christian men had a burden for souls and were fully committed to the task of church planting and preaching. God has given to his church people who care...”<sup>5</sup>

2. **Silvanus** - “He is called Silas in Acts and Silvanus in the Epistles. He, like Barnabas, was a leader in the Jerusalem Church (cf. Acts 15:22–23). He is closely associated with Paul (cf. Acts 15:40; 16:19ff; 17:1–15; 1 Thess. 1:1). He, like Barnabas and Paul, was a prophet (cf. Acts 15:32). He is called an apostle (cf. 1 Thess. 2:6). He, like Paul, was a Roman citizen (cf. Acts 16:37–38). He, like John Mark, is also associated with Peter, even possibly acting as a scribe (cf. 1 Pet. 5:12)”<sup>6</sup>
3. **“Timothy”** - “His name means “one who honors God.” He was the child of a Jewish mother and a Greek father and he lived in Lystra (cf. Acts. 16:1). The Latin translation of Origen’s commentary on Rom. 16:21 says Timothy was a citizen of Derbe. This is possibly taken from Acts 20:4. He was instructed in the Jewish faith by his mother and grandmother (cf. 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14–15). He trusted Christ during Paul’s first missionary journey (cf. Acts 13:49–14:25). He was asked to join Paul and Silas’ missionary team on the second journey (cf. Acts 16:1–5). He was confirmed by prophecy (cf. 1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14). He was circumcised by Paul in order to work with both Jews and Greeks (cf. Acts 16:3). He was a dedicated companion and co-worker of Paul. He is mentioned by name more than any other of Paul’s helpers (17 times in 10 letters, cf. Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; Phil. 1:1; 2:19, 22; Col. 1:5; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2:6; 3:2; 1 Tim. 1:2, 18; 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:2; 3:14–15). Paul affectionately calls him “my child in the faith” (cf. 1 Tim. 1:2); “my beloved son” (cf. 2 Tim. 1:2); and “my true child in a common faith” (cf. Titus 1:4). He was apparently in Rome when Paul was released from prison and accompanied him on his fourth missionary journey (cf. Col. 1:1; Philemon 1). He is called an “apostle” (cf. 1 Thess. 2:6). Two of the three Pastoral Epistles are addressed to him. He is last mentioned in Heb. 13:23.”<sup>7</sup>

- E.** Second, the letter is for every Christian to learn from, but it is written to a specific church in a specific city and therefore needs to be understood in that context.

<sup>5</sup> McNaughton, I. (2008). *Opening up 2 Thessalonians* (p. 20). Day One Publications.

<sup>6</sup> Utley, R. J. (1997). *Paul’s First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians: Vol. Volume 11* (p. 124). Bible Lessons International.

<sup>7</sup> Utley, R. J. (1997). *Paul’s First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians: Vol. Volume 11* (p. 124). Bible Lessons International.

1. **“church”** - “The Greek term *ekklesia* means “the called out ones.” The same term signified called town meetings in Greek cities (cf. Acts 19:32). It was used in the Septuagint to translate *qahal* or “congregation” of Israel. The early Christians saw themselves as the fulfillment and extension of OT Israel.”<sup>8</sup>
  2. **“church of the Thessalonians”** - “The recipients of 2 Thessalonians were Christians in Thessalonica, a city in Macedonia (northern Greece) where Paul and his companions had planted a church (Acts 17:1–9; see the “Introduction to 1 Thessalonians”). This letter does not provide as many clues about the date and place of its writing as 1 Thessalonians (which was sent from Corinth around ad 50–51). Since the two letters cover many of the same issues, 2 Thessalonians was likely written soon after 1 Thessalonians (2 Thess 2:15) near the end of Paul’s second missionary journey (circa ad 49–51).”<sup>9</sup>
- F.** Third, notice that he doesn’t just call them a church, but identifies them as a very specific kind of church. He writes, **“To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”**.
1. **“in God Our Father”** – So many early Jewish Christians were uncomfortable with being identified with gentile Christians, but Paul was not one of them. He makes an emphatic point here when he says that this church, which is mostly comprised of Gentile Christians, were brothers and sisters to himself, Silvanus, and Timothy. God was the father of each of them, making them all equal in the household of God!
  2. **“and the Lord Jesus Christ”** - Furthermore, any group of people can call themselves a church, that is, a gathering of people that claim to be called out for some unique purpose, or belonging to or worshiping a deity, or even belonging to Yahweh. But Paul makes it clear that he’s writing to the group of people who belong to God because of Christ! A Biblical church is none other than those who have been redeemed from the curse of sin and adopted into the household of God through the death, burial, and resurrection of the only one who can—the one and only eternal son of God, Jesus Christ!
- a. 16 “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” (Luke 10:16)**

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<sup>8</sup> Utley, R. J. (1997). [\*Paul’s First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians\*](#): Vol. Volume 11 (p. 124). Bible Lessons International.

<sup>9</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [\*Faithlife Study Bible\*](#). Lexham Press.

b. **6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)**

c. This gold nugget makes what comes next, something some might consider to be nothing more than a polite customary way of greeting people in a letter, to be something much more! Paul then writes,

**G. 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

1. **"1:2 "Grace to you and peace"** Many see this as a combination of the Greek and Jewish greetings. The phrase "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" links the Father and Son by the CONJUNCTION "and" and the SINGLE PREPOSITION, showing Paul's theology of Jesus' deity (just like v. 1).

**Theologically grace always precedes peace."**<sup>10</sup>

2. "grace to you and peace" it adds a phrase which makes explicit *the source* of grace and peace, showing that it comes "*from* God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>11</sup>

3. The **grace** and **peace** that comes from God in Christ is unlike any other! As a matter of fact, if it weren't for the grace of God sending Jesus Christ to be the full satisfaction of His righteous wrath for our sins, then there could be no peace with God and therefore no peace in life. The curse of sin leaves us incapable of living in the eternal life of Christ, meaning we are stuck in a life separated from the one whose life is peace! Therefore, no matter how amazing of a life you can build in this world, as long as your life is separated from His life, there will never be any peace in your life! Inversely, no matter how difficult this life becomes, if your life is in Christ, then peace is the reality of your life, no matter what happens in this life!

**H.** So far, the letter has made it clear that the people he's writing to are those who have been transformed into a church by nothing other than the grace of God through the work of Christ, but he hasn't yet revealed how that context helps us understand what a healthy church looks like. They could be a church needing to repent of things that are causing them to be unhealthy, but they aren't. Paul then writes,

**I. 3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly,**

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<sup>10</sup> Utley, R. J. (1997). [\*Paul's First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians: Vol. Volume 11\*](#) (p. 125). Bible Lessons International.

<sup>11</sup> Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [\*Exposition of I-II Thessalonians\*](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 152–154). Baker Book House.

1. Paul says we should always praise the Lord for you guys because ya'lls faith is increasing! It's growing abundantly! And remember what Biblical faith is. Biblical faith is living our lives in glad submission to Him because we fully trust the work of Christ that gives us the right to be the sons and daughters of God!
2. "'Grows exceedingly' comes from the Greek word *uperauxano*, which in the Greek Bible is used only here and means 'growing more and more'. It implies very vigorous growth. Paul was convinced that they had grown spiritually in a short time and that this was an answer to his prayers (1 Thes. 3:12)."<sup>12</sup>
3. Now this is KEY! In testifying how excited they were that this was a healthy church, Paul and his team did NOT say it was because their faith was perfectly matured and they had everything right. Rather, Paul wrote that they were praising God because their faith in CHRIST and His GOSPEL was GROWING ABUNDANTLY, meaning it was increasing in obvious, observable ways that were spilling over to others!
4. Interestingly, some people think a healthy church isn't one with problems. So let me just say,
  - a. If your church doesn't have a noticeable number of nonbelievers and baby believers who are unsure about walking with Jesus, then your church isn't being faithful to the mission of God and the Church, and as such, your church cannot be called a healthy church.
  - b. Healthy churches should certainly see those who come to Christ grow in their faith. That growth has highs and lows, and certainly if people are truly being led by the Holy Spirit, the trajectory of their faith will be upward. However, because Jesus said if you follow Him, He will make you a fisher of men (Mark 1:17), that means if you are actually growing in Christ you'll be inviting people who don't know Christ to start following Him as well, which means a healthy local church will always have a noticeable amount of nonbelievers and brand new believers who are just beginning their life in Christ!
  - c. Therefore, it turns out that a perfectly cleaned-up church that supposedly has its act all together either exists in a city where every human being in that city has become a follower of Jesus (which isn't going to happen), or they are actually following Satan into a religion in the name of Jesus!—fooled!

**The second testimony of a healthy church is that,**

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<sup>12</sup> McNaughton, I. (2008). [\*Opening up 2 Thessalonians\*](#) (p. 27). Day One Publications.



**(2) Its love for one another is universal and increasingly obvious. (1:3b)**

**A. and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. (1:3b)**

**B.** Now it should be evident that if **“the love of every one of you”** is growing for **“one another,”** then that’s a really good sign of a healthy church. However, I want to take a moment to help you understand just how significant it is that we love one another, and thus how profound a testimony it is to our health as followers of Christ and as a local church.

**C.** In Paul’s first letter to the church in Thessalonica, he wrote,

**D. 11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, 12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1 Thessalonians 3:11-12)**

**E.** Notice to **“make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all”** is necessary for their hearts to be **“blameless in holiness”**. In other words, you cannot call yourself a mature Christian if you do not have the love of God for others increasing and abounding in and through you!

**Note: 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1 John 4:7-8)**

**F.** Logically, then, a church can’t be a healthy church if it doesn’t have the love of Christ for others increasing and abounding in and through it as well!

**Note: 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)**

**G.** Now understand that the “love” the Bible calls us to have is also the love that only the Holy Spirit within us can truly equip us to have and give. The world has its version of it, but it’s a knock-off version of the real thing! The love the Bible calls us to have is an unconditional and unwavering love that is completely committed to giving life to others, no matter if it’s ever repaid or returned. It’s the love that Paul famously described the practical manifestations of it in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a.

**Note: 4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.**



**7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a)**

- H. However, the greatest testimony of this love is not how it is manifested in our lives, but rather in how Christ demonstrated it on the cross!

**Note: 9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10)**

- I. So, circling back to what Paul just said about the church in Thessalonica in the second half of verse three, **“and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.” (1:3b)** tells us that the love of Jesus for us, that intentionally suffered the wrath of God on our sin so that we could be set free from the death it creates in our life now and forever, is the very love that is now present in every born again believer in the church of Thessalonica for every other person in the church in Thessalonica and its growing!!

**This takes us straight to the third testimony of a healthy church in 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4.**

- (3) Its ability to continue to grow in its love for Christ and one another in the midst of persecution and life’s hardships. (1:4)**

- A. **4 Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. (1:4)**
- B. **“Persecutions”** refer to the specific attacks on believers and the church because of their faith in Jesus. Persecution can come in all kinds of forms, from being excluded from relationships, to being expelled or canceled by society, which makes it extremely difficult to earn a living and provide for yourself and your family, to being physically beaten, imprisoned, or even killed.

Note: Hendricksen and Kistemaker noted, “The expression “*all* your persecutions” seems to indicate that of late these hardships had increased rather than decreased.”<sup>13</sup>

- C. **“Afflictions”** refer to the hardships of life that are not unique to being a follower of Christ, but rather to those involved with living on the earth. We all have them. The afflictions some people endure are way harder than what others endure, but

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<sup>13</sup> Hendricksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [\*Exposition of I-II Thessalonians\*](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 155–156). Baker Book House.

the afflictions we endure in this world are because we are born in it, not because we are born of Christ in it!

- D.** However, despite the increased suffering they are having to endure because they refuse to stop sharing the Gospel, sufferings that they are having to endure on top of the heavy life hardships they were already dealing with, they are nonetheless GROWING in their commitment to live fully surrendered to Jesus and loving each other as Christ loves them in a more obvious way than ever before! In other words, the more life throws at them, the more they run to Jesus and abound in His life!!!
- E.** When I was writing this sermon, I couldn't help but think about the believers I had the opportunity to spend time with from Darfur this past May. They have not only dealt with severe persecution for being followers of Jesus, but they have also had to endure the incredible hardships of being an ethnic minority in Sudan. Most of the people of Darfur are Muslim, but the majority ethnic group in Sudan is Arab Muslims who see African Muslims as second-class citizens. There have even been accusations of attempted genocide in the past, accusations that have merit.<sup>14</sup>
- F.** So not only have the Fur people had to deal with the massive hardships of extreme poverty and violent oppression from the majority ethnic group in Sudan, but the tiny number of Christians within the Fur people have the added burden of also being persecuted by their own ethnic group for being Christians! As a result of the civil war, many have fled their homes to live in refugee camps, only to have to deal with religious persecution within the refugee camps! You would think living in a refugee camp is as rock bottom as you can get in life, until you find out that you can still be persecuted for your faith in Christ in the refugee camp!
- G.** However, instead of being discouraged from trusting and following Jesus and reverting to self-preservation, caring only about themselves and their own families, these believers are growing stronger in their resolve to love and follow Jesus and to love and care for one another. They seize any opportunity to deepen their understanding of the Gospel and to support one another in life!
- H.** They are demonstrating the age-old truth that fire doesn't change who you are, it reveals who you are, and that's precisely what was happening with the church in Thessalonica. The hotter the fire of life got, the more evident it became that they were indeed children of God! So, listen: the testimony of a healthy follower of Christ and a healthy local church is not the absence of persecution and trials, but what happens when they come.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjel2nn22z9o>

- I. The Old Testament Scripture I studied in my quiet time this past Monday was Psalm 74. It guided my prayer time for myself and my Monday prayer list. The author of Psalm 74 was totally broken. An enemy had ransacked the temple, and the author was even wondering if God may have forgotten His covenant with Israel (74:20)!!
- J. However, the psalmist also knew that neither his feelings about what was happening nor his ability to explain them changed anything about the authority and power of God. No matter how he felt, he knew God cannot be defeated, and that God's character and trustworthiness are unchanging ... He is the God who works "salvation in the midst of the earth." (74:12)
- K. Therefore, I prayed for myself, my family, and those on my Monday prayer list to be able to hold fast to the truth in the midst of whatever wilderness we find ourselves in. I prayed that we would be able to combat the very real emotions of our fears, our frustrations, our anger, our worries, our brokenness, or even just the unknown, by faithfully walking forward with our heart and eyes fixated on what the Gospel of Jesus Christ has made so clear about who God has been and will always be! I prayed that we would be able to walk forward knowing He is establishing our footsteps on a path that not only has His presence and His glory as our destination but ALSO as our constant and guaranteed reality right now if we will remain steadfast and immovable in our submission to Him and in what He will always lead us to do—love one another as He loves us!

**Challenge: What are the persecutions and the trials of life revealing about your faith in Christ and love for others? What are you doing with what you're learning about yourself?**

Are you praising God for the endurance and strength He's building within you?

Are you repenting where you see weakness and failure, or excusing it?

Are the trials of life and the persecutions you are facing for proclaiming to be a follower of Jesus showing you that you fell in love with religion instead of Jesus?

Jesus told a parable about the serious reality of what we are talking about here.

**14 The sower sows the word. 15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. 16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. 17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. 20 But those that were sown on the good soil are**

**the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." (Mark 1:14-20)**