

# A LOVE WAIT DIRECTORSHIP

2 THESSALONIANS 3:5 MAY 21, 2017

*Don't Be Evil.* That was the longtime motto of Google's corporate code of conduct. The idea was that the company values, longterm goals and daily practices should be able to distill down to this one theme: *Don't be evil.* It has, of course, been like chum in the water for many critics of Google, who point out various antitrust lawsuits around the world, censorship issues in places like Communist China, manipulating search results, and supporting net neutrality stateside, but opposing it elsewhere.<sup>1 2</sup> As Google developed from a search engine to a global technology giant, many say that their values changed with it.

It's somewhat interesting to note that when Google restructured itself in 2015 under the new name 'Alphabet', the overarching motto was changed from "Don't be evil," to, "*Do The Right Thing.*"

Companies and organizations usually have an overarching value, or a core mindset that they attempt to build their goals and practices upon. The t-shirt company *Life Is Good* uses "Spreading The Power Of Optimism". *IKEA* says their "vision is to create a better everyday life for the many people."<sup>3</sup> And then there's the straightforward purpose *Walmart* has written for itself: "We save people money so they can live better."<sup>4</sup>

Living the Christian life is a combination of core values, eternal goals and daily practices. It encompasses our past, present and future. We *celebrate* what God has done already. We *undertake* His way of life. And we *anticipate* His future for us, both temporal and eternal. And the Bible reflects all these different facets and *lenses* by which we live out this wonderful life.

You can see it in Paul's letters to the Church at Thessalonica. Paul wrote 2 very *personal* letters to the Thessalonians. They are full of love and full of appreciation and correction. Doctrine. Eschatology. Paul wrote to them about specific situations in their church life, their personal history with him. Commands from the Lord. There was just a lot going on, even in these short letters. And then, in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 5, he takes a quick break for a moment and zooms back. He prays a prayer for them that essentially distills down the whole Christian experience to its essence and overarching purpose.

## **2 Thessalonians 3:5 - <sup>5</sup> Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.**

That's our text. After this simple prayer, Paul would zoom back in and talk about some specific issues they were facing. But here we have this wonderful, wide angle look at the Christian life for *all of us* who have pledged ourselves to Jesus Christ. And that's a great view for us to take from time to time, because each of us may be honed in on different elements today. So, this morning, we zoom back and take a look at the full frame, composed for us by the Holy Spirit through Paul's words.

He begins by saying, "May the Lord direct **your hearts.**"

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism\\_of\\_Google](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_Google)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/maybe-its-time-for-google-to-rethink-its-dont-be-evil-motto/2012/01/25/glQAAS0XRQ\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.a65d3bb65eda](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/maybe-its-time-for-google-to-rethink-its-dont-be-evil-motto/2012/01/25/glQAAS0XRQ_story.html?utm_term=.a65d3bb65eda)

<sup>3</sup> <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/inspiring-company-mission-statements>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.alessiobresciani.com/foresight-strategy/51-mission-statement-examples-from-the-worlds-best-companies/>

The Christian life is a *heart* life. God's method is not to toss on a new coat of paint onto the broken down shanties of our lives. He comes to us as the Master Craftsman and makes us a *new* creation altogether. A masterpiece work of functional art. That's how the Bible talks about God's work in your life. Biblical Christianity is an inside-out proposition. It's never a reformation from the outside in.

And when the Bible talks about your heart, what does that mean? All these terms we're talking about today: the heart, love, patience. They're easy for us to take for granted. They become easily blurred in our thinking. So, when God speaks to us about 'the heart,' what does He mean? It means the core of your person. The seat of your vitality. The place of your willing and planning. It's where your passions are and your desires are. *That* is the target God sets His sights on. That's where He starts.

The first recorded parable of Jesus is the Parable Of The Sower, who goes out and sows seed into the field. When the disciples asked Jesus to explain what He meant, He told them that the seed is God's word and the soil is the heart of man. *That's* what the Lord wants. He wants **your** heart.

There's an argument over where you can find the most fertile soil in all the world. "Some have suggested that the *Pampas* of Argentina have soil of [special] richness. Others [believe] certain areas of the Ukraine" are the best. "However the National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment...has declared Conrad, [Iowa's] soil among the richest farmland in the world."<sup>5</sup> As farmland decreases, they say that the black dirt of Conrad may be more valuable than gold.

But you know, the experts are wrong. The most productive soil in the world isn't in Iowa or Argentina - *it's your heart!* It's *my* heart. There's no field so fruitful as a human heart. From it comes thoughts and attitudes and words and passions and behaviors and pursuits and vows, even *life* and *death!*

And here, Paul says God wants *your heart*. Not to just *redeem* it, but He wants to *direct* it. He wants to have the rudder of your life so that He can point you in a particular direction.

And God's direction isn't meant to just be some casual, general thing. The word used here for 'direct' is a significant one. It means that the Lord wants to make this life straightforward for you, removing the obstacles and hindrances, in the hopes that you would have no deviations.

Note that God's method is to *direct* you, not *force* you. God does not put a gun to your head. He won't put a gun to your heart. The way He leads us may prick like an ox goad from time to time, but He's a Shepherd who leads. He won't violate the heart of the person who doesn't want to go with Him. But His desire is to *lead* us down a straight path. One He's cleared the obstacles off of that we might experience the abundant spiritual fullness He has promised to His people.

So, as God directs, where are we going?

There are 2 items on Paul's list: into the *love* of God and the *patience* of Christ. Wide angle, zoomed out, core purpose of the Christian life, here it is: Into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

Greek scholars get excited to tell you that the language Paul used here when he talked about love and patience is written in such a way that he could be referring to them both objectively and subjectively. Here's what that means: He's talking about both God's love for you *and* your love for Him. He's talking about patience in the sense of waiting *for* Christ's return and waiting *as* Christ did.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/the-iowa-town-famous-for-its-dirt>

Let's first take a look at "the love of God". The Lord wants to direct me *into* the love of God. Well, what does that mean? Do I have to go out and *discover* God's love, as if it's hidden away from me? We know that's not true. As Christians we're already *in* it. Paul says in Ephesians 3:17 that we're rooted and grounded in it. But then Paul goes on to declare that God's love is unimaginably deep and wide and high. When we get saved, we are enfolded into the love of God. We're told in Romans 5:5 that it is then shed into our hearts to fill us up. But as we follow the Lord, we sail deeper and deeper into the sea of His agape love. A love that is on display for us throughout the 66 Books of the Bible. A love between God and individuals and God and families, God and the nation of Israel. A love demonstrated by Jesus Christ and detailed in the Epistles. No one who learns *more* about God ever comes to the conclusion that He loves them *less* than they thought. It's always the opposite! The more we learn about the truth of God, the more we realize the depth of His love.

Charles Spurgeon, in his final sermon before his death said: "*These 40 years and more have I served him, blessed be his name! and I have had nothing but love from him.*" That was the closing summary.

Paul would have us consider God's love for us in this prayer. But also our love for Him. He says that the purpose of this life would be that we be led and directed *into* a growing experience of God's love coming *out* of us. That we be bearing harvests of agape in our lives. That Godly, agape love is a love defined by *seeking* and *sacrifice*. It is a love that searches out recipients. God didn't wait for us to love Him first. He loved us while we were still sinners! And so, as we grow in our agape love, we will be searching out others who we can show that love to. We'll be seeking out opportunities to express our love to God. We'll be doing so sacrificially, because seeking and sacrifice *define* agape love. Agape love is described in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* as "a love that does not desire, but gives." It's a love that pardons enemies. A love that blesses whole communities. The Thessalonians *had* this love, Paul even said so. But he was praying that it would grow exponentially.

### **1 Thessalonians 3:12 - <sup>12</sup> And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow.**

God's first core purpose for each and all of us is that we be directed *into* His love and that it might abound more and more as we live out the Christian life.

But secondly, Paul prayed that we might be directed *into* the patience of Christ. Once again, this patience can be understood in 2 ways.

On the one hand, the Lord wants us to be anxiously anticipating His return. It's one of the major themes of both of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. We want to have a *growing* expectation of Christ's return. We try to focus on that here at Calvary Hanford. Jesus *is* coming and, rather than cause us to be *uninvolved* Christians, it should motivate us to be about His business all the more.

I heard a pastor this week tell the story of one of the majestic castles of Italy.

A tourist was traveling in the region. He especially wanted to visit a particular castle called the Villa Arconti. When he got there, a kindly old gardener opened the gate, showed him the grounds that were kept in immaculate condition by the old man. The tourist asked, "How long have you been here?" "24 years" said the gardener. "So, how often does the owner come?" asked the tourist. The gardener responded, "He's been here four times since I began." "Well, when was he last here?" The gardener answered: "10 years ago." "Well, do you talk to him on the phone?" "Never" said the gardener. "How do you know what to do?" The gardener responded, "the owner has an agent that

has told me what to do.” “Does the agent ever come by?” “Never” said the gardener. “Do lots of tourists come?” “Oh, once in a great while someone like you might come along. Otherwise, I’m here alone.” The tourist marveled: “Well, sir, you keep the garden in such fine condition, everything in excellence as if you expected your master to come tomorrow!” “No,” said the gardener, “I expect him today.”

The Word of God declares that there is a special reward for those who long for and love the return of Jesus Christ. That expectation doesn’t make us *less* engaging, it will make us *more so*. And the Holy Spirit’s prayer here is that we would sail deeper into that blessed hope, patiently waiting for the Lord.

But this isn’t just a sit-around-and-wait kind of patience. It’s not like when you’re waiting for the movie to start and you have to watch that terrible advertisement loop over and over again. No, this patience is something much more vibrant. It’s a word that means a constant, inward fortitude that withstands hardship. It can also be defined this way: remain behind and stay alive! At first when I hear it described that way it makes me think of the family hunkered down in the cellar, waiting motionless for the cyclone to pass them by. But that’s not what this means. We’re to ‘stay alive’ in the best sense! Remember, our hearts are fruitful fields. And so as we live out this Christian patience, waiting for the Lord, we’re bearing the *fruit* of patience, as Jesus Christ did when He was on the earth. In fact, the same word used here for patience is used in Hebrews chapter 12 where we’re told to take a look at Jesus as our example. It says:

**Hebrews 12:2 - <sup>2</sup> looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

While we patiently wait *for* Christ to return, we live out life with the kind of patience that He demonstrated while He walked the earth. He had a courageous endurance, motivated by the desire to reconcile people to God. He could be resolute and stay spiritually vibrant because He kept the end in mind. He knew the goal that He was working toward. And so He could withstand the relational hurts and the physical hurts and the many strains He was under. And now *that* patience is given to us to experience and exercise as Christians. It’s a gift of the Spirit. That we might remain behind and stay alive, bearing the fruit that Jesus bore while successfully enduring suffering. Returning to the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said:

**Luke 8:15 - <sup>15</sup> As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.**

So this is Paul’s prayer for us. That as we live life, the overarching principle be that the Lord direct us into the love of God and the patience of Christ. And it’s not just some marketing slogan. It’s the desire of God’s heart for us. You know, in the Old Testament book of Hosea, one of the complaints God had for the people of Israel was that they were not making spiritual progress.

**Hosea 10:9a - <sup>9</sup> The Lord says, “O Israel, ever since Gibeah, there has been only sin and more sin! You have made no progress whatsoever.**

The Lord wants us to progress in these things. And that’s not only a message to a backslidden person. Remember this was written first to the Thessalonians. They *were* producing fruit. They *were* excited about the Lord’s return. Their love *was* abounding. Paul said so in these letters. But *still* he prayed this prayer for them and for us by extension. And so the encouragement today is that we

take a wide look at the Christian life described on the pages of Scripture and see who we are. That we be comforted and established in what the Lord desires for us.

Now, maybe you're thinking: "That's all well and good, this Christian life these Bible passages talk about. But it's not my experience right now. I don't *feel* loved. I don't *feel* patient. I don't *feel* as though I'm being led by anyone." Maybe that's you today.

What should we do? Well, I have the answer to that discouragement. There's one more little phrase in this verse that we breezed over. It's *the LORD* direct you. This is the Lord's work to do, not yours. It is our responsibility to participate in what God is doing and to receive what He has for us. But it is *the Lord* who accomplishes these great things in our lives. "May the Lord direct you." Let me tell you about this Lord: He's the God of all power and authority. He's the lover of your soul. He's the legal guardian of your life. He's the one who is faithful and powerful, the giver of grace and peace, the One who grants us access to His presence and chooses to glorify Himself in us. He's the One who gives every consolation and every good hope, establishing His people in every good word and work.

And that's just the ways Paul has described Him *in the first 2 chapters of this letter!*

The choice we make is whether we will *trust* this Lord or not. Will I walk in the leading I receive from His Spirit and from His word? Will I set sail in the directions He has supplied, not just in some *part* of my life, but my *whole* life, from the heart out to the furthest reaches of who I am and what I do?

Here's what the Bible promises:

Those who seek the Lord will not lack any good thing.

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength and inherit the earth.

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever.

Blessed *is* the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord.

He is with us and He wants for you and me what He wanted for the Thessalonians.

So may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

*prayer*

*reflect*

*songs*