

THE SOURCE OF OUR STRENGTH

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. My friend just installed one of those home backup generators. When the power goes off, it kicks on and powers everything in the house.
2. The Christian life has a generator that powers everything else. It is the source of our strength. It gives us the energy to serve; it gives us the energy to overcome temptation; it gives us the energy to stay faithful during hard times. We have a generator too.
3. Today, I'm going to show you what that generator is. Because if we know what your generator is, if you know the source of your strength, then can learn how to maintain it, and protect it, and even make it stronger.

II. CONTEXT

1. Today we are starting study through 1 Thessalonians. It was written by Paul, his first letter, to the church in the city of Thessalonica (modern-day Thessaloniki, Greece).
2. The book of Acts tells about Paul's three missionary journeys. During his second missionary journey, Paul wanted to take the gospel to Asia or Bithynia (two Roman provinces; modern-day Turkey), but the Holy Spirit did not allow them. During the night Paul had a vision of a man from the province of Macedonia (modern-day Greece) begging, "Please come to Macedonia and help us!" So, Paul decided to travel there next, and as a result the gospel entered Europe.
3. First Paul stopped at the city of Philippi and started a church in the home of a wealthy woman named Lydia. But after being persecuted there, they left and went to Thessalonica.
4. Paul spent the first three Sabbaths teaching in the synagogue and making many converts, some Jews and mostly Gentiles. When he was kicked out of the synagogue, they moved to another location, probably the home of a man named Jason.
5. Eventually the Jews grew jealous and started a riot, but the church hid Paul, Silas, and Timothy, and later that night they helped them escape.
6. From Thessalonica Paul and his team went to Berea, then to Athens, and from there Paul sent Timothy to check on them and see if they were still following Jesus. By the time Timothy returned to Paul, Paul was in Corinth. Timothy reported good news about church, and also informed Paul about the different challenges that the church was facing, which Paul addressed in his letter.
7. If I could sum up this letter in one sentence or phrase it would be this: What to do while you wait. Every chapter talks about the second coming of Christ, and the rest of the letter talks about how to live while we wait.

III. TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy: To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace.

- i. Paul's associates were Silvanus (aka Silas), and Timothy.

*2 We always thank God for all of you, making mention of you constantly in our prayers.
3 We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- ii. The first thing we see in this is a summary of the healthy Christian life: Work, labor, and endurance. This is the trinity of the healthy Christian life.
- iii. Then we see the source of the Christian life: faith, love, and hope. A door in a house usually has three hinges. Faith, love, and hope are the three hinges up on which the entire Christian life turns. This is the Christian's generator.

IV. THE TRINITY OF A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN LIFE

1. Work.

- i. "Work" means "works of righteousness," or acts of obedience.
- ii. We are not saved by works, but we are saved unto works.
 - 1. **Ephesians 2:8-9** "8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—9 not from works, so that no one can boast."
 - 2. **Ephesians 2:10** "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do."
- iii. The healthy Christian life means obeying God's commands – reading your Bible and doing what it says.
- iv. Remember, Biblical obedience is...
 - 1. Immediate
 - 2. Complete
 - 3. Joyful

2. Labor.

- i. "Labor" refers to serving the Lord.
- ii. **1 Corinthians 15:58** "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."
- iii. Labor refers to Christian ministry. Serving in the church; witnessing; serving the poor in Jesus' name; teaching the Bible; leading a Home Group; any kind of Christian ministry, or ministry for Christ.

3. Endurance.

- i. **Hebrews 12:1** "Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us."
- ii. Endurance is doing what is right despite adversity. It is also called perseverance, persistence, and resilience. It is fortitude, staying-power, stick-to-it-iveness. It is steadfastness, unswerving constancy, and standing firm.
- iii. Adversity is a fact of life. It doesn't matter if you are good or bad, Christian or non-Christian, you will face many difficulties in life. These might include failure, disappointment, sickness, injury, physical pain, poverty, persecution, loneliness, or loss, just to name a few. The Bible does not promise a problem-free life for Christians. On the contrary, it promises that you will

face adversity (John 16:33). The only question is how you will respond to adversity when it comes. God's will is that you learn to endure; to do what is right despite adversity.

4. These three attitudes comprise the trinity of a healthy Christian life. This is what healthy Christian living looks like. Obedience. Service. Perseverance.
5. We see these three together in Revelation when Jesus commended or praised the church in Ephesus. **Revelation 2:2** "I know your works, your labor, and your endurance...." We'll come back to this verse in a minute.
6. But where do we get the energy, the strength, the motivation to live like this?
7. **1 Thessalonians 1:3** "We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."
8. Faith, love, and hope. Let's look more closely at these three.

V. THE SOURCE OF OUR STRENGTH

1. Faith.

- i. Two kinds of faith energize the Christian life:
 1. The first kind of faith: Faith for salvation.
 - a. Involves believing two things.
 - i. Believing that you cannot save yourself.
 - ii. Believing that Christ can and will save you.
 - b. Question: Why should God let you into heaven?
 - i. This question reveals the object of your faith.
 - ii. If the object of your faith is your good works, then you are not trusting in Christ.
 2. The second kind of faith: Faith for Christian living:
 - a. Faith is confidence that God is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do.
 - i. **Jeremiah 17:7** "The person who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence indeed is the Lord, is blessed."
 - b. Faith is confidence in the word of God
 - i. That what it says is true is true.
 - ii. That what it says happened did happen.
 - iii. That what it says will happen will indeed happen.
 - iv. That what it promises will be fulfilled.
 - c. It is believing that God "exists and that he rewards those who seek him (Heb 11:6)."
- ii. Faith is the source of "work," or acts of righteousness and obedience.
 1. We obey because we believe God is watching; because we believe God will hold us accountable; because we believe God will reward us; because we believe God is worthy; because we believe God's commands are authoritative; because we believe God's commands are beneficial.

2. Every sin is an act of disbelief, even just for a moment. Every sin is the result of doubting God's word, God's promises, God's existence, God's goodness.
 3. **MacArthur Study** "Faith is an essential protection against temptations, because it is trust in God's promise, plan, and truth. It is unwavering belief in God's Word that protects us from temptation's arrows. Looking at it negatively, it is unbelief that characterizes all sin. When believers sin, they have believed Satan's lie."
- iii. How to grow your faith:
1. I think one of the best ways to grow your faith in God is to study the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - a. Christ's resurrection has so many implications. If He rose from the grave, then...
 - i. He is God.
 - ii. There is a God.
 - iii. There is life after death.
 - iv. All His words are true – about God, morality, money, prayer, heaven and hell, etc.
 - v. **Andy Stanley** "If a man can predict his own death and resurrection, and pull it off, I just go with whatever that man says."
 - b. Let's review the evidence:
 - i. Jesus was a real person. No credible historian disagrees.
 - ii. Jesus was crucified and died. Virtually 100 percent of the scholars who study this subject agree.
 - iii. The tomb was empty. Even the Romans and Jews agreed that the tomb was empty. If they wanted to squelch the new Christian movement, all they had to do was produce a body.
 - iv. There were multiple eyewitnesses. Hundreds of people claimed to have seen the risen Christ on multiple occasions.
 1. Justin Bass, Christianity Today "Virtually every Bible scholar across the Western world, regardless of religious background, agrees that Jesus' earliest followers believed he appeared to them alive."
 2. Were they hallucinating? No. Hallucinations only happen to individuals, never groups. Were they lying? No one dies for a lie.
 - c. The English Poet Gilbert West (1703-1756) was a student at Oxford. He and his cousin set out to disprove the resurrection. After a year of painstaking research, they

concluded that Jesus did indeed rise from the grave and became Christians.

- d. Frank Morrisson (aka Albert Henry Ross, 1881-1950) was an attorney and journalist who wrote a book to disprove the resurrection of Jesus. His research led him to become a Christian.
 - e. Lee Strobel (1952) was an atheist, and an investigative journalist for one of Chicago's major newspapers. When his wife became a Christian, he set out to disprove the resurrection. After many hours of study, and many interviews with the world's leading experts on the subject, he became a Christian and is now a preacher. His book is a great read to build your confidence in the resurrection. It is called *The Case for Christ*.
2. The Five Faith Catalysts. One pastor has written that after years of ministry his church has discovered five practices that help to grow your faith. They call these the five faith catalysts.
- a. Practical teaching. Practical, helpful Bible teaching. You get this on Sunday mornings, but you can supplement it with listening to preaching during the week, or reading the best Christian books.
 - b. Private disciplines. Personal devotional life. Private prayer, exploring the Bible on your own, tithing, memorizing Scripture.
 - c. Personal ministry. Getting involved in a ministry in which you are serving God's purposes.
 - d. Providential relationships. When we hear from God through someone or see God in someone. This is why church involvement (especially Home Group) is so important.
 - e. Pivotal circumstances, or defining moments. Big, huge moments in life – either good or bad. These can have one of two outcomes, depending on how you respond. Your faith in God can deepen, or your weaken.

2. Love.

- i. Love for God means affection for God.
 - 1. **John Piper** "Loving God is a compelling admiration and delight in God. It is essentially a treasuring God."
 - 2. **John Piper** Love for God is "strong feelings of admiration for his attributes, abiding enjoyment of his fellowship, undying attraction to his presence, warm affection for his kinship, and strong gratitude for loving us before we loved him."
- ii. Love is the source of "labor" – serving Christ; ministry for Christ.
 - 1. **J. C. Ryle** "Love for Christ is the driving force behind work for Christ."

2. **Thomas Watson** Love... “is like oil to the wheels; it quickens us in God’s service.”
3. A few weeks ago we looked at the story of Jacob and Rachel. Jacob fell in love with Rachel, and so he asked her father Laban for her hand in marriage. He said, “I’ll work seven years for your daughter Rachel.” Laban agreed. Notice what it says about Jacob’s labor for Rachel.
 - a. **Genesis 29:20** “So Jacob worked seven years for Rachel, and they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.”
 - b. Notice: Love leads to labor. Not only that, but love makes effort feel effortless.
 - c. Love moves us into action for God. We want to serve Him. Be on His team. To do whatever we can to further His mission, to contribute to His purpose. We we’re willing to do anything for Him, even if it means going to the ends of the earth and exposing ourselves to poverty and persecution, because we love Jesus.
 - d. There’s a lesson here about burn-out. How do you avoid burn-out in ministry? Nurture your love for Christ. Keep your love white hot. As your love cools, your energy for ministry decreases. Ministry gets harder, leaving you more frustrated and tired, and thinking about vacation all the time. Eventually you burn out, flame out, and pass out. You have a moral failure, or your body breaks down, or you have a nervous breakdown, or you just quit. Keep the love.
4. Let’s go back to Revelation, when Jesus is praising the church in Ephesus for their work, labor, and endurance.
 - a. **Revelation 2:2** “I know your works, your labor, and your endurance.”
 - b. But a couple of verses later, Jesus issues them a warning.
 - i. **Revelation 2:4-6** “4 But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.”
 - ii. They were commended for their labor, which is energized by love, yet they did not love like they did at first. Their labor was diminished. And if they didn’t repent, Christ would remove their lampstand from its place – the church would no longer make an impact.
 - c. This reveals a few things about the relationship between labor and love.
 - i. It is possible to labor without love, or with less love.

- ii. However, labor without love, or with less love, will be diminished. It will have less impact because labor is empowered by love. And again, this will lead to burnout.
 - iii. If we do not maintain our love for the Lord, our ministry will become useless (Christ will remove our lampstand).
 - iv. It is possible to repent and increase your love for Christ.
- iii. How to grow love:
 - 1. Love is like fire; it tends to die out.
 - 2. **Thomas Watson** “If our love to God does not increase—it will soon decrease. If the fire is not blown up—it will quickly go out. Therefore, Christians should above all things endeavor to cherish and excite their love to God.”
 - 3. The Bible says we love because He first loved us (1 Jn 4:19). So focusing on God’s love, and His loveliness will stir up our affections for Him. This looks like praise and worship. Spending time in private, and with church family, worship God. When we worship, we focus on the attributes and acts of God, which in turn stirs up our affections for Him.
 - 4. I would also add spending time thanking God specifically for rescuing you. If you can, think back on your life before Christ, and all that Christ has delivered you out of and into.

3. Hope.

- i. Hope is the confident expectation that something good will happen, that a better day will arrive.
- ii. Christian hope is not optimism, wishful thinking, or a glass-half-full, positive attitude. It is the eager expectation of that which is certain to take place.
- iii. What is the Christian’s hope?
 - 1. Our confident expectation is not that something good will happen in this life, or that a better day will arrive in this life. That is not guaranteed.
 - 2. Our hope is in heaven. It is in the afterlife. It is in the resurrection.
 - 3. **Acts 23:6** “I am being judged because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.”
 - 4. **Acts 24:15** “I have a hope in God, which these men themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection,, both of the righteous and the unrighteous.”
 - 5. The Christian hope is that when we die, we will wake up in in paradise in the presence of our loving God where we will spend all eternity; where there will no longer be sin, sorrow, shame, or suffering.
 - 6. This is the Christian’s hope:

- a. We may suffer, but this is the closest we will ever get to hell. (Lk 12:4-5)
 - b. We may face affliction, but our afflictions are only temporary. Heaven will last for all eternity.
 - c. We may live in poverty on earth, but in heaven we will live like kings. (Lk 18:29-30)
 - d. We may deserve God's wrath, but because of Jesus Christ we can look forward to eternal bliss in God's loving presence. (Jn 3:36)
 - e. We may face persecution and rejection, but in heaven we will enjoy congratulations. (Mt 5:10-11)
 - f. We may live in this world in obscurity, but in heaven Jesus Christ will acknowledge us before the Father. (Mt 10:32)
 - g. We may be last on earth, but in heaven we will be first. (Mt 20:16)
 - h. We may weep now, but soon we will be comforted. (Mt 5:4)
 - i. We may be lonely now, but in heaven we will enjoy the company of angels, and the communion of the saints.
- iv. Hope is the source of "endurance."
- 1. How do we endure hard times? How do we stay close to God, keep serving and obeying God, even in the hard times? Hope.
 - 2. **William Barclay** "A man can endure anything so long as he has hope, for then he is walking not to the night, but to the dawn."
 - 3. No matter what calamity, or tragedy, or terror, or horror we must face in this life, we know that it is only temporary, and heaven is eternal. This is hope. And it fuels us with endurance.
- v. How to grow hope:
- 1. The reason we lack heavenly hope is because our hope is wrapped up in this life. Our hope is for a bigger income, nicer stuff, a better economy, more parties, more success, more fame, a healthier body, a bigger home with a bigger yard, a new vehicle, a new romance, etc. This is what we are hoping for. Earthly things.
 - 2. But these things aren't guaranteed. So, when we experience trials, or when these things are taken from us, or when we get these things but they don't satisfy us, we are devastated.
 - 3. The key to growing in hope is to focus on eternity rather than on earth. Focus on things that are guaranteed; things that will last; things that cannot be taken away; things that will satisfy.
 - 4. **Colossians 3:1-2** "1 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."
 - 5. **Matthew 6:19-21** "19 Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where

neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

6. To grow hope, focus on storing up eternal riches rather than building up earthly riches. Instead of seeking heaven on earth, try to get as many people to heaven as possible. Instead of seeking pleasure on earth, focus on the pleasure you will experience in heaven when you hear God say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

VI. CONCLUSION

1. You can have the most beautiful truck in the world, but without an engine it is useless. When God saves us, He places an engine inside the believe – the engine of faith, love, and hope. These three enable us to work, labor, and endure.
2. You can have a huge, supercharged engine, but if you fail to take care of it, it will break down and leave you stranded. Even though you already have faith, love, and hope, you still have to protect and cultivate them, or they will weaken and you will have a spiritual breakdown.
3. Faith, love, hope. Protect them. Grow them. At all cost. They are the source of our strength.