

Don't Be Fooled ...
About What You Should Remember!
2 Thessalonians 3:3-5

Introduction: The busier life gets, the more disciplined we have to be to remember to do the things we are supposed to do. You would think we wouldn't forget what we need to get done, especially the critical tasks we have to complete, but we often do. I have a couple of software applications that remind me, and I've even built duplicates for some of the tasks between those platforms to help ensure I don't forget some of the most important things. Why do I do that? Well, because I have forgotten some really big things before that you would think you wouldn't forget ... like big things!

For instance, in 1999, I began working for the Florida Baptist Convention. When I got there, they gave me a new planner. Now, to help the younger generations who have no idea what I'm talking about, before smartphones came along, everybody carried around a non-electronic notebook-looking thing called a planner. The most obvious part of it was the calendar, but it also had sections to build task lists, record contacts, take notes in meetings, and other tools to help you maximize your productivity. I've brought one of my older ones to show you.

Interestingly, back then, there were various classes and consultants available to hire for your business or organization to teach you how to effectively utilize your planner. You learned how to evaluate and order appointments and tasks based on their level of importance and urgency. Sounds simple, right? But it wasn't!! Unlike a digital platform that let's you just change the date and time of a reminder or an appointment and it just moves it to where it's supposed to go, every time you made a change in a traditional planner you ended up with a bigger a bigger mess that eventually led to having to take those parts out and rewriting entire sections on new templates and inserting them back into the planner. It's why many people started using sticky notes. When you were done with something, you would just toss it in the garbage and then rearrange your sticky notes to the order you wanted them. But what a mess all those sticky notes made! And Lord help you if one happened to fall off what it was stuck to! It could be lost forever! Transporting those planners, especially when they were full of sticky notes, could get pretty cumbersome as well!

However, no level of planning could get your planner or sticky notes to do what modern calendars and task management software do—alert you that it's time to get something done! If my Administrative Assistant didn't call me about my next appointment or tasks, then there was no other “alert” coming, so you had to be disciplined to look at your calendar and reminders frequently throughout the day! Furthermore, as things developed throughout the day that impacted future tasks and appointments, you had to adjust your task lists and calendar to reflect these changes, which meant erasing items (if they were erasable), marking out items, and writing in new ones.

So what does that have to do with me forgetting to do something big? When I moved to Jacksonville, FL, and started working for the Florida Baptist Convention, I had my own

planner, which was already full of dates that churches and other organizations had scheduled for me to preach. So, when they gave me a new planner, I needed to transfer all those dates to the new calendar. However, in the process of transferring all those dates, I forgot to move one, a big one. A church had scheduled me to preach in their youth revival on a Friday and Saturday night and then preach in their regular Sunday morning worship gathering. I don't know if the pages got stuck together or what, but I didn't move it over. To this day, I have no idea how that happened. The setup for failure was exacerbated by the fact that the pastor who booked me never called to discuss the weekend after he made the booking, over a year before the actual event.

I never heard a thing from him until the Monday morning following the weekend I was supposed to be there. I'll never forget that morning. My Administrative Assistant patched the call through, and I picked it up thinking I was meeting a pastor I had never spoken to before! After all, he hadn't called me for over a year! The call began with him asking me how I was feeling, and I answered with a resounding, "Great!" I then proceeded to tell him that it was the first weekend off I had had in a long time, and that I had spent the entire weekend just hanging out and being lazy with my wife. I even talked about the church we went to and how awesome the sermon was!

After energetically sharing this with a man that I thought I had just met on the phone and who was just being cordial with his question, he then proceeded to tell me how much his students and church missed having me and that they had put flyers up all over the local middle school and high school inviting people to come hear me preach!

Now I have no idea how you could go through that kind of effort to promote an event, but then forget to call me and tell me things like where I was staying and what time I needed to be there. Nonetheless, the ultimate fault was still mine! I totally failed—big time! I didn't show up! To this day, it's the most embarrassing moment of my life. I felt absolutely stupid. I apologized profusely, and although the guy never communicated with me after scheduling me, I didn't say a thing in that context. In addition to the personal guilt I felt, I also had the weight of knowing I held a fairly prominent position in the eyes of one of the largest networks of Baptist churches in the country, and in that very glass house type of position, I had just let down one of the churches in that network in a big way, and did so because of a stupid mistake on my part. I honestly wondered if I would be fired, but God, the Pastor, and the Executive Director of the Convention were very gracious!

I also knew that could never happen again, so I became even more intentional and disciplined with my calendar and task organization strategy. Now you would think, because I'm so passionate about preaching, I could never forget something related to that. However, the fact of the matter is that passion and memory are not always connected. For instance, have you ever forgotten somebody's birthday that you love? See what I mean! Passion doesn't insulate us from forgetting important stuff, and that includes not forgetting the things related to what we are passionate about! Therefore, I put my wedding anniversary, my wife's and kids' birthdays, my parents' birthdays, and all kinds of other things related to people I deeply love on my calendar. I set reminders about all sorts of

things I'm passionate about, and I do so BECAUSE I'm passionate about them and don't want to forget!

When it comes to our relationship with Jesus, things are no different. We need to be reminded about what matters in that relationship! It's why we come to church regularly to hear music and preaching that not only informs us of things we may not know or understand yet, but also reminds us of what we do know. Taking time to regularly sit under the preaching of God's Word, committing to sit with others to discuss it (Life Groups), as well as reading the Bible throughout the week on our own, reminds us of the most essential things in the universe – who God is, who we are and how that's all meant to play out in an eternally fulfilling way! It's astonishing how life can deceive us into forgetting the most important things. Whether it's the whirlwind of all we have to do in life or things that we allow ourselves to be convinced should have more importance than they should, life has a way of fooling us into forgetting the most important things! Therefore, knowing the whirlwind of life the believers in Thessalonica were facing, as well as the fact that some people were trying to distract them with false teaching, Paul took some time in 2 Thessalonians to ensure the believers in Thessalonica remembered some essential items related to their relationship with God. Paul wrote,

3 But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

4 And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. 5 May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

Proposition: 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5 teaches us four essential items we should never be fooled into forgetting!

The first essential item is that we need to ...

(1) Remember that God is faithful. (3:3)

- A. 3 But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.**
- B.** In the previous verse, Paul asked them to pray for their safety as they bring the Gospel to new places because there were “**wicked and evil men**” (3:2) trying to stop them. Specifically, there were Biblically educated Jews in the synagogue in Corinth who were trying to keep Paul from preaching the Good News about the very Messiah that ironically, they gathered every Saturday to pray would come! These same types of men were the very same type of men who convinced Pontius Pilate to crucify Jesus. They claimed to love and follow God while deceitfully arranging the unjust execution of the eternal Son of God!
- C.** However, in verse three, Paul switches the focus from the “**wicked and evil men**” he's dealing with in Corinth to the “**the evil one.**” The evil one is Satan, and he is the ultimate hater of God. He is the one to whom God cursed the world

to be under the rule of, but he is also the one who has NO power or authority over God's children. Paul writes as a matter of fact that, "... **the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.**" God IS our protector against Satan, which means God is our protector against the mission of Satan to lead us away from faith in God.

- D. Many people confuse the effort of Satan. They believe the mission of Satan is to harm them physically or their family, or even to destroy their finances, in part because the three things we are most prone to put our hope in instead of God are our family, our health, and our finances. But here's the deal: Satan's mission is not to attack your family, health, and finances, but rather your faith in Christ! He may do that by attacking your family, health, and finances, but the win is not in destroying your bank account; it's in destroying your faith! One of the greatest examples of that truth is the story of Job. The Bible says,
- E. **9 Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." (Job 1:9-11)**
- F. Essentially, the story of Job is centered on Satan's suggestion that the only reason Job loved and served God was because God had essentially spoiled him with a great family, health, and financial prosperity. Satan was saying that God was essentially buying Job's love and faith because, without those things, there was no way Job, and consequently anyone else, would ever consider God worthy of their love and obedience, because God isn't inherently worthy of love and obedience. Satan was saying that God is only worthy of our love and obedience; of our worship and praise, if He does what we want, when we want, and how we want!
- G. Now, because Job was human, he struggled greatly at the loss of his family, health, and finances. Who wouldn't? He even got angry with God, but he also never stopped going to God, even if it was to express his anger and feelings of being unjustly treated. Finally, at the end of the book, God confronts Job's accusations that He's being unjust, as well as Job's demands for Him to explain Himself. Job's response to God's rebuke was this,
- H. **1 Then Job answered the Lord and said: 2 "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 4 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.' 5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; 6 therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:1-6)**

- I. God confronted Job with the truth about who He is, and in so doing, rescued Job from any thoughts that God needed to justify His actions or that God had forgotten Him. When Job caught a glimpse of who God is, Job realized God was worthy to be loved and obeyed, praised and honored, no matter what! God rescued Job from the path of faithlessness he was headed down, because God is faithful! Jesus Himself said,
1. **37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:37-40)**
 2. **27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. 30 I and the Father are one.” (John 10:27-30)**
- J. I can NOT forget the truth in those passages, even though my faith may falter at the attempts of Satan to turn me away from God! I must cling to what the Word of God said, **“3 But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.”**
- K. Now, some of you are wondering if you and I need to do anything to not end up following Satan instead of God. And the answer is that we absolutely do. Paul wrote this to the church in Ephesus,
- L. **10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (Ephesians 6:10-11)**
- M. So, wait a minute! Is Paul contradicting himself? Is Paul saying God will keep us from Satan, or is he saying I need to keep myself from Satan? The answer is, yes, both! But if God is sovereign, then why do I need to worry about it? What’s left for me to do if God promised to do it? What can I do if God promised to do it? Well, this is another one of the paradoxes we see in the Bible that the Bible refuses to explain, but tells us how it will end! The late Dr. John MacArthur did such a good job addressing this subject that I wanted you to hear it straight from him. - <https://youtu.be/66V0Kngkpz8?si=xK20n3bM Fx lOjA>
- N. The Bible contains a variety of doctrinal paradoxes that present, on one hand, the sovereign, unthwartable will of God and, on the other hand, our responsibility. However, what the Bible doesn’t have is an explanation of how

seemingly incompatible truths perfectly fit together in God's plan. God's sovereignty and our free will are testified to clearly in Scripture, and there is no explanation for how they co-exist; therefore, we are encouraged by the knowledge of God's sovereignty, and we are held accountable by the fact that He will judge us for how we respond to Him.

- O. Therefore, 2 Thessalonians 3:3 is not an invitation to be lazy in the war for your soul! But instead, because I know God is in it to win it with me, I can keep fighting! I can put on the whole armor of God and fight! He will stand guard over my heart, but that doesn't mean I shouldn't be slinging arrows beside Him in the fight, which is why Paul then writes what he writes in verse 4!

The second essential item is that we need to ...

(2) Remember what we are supposed to do! (3:4)

- A. **4 And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command.**
- B. **“‘command’** This is a military term. It is used repeatedly in this context (cf. vv. 4, 6, 10, 12). This shows Paul's authority as an Apostle. This term could refer to (1) Paul's preaching, (2) his first letter, I Thess., or (3) his current instructions, II Thess.”¹
- C. Yes, it is true that the immediate context of this verse is not a reminder, but rather an encouraging expression of confidence that they are doing and will continue to do the things Paul rightly commanded them to do! It's a congratulatory acknowledgement. It's a “good job!”
- D. However, in expressing confidence that the believers in Thessalonica will continue to do these things, every parent and coach knows what Paul is subtly but clearly also saying—don't forget!
- E. What was it that Paul had commanded them to do that they were doing? There are all kinds of obvious things Paul commanded them to do in his first letter. Here are a few examples,
 - 1. **2 For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God (1 Thessalonians 4:2-5)**

¹ Utley, R. J. (1997). [*Paul's First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians*](#): Vol. Volume 11 (p. 143). Bible Lessons International.

2. **8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. (1 Thessalonians 5:8)**
 3. **11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing (1 Thessalonians 5:11)**
 4. **22 Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:22)**
- F. When you read the New Testament, you will soon realize that there is nothing God has commanded us to do that's hard to understand, but choosing to do it is clearly challenging. Therefore, don't make things harder on yourself by forgetting what He told us to do. Do what you are doing right now in listening to or reading this sermon. I encourage you to spend regular time with other Christians talking about God's Word. Schedule regular times to read it and meditate on it for yourself. Write key verses you need to remember on things and stick them in places that you'll see as you go through the day. Have a system to remember! Don't assume you will!

The third essential item is that we need to ...

(3) Remember the love of God. (3:5a)

- A. **"5 May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God ..."**
- B. **"direct"** This is an AORIST ACTIVE OPTATIVE, which reflects a prayer (cf. 1 Thess. 3:11–13). It is another military term, "make straight by removing obstacles." It is an allusion to the OT metaphor, "well-worn paths of righteousness" (cf. Luke 1:79; 1 Thess. 3:11). Notice the two aspects of this prayer: (1) the love of God and (2) the steadfastness of Christ."²
- C. Paul is praying that God will keep them from forgetting His love, but in doing so, he's telling them they need to not forget it either! Knowing and believing in God's love for us is essential, to the point that not actively remembering it is devastating to our faith.
- D. It's also important to note that what Paul is praying for them to be directed to is not God, but the "LOVE of God." I'm splitting hairs here, but it's essential given our propensity to forget God's love! It is very true that you cannot know God apart from His love, nor His love without knowing Him, because they can't be separated. His love is inherent to who He is. However, hypothetically speaking, if it were God alone that Paul wanted them to remember, but not His love, given the knowledge I have of my own depravity, that would be a horrifying concept!

² Utey, R. J. (1997). [*Paul's First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians*](#): Vol. Volume 11 (p. 143). Bible Lessons International.

God's judgment on sin and ability to carry out that judgment is horrific; therefore, to know God apart from His love would be the most devastating news one could ever receive.

- E. The knowledge of God's love doesn't change anything about His level of wrath on sin, but it does change my understanding of how He views me and treats me in that judgment. The Bible says,
- F. **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 4:10)**
- G. God's love doesn't take away from His holiness. God told Adam what the consequence of sin would be—death! Therefore, for God to be Holy, He must enact His judgment on sin, and that He did to the fullest, only He sent His only Son to bear that burden for us, and in that we can see no greater testimony of love!
- H. It is the knowledge of God's love for us that inspires us to love and trust Him. The knowledge of His holiness would only lead us to eventually quit trying to follow Him, because we would be keenly aware of our failures and His wrath. But the knowledge of His love in Christ changes everything! I can get up out of my sin and follow Him because He is not coming to punish me for my failure, He's coming to pull me out of it so I can walk in His righteousness.
- I. Therefore, Paul is saying he wants our hearts to be so convinced of God's love for us that we never forget it, and as such, that we **love being loved by Jesus more than anything!**

The fourth essential item is that we need to ...

(4) Remember the steadfastness unique to Christ. (3:5b)

- A. **5 May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.**
- B. Steadfastness is also translated as "perseverance" and "endurance."
- C. This certainly draws us deeper into our understanding of God's love for us, because you can't think about the steadfastness, perseverance, or endurance of Christ without also thinking about Him willingly enduring all of God's wrath on our behalf for our sin.
- D. However, the understanding of Christ's steadfastness is not limited to what He did on the cross, but is an inherent quality of God's character that is key for us to remember in our failures, so that we will not lose heart and see no use in

repenting. If Christ never gives up on me, if He's in it to win it with me, then I can be in it to win it with Him!! Spurgeon wrote,

- E. **"How He put up with each one of us when we would not come to Him! How He wept over us when we neglected Him! How He drew us with constancy of love when we tugged against the cords! And when we came to Him, and since we have been with Him, what patience He has had with our ill manners! If I had been Christ, I would have discharged such a servant as I have been long ago. Have you not often wondered that He should still love you? He is engaged to you, and He hates putting away. But is it not marvelous that He keeps His engagement with you and will do so, though you have often defiled yourself and forgotten Him?"³**
- F. **As the Psalmist wrote, 15 But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. (Psalm 86:15)**
- G. The very fact that the Holy Spirit calls us to repentance is a testimony of His steadfastness applied to us! The conviction of God that calls us away from sin is not a testimony of His impatience but of His patience. He is in it to win it with us! He is not convincing you of your sin so that you walk away in shame, but rather to give you the wisdom and courage to repent! It's why Paul wrote this to the church in Rome,
- H. **4 Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)**

Challenge: Where have you forgotten God? Write down the Bible truth that confronts the void and spend time meditating on it each day so that your life is shaped by the truth of His presence and ways.

In the persecutions and hardships of life, have you forgotten that the creator of the universe is with you and using every aspect of it in some way for His glory and your good?

In your sinful failures, have you forgotten that God will never stop loving you, and as such, the door is open to repent and go home?

Is your heart justifying sin that you know God's Word confronts by conveniently "forgetting" what God says?

Are you going through life thinking God doesn't see you or that He doesn't love you?

³ Spurgeon, C. (2014). [*Spurgeon Commentary: 2 Thessalonians*](#) (E. Ritzema, Ed.; p. 63). Lexham Press.

Be intentional! Fill the void of your forgetfulness with a clear effort to remember the truth about who God says He is, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do—The Gospel!