

¹ Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, ² and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. ³ But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. ⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

Past week, as nation remembered veterans on Veterans Day,
veterans themselves surely reminded of time of service.

One memory that may easily come to mind is marching
because there may have been a lot of it.

So picture marching in formation and what will happen
if one is out of step, slows down, lagging behind.

It interferes with the whole group.

This makes me wonder if marching in formation
is not just orderly way to get from one place to another
but practice in working together and learning that
if one is slacking it effects all the rest.

In the same way, when one is tired,
being with a group of others who are stepping along
can help the tired one to keep up the pace.

In text, Paul is writing to Thessalonians, who had seen
their share of Roman troops passing through
He repeatedly calls them brothers,
reminding them of the group they are part of,
and encourages them to keep up the pace.

KEEP ON GOING AS THE GOSPEL RUNS
DON'T BE WEARY AND WALK OUT OF LINE
FOLLOW IN FAITH AS JESUS LEADS THE WAY

KEEP ON GOING AS THE GOSPEL RUNS

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Imagine, if you can, you are running in race & see finish line.

What are you going to do, now that you are almost there?

Start walking, because now you have it made?

Or keep running or even sprint to finish strong?

When Paul writes in v. 1 about word of Lord speeding ahead, word for speeding ahead literally mean run.

Paul is writing to those who think they see finish line.

In 1 Thess., Paul urged faithfulness in face of persecution and reassured that those who already died will join us again when Christ suddenly returns.

But he heard back that these words had opposite effect on some from what was intended.

Some stopped everything to sit and wait for Christ's return.

In this 2nd letter Paul writes, as we read last week: No,

he has not come yet. This is no time to just sit around.

It is true, if we have faith in Jesus, we are ready for heaven,

Jesus has done everything necessary for us to be saved.

So why are we still here? God still has more to do for us or more for us to do.

We are runners in relay race who not only need to finish our leg but pass the baton on to others.

So even before encouraging Thessalonians to keep going,

Paul says in v. 1, pray for us, that we can keep going,

that the word of the Lord may run, speed ahead,

just as it did with you because not everyone has faith yet.

As we think today of our plans for spiritual life, we are reminded

that want to do what we do not just to hold on to faith

until Jesus comes again,

but so that the word of the Lord may run, speed ahead,

and be shared with many others who urgently need it.

For this, we too need not just plans but prayers for God's help

to be delivered from the wicked, including the Devil.

The word here for wicked means outrageously inappropriate,
literally, out of line, like a soldier who breaks ranks
or worker on line who throws monkey wrench into things.
So after asking for prayer for himself, Paul goes on...

DON'T BE WEARY AND WALK OUT OF LINE

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Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness
and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

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If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that
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Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus
Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

Last week, students from our school participated in an event
sponsored by our District, packing food for the starving.
They worked in teams, with four scooping ingredients,
while others held or sealed bags, brought supplies, etc.
It was easy to see that if one started daydreaming,
whole operation was thrown out of whack.

This is why Paul warns about those walking in idleness,
which can also be translated walking in disorderliness.
It throws everything out of order and holds up everything.
So those not busy working don't just waste own time
but are busybodies who interfere with others.

As part of the body of Christ, the team, we all have work to do.
God himself provides in world all we need for physical life
but we need to work to benefit from it.

Paul says God intends for us to earn our own living.
God provides in his word all we need for spiritual life
but we also need to work at getting the most out of
his word in our worship, Bible study, devotions.
But there are various things that can cause us to become
weary in doing good.

For Thessalonians, thinking of Christ's return made it feel
like it was Friday and they were ready to be done.
Others may feel, I have been at this so long, I am old,
or I have done what I do so many times before,
it is getting old and I am tired of same old same old.
The devil will also whisper in our ear negative self-talk:

this job God seems to have given you, or spiritual discipline
is too hard for you. You don't have the right abilities,
You are not very good at it.
Surely someone else would do it better.
Or maybe you feel ineffective. What good is it doing?
It isn't making a difference, or you are unappreciated.
Maybe you look at others and they have more success
or maybe others you see are not working as hard as you.
Both are discouraging.

Plenty of things can make each one of us weary of doing good
to make us stumble or stop or get out of line,
which gets in the way of others around us as well.
But Paul puts up a sign you may see on busy streets:
No stopping here. This is not a time or place to quit.

FOLLOW IN FAITH AS JESUS LEADS THE WAY

³ But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against
the evil one. ⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you
are doing and will do the things that we command. ⁵ May the Lord
direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.
⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we
were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread
without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day,
that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ It was not because we do
not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.

Paul points out how he worked when he was with them,
not that he was trying to do everything for them,
a temptation leaders need to watch out for,
and not that he didn't have the right or authority
to ask them to do anything,
but to lead by example, being busy leading the way
as opposed to those who get in the way.
We can also encourage each other by our examples.
But, as he says in another place, they are not just following him.
His example is intended to be a picture helping to see Christ.
Everything we do is intended to point to Christ
because no matter how hard we work or don't work,
everything depends on what Christ does for us.
Paul contradicts the negative self-talk in v. 4:
We have confidence about you. It is confidence in the Lord.
He is the one who is faithful & will establish & guard you.

Our motivation is this in v. 5: May the Lord direct your hearts
to the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ.

This is what makes is loving and steadfast.

We can keep working because God keeps working.

It certainly appeared Jesus was a failure wasting his time
when his disciples dropped off one at a time

and he was left standing before an accusing crowd.

But he was steadfast & finished doing what he came to do,
by dying while forgiving unappreciative people.

But it was not all for nothing. He rose again as promised
and he is coming again in victory as promised.

Meanwhile he continues to patiently hold this world together
at to attentively listen to and answer our prayers.

Meanwhile his living and active word and his sacraments
are effective in causing & strengthening faith.

Yes we fall and fail, but Jesus will continue
picking us up again and getting us going every day.

God is still working as hard as ever every day.

He can be depended on to supply us with all we need
to do what he intends for us to do.

He himself is the one who is responsible
for causing our obedient efforts to be successful.

He has promised his eternal rewards by grace
not based on what we accomplish but based on
what he has done for us, and no one can take away.

This is why we keep on doing all we do in work & worship,
first to keep on receiving all God has to give us
and then to do all he has given us to do
in sharing it with others who need it.

KEEP ON GOING AS THE GOSPEL RUNS

Keep passing on the baton of God's word
for not all have faith.

DON'T BE WEARY AND WALK OUT OF LINE

Don't stop now. Don't get tripped up or get in the way
because of false or failed expectations

FOLLOW IN FAITH AS JESUS LEADS THE WAY

Keep looking at what God continues to do
because of his love and the steadfastness of Christ
who continues to work for us, in us and through us
until he does at last come again in glory.