

Upward and Onward

Text : **I Thes. 4: 1-10 ; Heb. 5: 12-6:2**

A. There are three words that should be part of the mission statement for all faithful children of God.

S#1.
S#2.

1. If these three words are incorporated into your life and abound, there is no limit to what you can accomplish for God during your brief sojourn.
2. No limit to how strong you, your family, and this church can become.
3. They are found in the beginning and in the end of our primary text.

a. **I Thes. 4: 1** – Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.

S#3.

b. **I Thes. 4: 9-10** Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; **10** for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more,

S#4.

c. **I Thes. 3: 12** – May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you;

S#5.

B. This letter is addressed to a strong and faithful Church of Christ.

S#6.

1. This letter encouraged them to “keep on keeping on” only do it more so.
2. He urges them to take their faith to the next level.
 - a. Never slow down
 - b. Never just settle
 - c. **Never stop growing ... *Ever Onward & Upward !***

C. Thessalonica was and remains an important city ... a free Roman city.

S#7.

1. Strategically located so it received much attention from Rome. (**map**)
2. The church grew up in the face of strong opposition. (***Paul escaped at night***)
3. Metropolitan Thessalonica is the second largest city on Greece ... 1.4 mil.

S#8.

S#9.

D. The church in Thessalonica was a model of faith and good works. (*not troubled*)

1. **I Thes. 1: 2-3** We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; **3** constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,

2. They were an evangelistic congregation.

I Thes. 1: 8 – For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only **S#10.**
in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward
God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

E. Not a rebuke, it was not a pep-talk .. was a fan letter ... a written pat-on-the-back

1. What you have done is only the beginning.
2. You've done a lot, but you must keep on progressing. (*Don't become satisfied*)

F. We have a lot in common with our brethren in Thessalonica.

1. They loved, but had the potential to do even better.

a. **I Thes. 4: 9–10** Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for **S#11.**
anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God
to love one another; **10** for indeed you do practice it toward all
the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you,
brethren, to excel still more,

- b. Build on your strength.

I Thes. 3: 12 – May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for **S#12.**
one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you;

- c. We are a loving congregation, but we could do even better.

2. They are walking well and receiving the word, but need to pick up the pace.

a. **I Thes. 4: 1** – Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord **S#13.**
Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you
ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk),
that you excel still more.

- b. “Your walk is great but it’s just the beginning the road you need to travel for God.”

- c. Like them, we need to view our past as preparation for our future.

G. As Paul urged others to grow, he realized his own need for ongoing growth. S#14.

1. **Phil 3: 12–14** Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect,
but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid
hold of by Christ Jesus. **13** Brethren, I do not regard myself as having
laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and
reaching forward to what lies ahead, **14** I press on toward the goal for
the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

2. We all must keep striving.

- a. You are not Thessalonica and I am not Paul.

- b. None of us are yet what we need to be.

- c. We must help each other grow in the Lord.

3. Christian maturity is a lifelong process ... NOT an accomplishment.

H. How do you suppose the brethren received Paul's admonition ?**S#15.**

1. Were they resentful ? We're better than most ? Is nothing good enough for Him ?
2. **II Thes. 1: 3-5** We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is **S#16.** only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; ⁴ therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God **#17.** for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. ⁵ This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.
3. Notice their progress was made while undergoing persecution and it was rewarded.

Probably all of us want to grow spiritually.**S#18.****We could quickly list many things in which we want to improve.****More import is HOW can we excel still more ? (How do I get off that plateau)****Three qualities ... Three words ... If we have them and abound = no limit.****I. The first word is urgency.****S#19.****A. Excellence and excelling begins right now.**

1. We must move beyond the desiring stage. (*I would really like to ...*)
2. *Must get past the planning.* **One of these days I'm gonna ...**

B. The parable of the talents teaches us a very valuable lesson about this.

1. **Matt. 25: 14-18** For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called **S#20.** His own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. ¹⁶ Immediately the one who had received the five talents went **S#21.** and traded with them, and gained five more talents. ¹⁷ "In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸ But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.
2. Success in anything comes to those who eagerly pursue it. Immediately the one ...
3. The difference between those who were praised and the one condemned was not results; it was attitude and the process. ***The winners pressed on eagerly.***
 - a. I don't know how much I can do.
 - b. I don't know how much is acceptable.
 - c. If I start right now and do the best I can I'll get the most before He returns.

C. What do we learn from the one talent man ?**S#22.**

1. We learn that hanging on to what we have is just not good enough.
2. Too many Christians are just hanging on ... hoping not to lose.
 - a. They are not interesting in talking about excelling or what they need to change.
 - b. As long as they don't lose ground, certainly that will be good enough for God.
(*Same amount of study, prayer, attendance, visiting, reading, etc. as last year*)
- * 3. These people don't know God.
 - a. Why is this parable even in the bible ? *It teaches us about God's expectations.*
 - b. **Matt. 25: 24 – And the one also who had received the one talent came up and** **#23.**
said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed.
26 – But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed
- ** c. **What I am in Christ today is certainly good enough for my savior, BUT** **S#24.**
what I am in Christ today is not good enough for my savior tomorrow. **S#25.**

D. Having an attitude of immediacy and urgency, I can grow boundlessly.**S#26.**

1. Do you want to do a better job of evangelizing ?
 - a. There is no guarantee of tomorrow ... for you, for the prospect, or for the world.
 - b. There is a need for urgency ... do it today.
 - c. All things being equal, you'll travel the greatest distance if you leave the soonest.
2. Do you want to be a better teacher ?
 - a. Move from "I'll do it sometime" to "I need to teach today."
 - b. It is not what you want to do sometime, **but** what you will do NOW.

II. The second word is maturity.**S#27.****A. Maturity comes from knowledge and understanding of spiritual things.****S#28.**

1. Sometimes I want to do more **but** I don't know how to do more.
2. *"I've been a Christian for years and nothing seems to be happening for me."*
3. They can't do anything because they don't know anything.
4. Three suggestions for growth :
 - a. Bible reading ... learn content
 - b. Bible classes ... seek understanding
 - c. Bible conversations ... become comfortable with the word

5. **Rom. 10: 17** – Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ **S#29.**
6. **II Pet. 3: 18** – Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

B. Remember Hebrews 5 ... The lack of maturity has been a problem from the early years of the church. **S#30.**

1. Vs. 11 ... I want to teach you, but you're too immature to understand it.
2. Vs. 12 ... By now you ought to be teachers, but you're still in first grade.
3. Vs. 6:1 ... You really must mature past the basics and move on to deeper things.

B. The lack of spiritual maturity prevents many Christians from excelling more.

1. They want to teach a class, **but** fear they don't know enough.
2. Some want to ask a neighbor to study the bible, **but** fear they will say yes.
3. See a brother or Sister who is hurting, **but** you don't know what to say to them.

C. Put urgency with your learning and there is no limit to what you can do.

III. The third word is dependency.

S#31.

A. This runs counter to our culture.

1. We Americans are brought up to be independent.
 - a. It's not really success unless I accomplish it myself.
 - b. If other people help me, I may not get the credit.
2. That's not pride in doing something, most often it's JUST PRIDE.

B. I call your attention to a familiar passage about teamwork.

1. **Heb. 10: 21-25** Since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us **S#32.** draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and **#33.** let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.
2. The words "let us" appear 12 times in the book of Hebrews.
 - a. Christianity is a communal lifestyle ... **it is teamwork ... interdependence**
 - b. We are joined in same body ... same family ... same army ... working same mission

3. Draft horses provide a good illustration for us :

Horse Sense ... By Jim Stovall

Recently, I was reading about draft horses which are very large, muscular animals that, throughout history, have been used for pulling great loads and moving very heavy objects. A single draft horse can pull a load up to 8,000 pounds. The strength involved in this is hard to imagine. So then we can speculate what would happen if we hooked up two draft horses to a load. If you instantly thought two draft horses could pull 16,000 pounds if one draft horse can pull 8,000 pounds, you would be wrong. Two draft horses pulling together cannot pull twice as much as one. They can actually pull three times as much. The two draft horses that can each pull 8,000 pounds alone can pull 24,000 pounds working together. S#34.

The horses are teaching us a very clear lesson in teamwork, but they still have more to teach us. If the two horses that are pulling together have trained with one another and have worked together before, they can't just pull three times as much working together as they can by themselves. The two trained horses in tandem can actually pull 32,000 pounds, which is a load four times as heavy as either of the horses could pull by themselves. S#35.

C. This principle applies to all cooperative efforts, including spiritual things. S#36.

1. God never intended for us to try to function as islands. (*Individuals or congregations*)
2. Couple of examples from Moses.
 - a. **Ex. 17** ... Israel was fighting the Amalekites and Moses had to have Aaron & Hur
 - b. **Ex. 18** ... Moses was judging the people

D. Start now ... learn how to do it ... team up with others to get it done. S#37.

1. Everything we do for God is easier when we do it with someone else
2. Evangelism is many times easier with even one other person.
3. Another person can provide the discipline of accountability to personal efforts.

CONCLUSION :

A. CHALLENGE : Attach urgency to our maturity and team up this week with other brethren to accomplish something for God. Eph 3:20 S#38.

B. If I were to preach this same sermon next year ... Could I start with S#39.

II Thes. 1: 3-4 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; **4** therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. S#40.

INVITATION : Will you commit your life to Christ and then excel in His service ? S#41.

S#42.

Lesson Text :**I Thes. 4: 1-10**

1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us *instruction* as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. **2** For you know what commandments we gave you by *the authority* of the Lord Jesus.**3** For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality; **4** that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, **5** not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; **6** *and* that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the* avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned *you.* **7** For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. **8** So, he who rejects *this* is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. **9** Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for *anyone* to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; **10** for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more.

Heb. 5: 11-6:2

11 Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. **12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. **13** For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. **14** But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

6:1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2** of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.