

Vital Signs

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes the vital signs of a Christian life: faith, love, and hope, and the importance of gratitude for fellow believers.

Duration: 29:59

Scripture: Acts 16:6

Topics: "Ministry"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the belief in the kingdom of heaven and encourages the congregation to express their faith by saying amen. He prays for the Word of God to deeply impact their hearts and for their vital signs, such as faith, love, and hope, to be strengthened. The preacher acknowledges the injustices and hardships in the world, such as the shooting of a young person in Chicago, but assures the congregation that a day will come when all wrongs will be made right. He reminds them that Christians who have endured persecution and suffering will rise up to meet Jesus and rule and reign with Him. The sermon also references the book of 1 Thessalonians, highlighting the vital signs of a Christian, which include faith, love, and endurance inspired by hope in Jesus Christ.

Transcript

So last Sunday as a church, we began on the first Sunday of the new year, a study in the book of 1 Thessalonians. It's a letter, not a book. It's called a book of the Bible, but it's a letter.

It's a letter from the apostle Paul to the church in Thessalonica. Just to have a 60 second review, Paul, the apostle who was once a persecutor of the church, got converted and he started taking missionary trips. But in his case, to plant new churches.

And at the very time that our devotional for today is Acts 16, he doesn't know where to go because he's being blocked by God. Isn't that strange? He wants to do a good thing, but being blocked. Wants to preach the gospel in what we would call Turkey.

Spirit says no, someone else is supposed to do that. He doesn't know what to do, so he waits. That's when you don't know what to do, you wait.

He gets a vision at night and there's a man from Macedonia, northern Greece, who says come over and help us. And they took that as from the Lord as a sign to go there. So he and his team goes there, Luke

and Silas and Timothy, a young helper.

They go to Philippi first. And there they preach the gospel. He gets thrown in prison.

He leaves that city and goes to Thessalonica. He preaches the gospel there. Again, trouble ensues.

But he plants a church, and the amazing thing about this passage is he plants the church in maybe three weeks, four weeks. At the most, two or three months he was there. Plants a church, they have leaders.

He goes on to Berea, later on to Athens. And when he gets to Corinth, where he stays for a year and a half, he's preaching the gospel, but his heart goes out to those believers. Like, how are they doing? You know, if you're a leader, a pastor, a deacon, or a Christian, you're supposed to care about other Christians.

It's not about me, myself, and I. So he starts being concerned. How are they doing? There's no texting, there's no phones. So he sends Timothy, his young assistant, to find out how are they doing.

And now Timothy has come back and given a good report. Now he's writing to them to tell them, mostly all, very little correction in this letter, mostly encouragement, some instruction about the coming of the Lord, which we'll get to as the Lord helps us through the book. And he's writing them, and to me, this letter shows more of Paul's heart than any other letter that he writes.

It's not heavy on theology. It's heavy on practical instruction. But it reveals this huge heart that God gave him to serve the Lord.

And he's writing to a church which is undergoing persecution. He's heard that the screws are being tightened in that part of the Roman Empire between Jewish persecution and then the Roman government would persecute because they didn't like the idea that you had another king other than Caesar, who was this King Jesus. So the church is under pressure.

He's writing to encourage them. The church is made up of, as what most churches became made up of, of Jewish and Gentile believers. In the New Testament, they're many times called Greek, but what that means is they're Gentiles, they're non-Jews.

You have what God's original plan was, not just Jewish believers like in Jerusalem and in places in Judea, where the church started, but now you're having this incredible thing, Jews and Gentiles together who never got along, who despised each other. But you know, when Jesus comes in your heart, you lose all your prejudice. Oh, I thought I'd get a bigger amen than that.

When Jesus comes in your heart and fills you with love, you don't think culturally anymore. Oh, I got less, all right. I'm moving in the wrong direction.

No, I'm moving in the right direction. I'm moving in the right direction because 98% of the churches that I've been to in my life are more cultural than spiritual. They don't go by the Bible and the Holy Spirit.

They're more colored and seasoned and flavored by their culture, their white culture, their southern culture, their black culture, their West Indian culture, their Asian culture, their Latino culture. And when push comes to shove, the Bible sometimes loses and the culture wins. That's sad, that's sad because that's never what Jesus planned.

And in heaven, if you're very cultural, you might not make it because they have it. Every nation, every tribe, every tongue. How many say amen? We're all gonna be together.

So never say, oh, I don't like to be with those people because God might take you at your word and say, fine, I won't bring you there. And then the other place is not where you wanna go. So let's look at the beginning of the letter again because today we covered two verses last week.

We're covering only one verse this week. Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Paul and Silas, I told you about.

They were the leaders. Timothy, young assistant to the church of the Thessalonians and God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace to you.

We always thank God for all of you. We're doing verses two and three now. We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.

Let me say that again. We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father, it's as they were praying or worshiping or thinking of them.

We always remember three things about you. We remember what we saw happen when we were there. Your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. This is called vital signs because what this verse passage covers are the vital signs of a Christian, all Christians for all time. But before we get to them, I want you to notice something that touched my heart this week as I meditated on this.

Paul said, we thank God for you every time we think of you and when we gather to pray for you, our prayers are filled with thanksgiving. We thank God for all of you, always remembering you when we pray. It's interesting that in the New Testament, Paul hardly ever thanks God for things or for experiences.

He only thanks God for people. We're just the opposite. You most Christians and ministers play to this because they're material minded.

America is one of the gods of America is materialism, am I right? So they punch that ticket in to attract carnal thinking. So God is your ticket to more material things. You will not find that in the New Testament.

He thanks God for food. We're to thank God for everything we have. The clothes we have on, the shoes we have on, God has given us everything.

But it's interesting that as you walk with the Lord and you get closer to Christ, you thank God more for people than for things. You never find Paul saying, I thank God that last week he met me in such a way in the prayer meeting, and so on and so forth. Moments like that come, and we're to thank God for every encouragement.

But the most valued thing to Paul is people. Not only people who have influenced us, which we rarely thank God for, we rarely thank them, nor do we thank God for them, and yet their gift's way more important than a car. Cars come, cars go.

But a person who helps you in your walk with Christ, a person who's there to pray, a good friend, a husband, a wife, a brother or sister in Christ who locks arms with you, we just take that for granted, or we complain about them rather than thanking God for them. So he thanks God for the people. But now these people are his converts.

What a shame on ministers like myself that I should be thanking God, and we pastors should be thanking God more for the choir, more for the congregation. Notice, these are his converts, but like a proud father, he's thanking God for these children. Oh God, I thank you for these children.

He's interceding for them, he's praying for them, but he's also thanking God for them. Always remember, when you pray for anything, you gotta season it with thanksgiving, or it gets very dry. When you're praying for anything, just don't ask, ask, ask.

Throw in some thanksgiving. There's always something to thank God for, and that'll help you to pray with more flowing love heart. The other thing is, it's interesting to me that Paul and Silas and Timothy said, we remember you together in our prayers, not my prayers.

Most time, Paul is saying, I pray for you, I bow before God, I kneel before the Father, and I pray. But in this case, he says, no, stand up for a second, stand up for a second. Now he's saying step forward.

So he's saying, no, every time Silas and Timothy and I, join hands there, every time Silas and Timothy gather with me, we pray together. And every time we're praying, we make mention of you. Notice, we make mention of you.

Didn't spend an hour, because there's so many things to pray for, but we make mention of you. And every time we think of you, we thank God for you. Remembering all of you, you may be seated.

Now all of the Christians there couldn't have been mature. He has to warn people at the end of the book, warn those that are unruly, people who don't wanna work, but he's still thanking God for them. Notice also the psychology, the sanctified psychology.

Paul begins by commending and thanking God for them. He has some corrections later on, but he doesn't start with that. If you want people to listen to you, and you wanna really be helpful, let them know you love them first.

And thank God for what is there, just don't talk about what's not there. You know what I'm saying? You all get it? Be like that with your children. Thank God for what they do have, and compliment from what they can do.

Then you have to get into other stuff. But if you're just always railing at them, why don't you do this, why don't you like that? When I was growing up, my mom and dad would always say, why don't you like your brother? That's why I'm still in therapy right now. I haven't gotten over that.

No, they didn't do that, but they would do that sometimes. They didn't always do that. But Paul is thanking God for them.

He's saying, every time we remember all of you, all of you, just like this church, I want to thank God, and I do thank God for all of you. Are some people acting sideways sometimes? Yeah. They're acting wrong, but they're in church.

Some people are not in church at all. Just a brother or sister you thank God for, even if they act a little bit off. But we're the kind of people that we either hold people close to us, or we reject them as not worthy of our approval.

That's not the way Paul did. And now he gets to the vital signs, and he covers the vital signs of the Christian faith. Nothing has ever changed on this matter.

What are the vital signs? He names three of them, and he puts them in a different order than he does in 1 Corinthians 13. He starts with faith, then he mentions love, then he mentions hope. He says, we remember you when we think about you, and when we think about you, here's what we think about.

Not what clothes you have, not how much money you make, or how you sing. We don't think about any of those things first. We think about your faith, which produces works.

We think about your love, which produces labor. And we think about the hope that you have in Christ, which produces endurance. That's the only way a Christian can grow.

Faith, love, and hope. As faith increases, as love increases, as hope increases, we become more mature. When those decrease, when those get sick, when those get out of balance, there are some people who strive about faith and have faith, but they don't have the love of a slug for somebody else.

They're distorted in their growth, just like you can be distorted physically in your growth. So that's the question for all of us today, but Paul now is remembering their faith, and their love, and their hope. Not talent, grace, God working in them.

He says, that's what I remember about you. Oh, and boy, do we thank God when we think of that. We thank God how he's worked in you.

We thank God for the way you have faith, the way you have love, and then the way you have hope. So let's wrap this up. We thank God when we think of you because you have faith that produced work.

What does he mean by that? He wants to delineate here between fake faith and real faith. Real evangelical faith that saves a person always produces a different life, always produces new works. Not perfection, but work.

Work for God, work for Christ. Sterilizing the toys in the nursery, singing in a choir, cleaning a building, being in the prayer bed, trying to help somebody. Instead of being self-centered, your faith in Christ has now made you do different things.

You've stopped doing all kinds of other things. You used to worship idols, used to be selfish, used to lie, used to steal possibly. Now you don't do that anymore.

Now you're showing kindness. Now you're showing going the extra mile. Oh, I thank God when we think of it that your faith has produced works.

Because even as James, the half-brother of our Lord, taught in his disciple, in his epistle, faith without works is what? Dead. You can always know who has saving faith because their life changes. Not perfection, but their life changes.

Someone who has no life change, there's now churches filling up with this, centered on just praise and worship and a vibe, but with no life change, still sleeping around, still lying to each other, still stealing on the job, still using profanity, but praise, you know what, I believe in Jesus. But then you wonder, what kind of Jesus is that that you believe in? You don't believe in the Jesus of the Bible. You don't have the faith that the Bible talks about.

My wife ran into somebody down in Florida at a nail salon or something, and the lady was talking, it was near Christmas time, and the lady said, what are you gonna do for Christmas? Well, we're gonna celebrate with the family. My wife said, what are you gonna do? Well, you know what, me and my boyfriend are going to this place. Because she had prefaced that by saying, you know, Christmas is coming, and you know, I'm so happy Jesus came.

Because in the end, Jesus is gonna have the last word. So where are you going for Christmas? I'm going with my boyfriend. We're gonna get a hotel room and shack up for a night and enjoy this restaurant and this festivity.

Jesus, fornication, right together. No, that's the prevalent thing, especially among teens and 20s and young 30s. That's a new move in Christianity.

No Bible, just a vibe of rocking back and forth during the song, but no changed life. Paul said, I don't know about your worship. I don't care about what kind of praise and worship you do.

I know one thing, your faith has produced works. You're different, not perfect. There's nobody perfect, how many say amen to that? But there's a change in the life.

If there's no change in the life, it's a bogus faith, because faith without works is dead. It's a fake kind of faith. It's the faith that the demons have who tremble at the name of Jesus, but they're still demons.

He's thanking God that it really hit home with them. He said, also, I thank God for your love, your labor, your love, which has been shown by your labor, and the word there, labor, is different than the word for work. It's the word that means exertion of strength to the point of sweating and exhaustion.

He said, we can't forget how you all killed yourselves out of love for Jesus. And then the love he put in your heart for others. You folks are filled with love, and we can't forget that.

You used to have no love for anybody, except your family. But now, he's changed you, and we gotta praise God. Every time we think about you, we just thank God for your labor produced by your love.

See, when you love someone with agape love, remember, this agape love that he's using is the third word, which was unknown. It was not used. The Christian society developed this word.

There was eros, which was romantic sexual love. There was phileo, which was loving someone because of the attributes you see in them. They are so lovely and attractive and so appealing to you that you're drawn to them by what's in them.

Then there's agape love that has nothing to do with who the person is. It's a divine love that just wants to work and slave for the welfare of the person you love. That's the love that was shown on Calvary for the people who were crucifying him.

Jesus said, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. That's agape love.

And he said, that's the word he uses for love. And he says, that love always produces labor, right? My wife and I were trying to have dinner last night, but we were watching our new granddaughter, Charlotte, who's seven months old, and she's a handful. And she was in one of her Ukrainian-Polish moods or whatever she has in her West Virginia moods.

And she was just causing a lot of trouble. And we're trying to eat food, but we couldn't eat. We had to tag team our meal because she was driving us both crazy.

But you know what? We didn't complain. That's my Charlotte. When you love someone, you'll do anything for them.

When you love someone, you'll labor for them. You'll labor for Jesus. And notice this also reflects the love that he puts in our heart when we love him.

The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. So when you become a born-again Christian, God puts his love inside of you and wants that to grow so that you can start building up the other members of the body of Christ. So he says, I see your vital signs.

I think of them. Woo, do I rejoice. Your faith has produced works.

You're different. You live different. You do different things.

You serve others. Not only do you serve others, but you labor to the point of exhaustion. You labor out of love for Christ and love for people.

We listed all the ministry groups this week, as I mentioned. I think there's 500 people in the prayer band. What do we pay them? Why are they praying? Why are you taking time to come to this church and go in a room and get cards and pray for needs? Why would you do that? Because you love people.

Because you love God. You know the battles that we all fight. So their vital signs, woo, really were good.

What a remarkable church, and he was only there a few months. And lastly, he said, and I wanna close with this, the endurance produced by your hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ.

Love for and from Christ, to show to Christ and others. And finally, hope in Jesus Christ, producing endurance. So let's just get two phrases defined, and then we'll come to a conclusion.

Hope in what about Jesus Christ? Hope that he came? No. Hope that he exists? Yeah, partially. But hope is always mentioned in the Bible because it's a future word.

No one hopes for something they have. I don't hope that I have this watch, that I'll have this watch. I have this watch.

I don't hope. I have it. Hope always is future.

They had been received teaching from the apostle that Jesus Christ not only came once, he's coming again. Not as a savior to die on a cross, but he's coming back to settle everything. All the mockers and all the deniers and all the blasphemers and all the people who say I won't obey my conscience, I won't obey the gospel.

I don't wanna hear about your junk. I don't wanna hear about your Bible and your rules and all of that. I don't wanna know about it.

I wanna follow my own vision. I wanna follow my dream. I'll live my life.

And all those who persecute Christians and all those who cut off their heads and all those who mock Christ and all of those who use his name in vain, all of the people which we now see it doesn't seem right. Look at all the stuff that's going on and no one's intervening to stop it. Someone just walked up to a police officer's car and opened fire on them.

That's not right. Or a police officer shot, it seemed to me, to death this kid in Chicago. That's not right.

Why don't you put a stop to that, God? How do you let that go on? Ah, but a day is coming when it's all gonna stop. It's all gonna be made right. And the Christians who have been persecuted, mocked, ridiculed, depending on where you live, we're gonna rise up to meet him in the air and we're gonna be with him forever and ever and we will not be on the bottom.

We will rule and reign with Jesus Christ. Can we all say amen? And every choir practice that they went to, when they pushed their bodies, they'll get a reward. Every time they stood and their legs were a little weak and they said, no, I gotta sing this for Christ, they'll have a reward.

For every glass of water you give to a child, for everything we ever do, every hug, every prayer we ever prayed, we're gonna get a reward. God's gonna say, well done, my good and faithful servants. Enter into the joy of the Lord.

The Christians in Thessalonica knew that payoff is not here. It's not here. Don't believe the American Christian revisionism.

The reward for us is not here. Yeah, we have peace, we have joy, but we got persecution. We got ridicule, we got tears, we got death, we got disease.

None of those things will be in heaven. He will wipe away every tear from every eye. There'll be no more devil to fight, no more temptation to resist.

Oh, come on, one more time, let's just say amen. So what did that produce? That kind of hope. Living with that realization, it could happen at any time.

Christ can come at any time. The Bible teaches imminent return. Any moment he could come.

Remember what Jesus said? Don't say he's not coming. He could come like a thief in the night. Thief does not text you and say, I'm coming tomorrow about four.

Leave some cookies and milk out. I'll probably be hungry after I rob you. No, no, no, he comes suddenly like a thief.

They knew that, they believed that. So what did it produce? Endurance. King James, I think, has a word which is misleading, patience.

Because we use patience in a different way. This is endurance. Not hanging on in a depressed way, but this word in the Greek speaks of a togetherness that makes you courageous, that makes you strong.

Jesus is coming again. I can put up with anything because he's coming again. So you mock me, so you reject me, so I don't fit in with your crowd, so I'm not cool and hip, I'm not a hipster.

You reject me. No, I'm not changing my convictions to fit in with you like churches are doing. I'm not changing my theology off the Bible so I can fit in with the media.

Let the media laugh. Let the media mock. They won't be mocking when Jesus comes.

No one will be mocking when Jesus comes. It produces a courage, a strength. They were going through persecution in Thessalonica, and Paul was saying, wow, we thank God when we remember the work produced by your faith and the labor produced by your love and the endurance that you have.

So you know what? I'm not gonna let my garments get dirty. I'm not gonna live in sin because Jesus is coming again. I know what the world says.

I know what my flesh says. I know what the devil says, but I'm not gonna do it. You know why? Because Jesus is coming again, and we don't wanna be ashamed when he comes.

How many are with me? You don't wanna be ashamed when he comes. Lift your hand up high. Let God see it.

We don't wanna be ashamed when he comes. So they had this endurance. I'm gonna keep my garments clean by God's grace through the blood of Jesus, through walking with the Lord.

But we're gonna be brave. We're gonna be soldiers. And you know what else? I close.

The Thessalonican Church was presenting Jesus to an audience that didn't wanna hear about him. The Jews didn't wanna hear they had missed the Messiah. The Roman Empire, with that mentality, didn't wanna hear that there's a God who died on a tree, mostly naked as a criminal.

That's the God you worship? We mock you. We laugh at you. You can do what you want.

We wanna tell you the good news about Jesus Christ. Not everyone will get saved, but some will get saved. And we're not into any numbers game.

Some will get saved, but we're gonna keep on strong. You try to push me? No, I'm not moving. I have endurance.

God's given me endurance. And I got that endurance from my hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. He's coming.

There's a reward. You know who some of the greatest people are that I've met? I've met some so-called well-known preachers, big time super pastors or super mega churches and all of that. Some have blessed me.

Others leave me cold. But I've been in Bangladesh and saw a guy who preached for Christ and someone, the husband, when he converted his wife, saw his wife get converted, he came and shot the guy in the face. And the bullet ricocheted around.

He had all scar tissue. And then he went back after he healed, right back to the same villages, risked his life. Why would you do that? Just tell me why would you do that? Isn't there a better way to live? I know if you have hope in Jesus Christ.

You endure anything. Oh God, save us from being babies. They were undergoing real persecution and what do we complain about? So today, be encouraged.

Be encouraged today. Not only keep your faith strong in the Lord, not only open your heart to God's love so it can flow through you, but be strong in your hope that you have in Jesus Christ. Don't be deluded like this is the only world.

This is the unreal world. What you see is the unreal world because it'll pass away. What you don't see unless God opens your eyes is the world that will last forever and ever and ever.

How many believe in the kingdom of heaven? Put your hands together and say amen. Let's close our eyes. Father, I pray that your word will find a deep place in our hearts.

I pray that our vital signs will be made strong through the grace that's in Jesus Christ that our faith will be strong, that our love will be fervent, and that our hope will be firm in the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to endure the hard places in life. Remembering it's but for a season.

For your servant Paul said, I don't count it even worthy to compare what I'm going through now with what's coming, the glory, the blessing, the eternity of joy with Christ. Help us to live with one eye always, Lord, on eternity. Strengthen our hope in you and your coming and help us to have that kind of love that when we pray together with other people, we can thank God, not complain about people, but thank God for people.

Let that grow in us today. We pray in Jesus' name. And everyone said.

Now you have a chance to hug somebody and say I thank God for you. Come on, say it.

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