

Rising Above Average (Part 1)

II Thessalonians 1: 1-12

In this passage we find a clear picture of what it takes to make a strong church. The church at Thessalonica faced severe persecution for their faith, and yet they were prospering for the Lord. This group of believers was dear to Paul, Silas, and Timothy. It was the second place in Europe that the gospel had been preached, after Philippi. They faced much adversity and yet Paul was encouraged and joyful about their progress. Apostates had tried to contaminate their doctrine, but they were moving forward for the Lord.

The modern church needs what Thessalonica had. America is filled with average churches, those who are content to simply go through the motions of worship with little or no change. There is no zeal for God, no excitement among believers, and no growth, spiritual or in number. Consider this: **Average churches are no closer to the top than they are the bottom.** I don't want Fellowship to be just an average church! I want us to excel for the glory of God. This morning I want to begin a two-part message as we consider the [characteristics](#) of the church in Thessalonica. I want to preach on: [Rising Above Average](#). Thessalonica wasn't an average church and if we can build upon her characteristics neither shall we be average.

I. A Planted Church (1) – [Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ](#): For me this is the most striking statement in this chapter. Thessalonica was [in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ](#). This wasn't a group of people who were built upon an unstable foundation; they were in the Lord. He was the source for their strength.

- That is what sets the church apart from the social groups of this world. We are part of the best thing going, nothing exceeds the church. We are in Christ our Lord! We are built upon the Solid Rock. The gates of hell shall not prevail against us! There is absolutely no reason for any church in the world to settle for average. We are in Christ Jesus!
- I am not serving an average Lord. Laying aside the splendor of heaven and coming to live as a humble servant was no average feat. The power that He possesses is certainly not average. The sacrifice that Jesus made upon the cross was no average sacrifice. The salvation that I've received has secured my forgiveness and placed me in the family of God for all eternity. What is average about that?
- Church we are built upon the Lord. We have gathered in His name. We are the body of Christ! There is no reason for us to settle for average. We are not serving an idol of stone or wood. We are not serving a mortal man. We have the presence of God in our midst. Our God is more than average and He can exceed average expectations!

- There are no limits to what we can achieve as long as God is working through us. If we can ever get a hold of Who it is that we are serving and what He can do through us, we will not be content with average. God desires us to reach new heights for Him and He is well able to supply the strength we need to achieve those heights!

I. A Planted Church (1)

II. A Prosperous Church (3a) – We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly. Paul was thankful for their growth in the Lord. They were growing *exceedingly*. That means “to grow beyond measure, far beyond what is expected.” Paul was saying, “I expected you to have grown in the Lord, but you have exceeded my expectations. Your faith has grown beyond measure.” He was literally amazed at the growth that had taken place at Thessalonica.

- If we are to rise above average, we must all grow exceedingly in our faith. If we are to see the Lord move in our midst in a life changing way, we must desire to know more of Him and draw closer to Him. How much of the Lord do you desire? How close would you like to be to Him? Fellowship will never rise above the desire of the hearts of its people.
- If you are tired of average, do something about it! If you want to see a transformation around here, grow in the Lord. This responsibility lies on each of us. A heart of complacency will never achieve anything more than average.
- I believe we have grown spiritually, but we need to grow even more. I pray that we will develop a hunger for the things of God like we have never known. I pray that the Lord will be so real in our lives that we can't get enough of it. I pray that we will hunger for the Word of God, the worship of God, and for fellowship with His people. I pray that we will leave anticipating our next service. I pray that our lives will be consumed with serving the Lord and learning more of Him! *1 Cor.13:11 – When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 1 Tim.4:15 – Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.*

I. A Planted Church (1)

II. A Prosperous Church (3a)

III. A Passionate Church (3b) – and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth. Paul wasn't just thankful for their prosperity, but also their passion. There wasn't just a select few that loved the brethren, but every one of them had love for each other.

There love abounded; it was “*super-abundant*.” Everywhere Paul looked he saw the love of God flowing forth from the church.

- A church will never rise above average if love is not present. We are commanded of God to love one another! If we fail to love others, we have been disobedient to our Lord. **Jn.15:12 – This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.** That is more love than simply being sociable! Jesus had a “whosoever” love. He loved the sinners and ungodly. Jesus loved us when we were unlovable. The love at Thessalonica was a universal love. They loved each other because they were all part of the body of Christ. There were no cliques or select groups. They just loved each other.
- Have you ever taken the time to notice a new-born Christian? They don’t know any better; they just love everybody. They haven’t been saved long enough to learn any better by those who have figured this thing out. If we are to rise above average, we must learn to be a passionate church, each of us and for every one!

I. A Planted Church (1)

II. A Prosperous Church (3a)

III. A Passionate Church (3b)

IV. A Promoting Church (3b) – **and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.** There is another important aspect to this verse. I was captivated by these words as I studied this passage. Their love abounded **toward each other**. The love at Thessalonica literally flowed as a river that had overflowed its banks, and all that love was channeled toward each other. They were in the business of being an encouragement. They desired to lift each other up. They didn’t come to find fault, or raise accusations, or gossip; they came to be of help to each other.

- Do you realize how hard it is to build something when every advancement is countered by some sort of destruction? It is hard to build when things are being torn down at the same time! A church that rises above average will promote the church and the individuals who make it up. You are doing our Lord, the church, or our mission in life no good by gossip and harsh words. There is nothing that troubles me more than to hear church members talk about other church members or the church as a whole. Don’t go to work and express your displeasure for the church.
- It is no wonder that most churches are dead in the water; look at the publicity it receives from within! How can we expect folks who know nothing of Christ to come and worship with us

if all they hear is negativity? You ought to be proud to be a part of this assembly of believers. We are all going to the same heaven; we all serve the same Lord.

- Do you want Fellowship to grow? If so, love it and let the world know how much you do! Encourage each other and build up one another. If I have wronged you, tell me, pray for me, but don't tell it to a lost world. [1 Jn.2:10 – He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.](#) Rising above average will be much easier with the demolition crew dismantled. Let's promote the church in a positive light!

I. A Planted Church (1)

II. A Prosperous Church (3a)

III. A Passionate Church (3b)

IV. A Promoting Church (3b)

V. A Patient Church (4a) – [So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:](#) Paul rejoiced in their [patience and faith](#) in the midst of trials. The church at Thessalonica had seen its share of hardships. They lived among a world who did not embrace their faith. It was a time of intense persecution for the church and yet they were patient in the Lord.

- That simply means they were steadfast in their stand and endured the difficulties with resolve. They maybe didn't always understand why things happened as they did, but they decided to believe God and trust that things would get better and they did.
- We live in a society of instant gratification. We are unaccustomed to waiting for much of anything. This impatience has even found its way inside the church. If trouble comes or things don't move fast enough to please us, we are looking to jump ship, abandoning the will of God for something that might bring immediate results. May I remind you that Abraham waited 25 long years for the promised son, Isaac? Moses spent 40 years on the backside of the desert, in the middle of nowhere, preparing to lead God's people, and then spent another 40 years wandering in the desert. God doesn't always move in our time, but He is always right on time.
- I have no doubt that God has great things in store for us, but we must be patient and wait for Him to work in our midst. Those churches that have risen above average didn't get there over night and neither shall we, but just stay by the stuff. God will take us where He wants us when it is time! God has a plan for us if we will give Him the time to work in our midst and resolve to do it His way.

I. A Planted Church (1)

II. A Prosperous Church (3a)

III. A Passionate Church (3b)

IV. A Promoting Church (3b)

V. A Patient Church (4a)

VI. A Prevailing Church (4b) – *So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:* The church at Thessalonica stands as a testimony to what can be achieved if we will seek the Lord and allow Him to move and work in our lives. Paul is thankful and encouraging to them. They have been through the fire and they came through stronger than before. They had built their lives in the Lord. They had grown exceedingly in their faith, loving and promoting each other. There had been great difficulty, but they patiently endured. When the dust had settled and the smoke had cleared, Thessalonica remained strong and vibrant.

- I want to leave you today, as we close out this portion of the text, with a challenging thought. Thessalonica had endured. The word **endure** means “*to hold one’s self up; to refuse to submit to the pressures of life.*” Life may have been hard, but the believers at Thessalonica had stood as individuals committed to the cause of Christ. The church prevailed because individual people refused to give up or give in.
- God has all power, but He chooses to work through individuals. Fellowship will prevail if the people who make it up are determined to succeed. There may be times when you are challenged in your walk with Christ. There will likely be times when you are tempted to give up. It may even feel at times as if you are alone in the journey, but you must be committed to hold yourself up. I may let you down, but Jesus never will. We must determine as individuals that we are going to serve the Lord whether anyone else does or not.
- If we are to rise above average, it will be up to you and me to make that happen. Great churches are made up of committed individuals, one person at a time contributing and making a difference.

Are you willing to make a personal commitment to continue for the Lord? Are you willing to do all that you can to ensure the growth and betterment of this body of believers for the glory of God? Are you willing to lay aside personal preferences for the bigger picture? We can rise above average, but it will require each of us doing our part. If you need to come and find help in this altar, now would be a great time to surrender your life completely to the Lord. Why not come and give Him your all?