

8/25/24

Deficient

1 Thessalonians 3:10

A couple of months ago I went in for my regularly scheduled doctor's appointment. Almost immediately, the nurse pricked my finger to extract blood for analysis. After placing it in a machine, she quickly exited the room like she had just armed a bomb!

So, there I sat in this tiny room having a stare down with this breadbox – sized machine. It began making a bunch of whirring and clicking noises like a dolphin trying to communicate with me.

“If only you knew what I'm doing with your blood!”, I think I heard it say to me.

All the while, the digital clock on the front was counting down 5 minutes.

I could feel my blood pressure rising. What would my number be?

Would it be in range or would my blood reveal some sort of deficiency?

Would it expose all my poor eating habits?

All I could do now was hope and pray - and start rehearsing my excuse for when the doctor arrived.

The suspense was killing me, but I'd just have to wait until time expired and the results came out, printed neatly and officially on a small piece of paper.

The truth is, nobody likes to hear they're deficient in anything, whether it concerns our body chemistry, feedback from a job review, or the status of our monthly bank account.

The recognition and admission of deficiency can deal a huge blow to our egos, and we protest!

What? I'm low in iron?

But I've been eating my spinach.

I'm not getting enough done at work? But I even work through my lunch hour!

I'm a little short for this month's rent? Can you blame me if I need my designer latte every morning?

The good news about discovering a deficiency is that there might be a solution.

We might be able to fix it!

Thyroid underperforming? Take this pill.

Low calcium levels? Eat more broccoli.

Not enough money at the end of the month?

Invent a new month? Just kidding!

But having a deficiency can raise some real concerns, especially when it comes to our health.

I once asked Google to tell me how much we Americans spend annually on health supplements that are specifically designed to overcome our so-called deficiencies. Anyone care to guess?

The answer: 35 Billion dollars!

Now I know why we can't pay our rent!

But what about our spiritual health?

What if we discover deficiencies here?

What are we to do when our short-comings show up in the faith department?

Do we just ignore them, hoping they'll go away?

Do we write them off as personality flaws and say ... well, that's just who I am, and I'm never going to change?

Maybe, we decide that this deficiency is insurmountable – too debilitating - so we just throw in the towel believing that God no longer has any use for us.

To my knowledge, the magic bullet to cure our faith short-comings has yet to be discovered.

And yet, Paul makes it clear that even these new believers in Thessalonica of whom Paul speaks so highly and considers them his pride and joy, are deficient in their faith: *“Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.”*

What about you?

Do you sense that you're deficient in your faith? Do you even care?

To be clear, this isn't the only time Paul has detected spiritual deficiencies in Christians. In fact, his overriding purpose in communicating with the churches was to bolster faith in the faithful.

Here are just a couple of examples from his letters:

Romans 1:11: *“I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.”*

1 Corinthians 3:1 - 3: *“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly.”*

Galatians 4:19: *"My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. How I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I'm perplexed by you."*

Paul was perplexed and troubled because some of the Galatian Christians who started out so well in their faith, had gotten sidetracked - so much so that Paul wrote, *"I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you."*

Obviously, Paul was not at the point of exasperation with the Thessalonians as he was with the Galatians. In fact, Paul is quite complementary toward them writing, *"Finally brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more."*

But in reading Paul's words, we can't escape the fact that the Thessalonians needed more faith. Why?

Was it because they were new Christians and needed more time to grow and mature in their faith?

Yes, this was part of it.

Was it because they missed their fearless leader?

Again true. Paul's time with them had been abruptly cut short, depriving Paul the time he needed to instruct the new believers on weightier doctrinal issues.

Was it because these new Christians were experiencing persecution?

Right again. Paul refers to these trials writing, *"You know quite well that we were destined for them."*

So, here we see some contributing factors that can lead to deficiencies in our faith:

Being a recent convert whose diet has consisted mostly of milk the lack of spiritual leadership that is needed to guide us through weightier doctrinal issues and trials and tribulations that they were told were coming, but still, were unprepared to face.

Now before I go any further, I should mention that when Paul refers to the Thessalonians' faith, I think we can safely assume that he's using the term faith in a broader sense than just the faith we need to become Christians.

Paul talks about this initial faith in Romans 10:9 when he writes, *"If you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

To be sure, this is the foundational and indispensable element of faith. Everyone of us needs to acknowledge on our hearts and minds that Jesus is God, and then submit to Jesus Christ as the Living Lord who can save our souls.

This takes faith - and the faith God gives allows us to do just that.

But this is just the beginning of appropriating our faith!

When we believe this truth, that God is our Savior and Lord - when we acknowledge it and accept it - it's not like we're suddenly transported from this world to heaven to be with God. If this were the case, our need for faith would be short-lived.

On the contrary, we still have our earthly lives before us to live, and God is calling us to live them out daily by the same faith which brought us to him.

In other words, the faith Paul is talking about when he writes that he wants to **supply what is lacking in their faith**, has a lot more to do with our conduct on earth than it does our transport to heaven.

The heaven part has already been taken care of by Jesus when he died on the cross and rose again – and we believe this by faith.

But now it's on to the practical earthly matters of honoring and glorifying Him with **our lives on earth**. This is the portion of faith that Paul addresses - The faith that moves us to live for God every day.

As a preacher, I can never emphasize this enough.

Obviously, the faith we need to come to God and become a citizen of God's kingdom is a gift from God. Ephesians 2:9 makes this crystal clear: *"It is by grace you have been saved through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works , so that no one can boast."*

But this same gift that brought us to him, now needs to be operating in us so that we can live out the reality of our calling right here on earth!

Ephesians 2:10: *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

I remember the first time I read these words in Ephesians. It was like a whole new world opened up to me because this is when I first learned that the God had called me and saved me, and now was wanting to live in me and work through me to the extent that I was able to live by faith.

For me, this was a revolutionary moment, and my life has never been the same.

But the question remains: How do we go from being deficient – lacking something in our faith - to sufficient, as it pertains to the outward expression of our faith?

In other words, can we ever have enough faith to satisfy God? Or maybe it's not even a matter of quantity, but rather quality.

In my conversations with other Christians, it's quite common to hear the sentiment, "If only I had more faith."

I know I've said things like that. But maybe what's really going on here is that we're expressing our dissatisfaction with our ability to follow hard after God, so we say things like ... "I wish I had more faith", when in reality, what we're trying to convey is that we want to have a life that is more in line and more in tune with God and his ways – we want to be as Paul puts it, *"blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when the Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."*

Wouldn't this be the most satisfyingly wonderful moment, that when Jesus came back, he did find us serving him with a pure love and unflinching devotion?

This is what God wants for us and I dare say this is what we want for ourselves if we're truly Christians – to be found faithful in Him, not lacking any good thing, especially in the category of faith.

James, the brother of Jesus puts it this way: *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."*

There we go with this idea of deficiency again.

And notice how James connects it to our faith.

Faith that has been tested and tried and found to be genuine and of high quality -this is the stuff that produces a mature Christian who lacks nothing.

Isn't this who we want to be?

A Christian who lacks nothing?

Not in the material sense, but in our following hard after God sense?
No hesitancy, no questions, no doubts.

Well, at the beginning of this message, I don't think I ever promised you a remedy or a prescription to cure our short-comings in terms of our faithfulness to God.

I wish I could, then I could guarantee more glory and honor to God emanating from his people, but it's hard to prescribe solutions to trials and persecutions.

Only bored or crazy people go looking for trouble.

Normal people like you and me try to avoid trouble like the plague because trouble isn't fun. It's a pain and it's inconvenient, and part of the reason trials and persecutions are called trials and persecutions is that they come at us without warning or reason making our lives unpredictable, and we like predictable lives – at least I do.

So here's the Good news in all this, and I suppose you already know it, but it's worth repeating anyway:

God delights in supplying what we lack.

Yes, I admit it. I lack a whole lot of stuff.

Compassion and kindness

sensitivity and wisdom

ambition and discipline.

Did I mention love and generosity?

Yes, those too. And the list could go on, but I always rest in the fact that the God I serve, by his grace, delights in filling in for my short-comings and my inadequacies.

So I don't despair, but live by faith.

Some verses that really mean a whole lot to me and should to you as well, if you're the type of person who always seems to be haunted by your deficiencies:

*2 Peter 1:3: "His divine power has given us **everything we need for life and godliness** through our knowledge of him who calls us by his own glory and goodness."*

God never calls his people to be someone he hasn't already been himself.

And more importantly, we can be good because our God living in us is the source of all goodness.

I'm not sure we Christians hear this message enough. Our goodness as individuals is completely dependent on God's power and goodness in us and our willingness to submit to Him.

Philippians 4:19: "My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ."

Now this verse sounds like some wonderful and comforting words, but what do they really mean?

Simply this: a Christian's need will never go unsupplied or unfurnished by God.

If our Father in heaven was willing to give to us his most precious Son so that we might gain eternal life in him, we can rest assured that he will withhold nothing from us if He deems it necessary for us.

Paul puts it this way in Romans 8: 31 – 32: *“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”*

And finally, Romans 3:3: *“What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar.”*

Yes, if we’re honest with ourselves, we’ll come to the conclusion that we’re deficient in our faith along with many other areas in our lives, but this doesn’t mean we shouldn’t strive for better spiritual health or that we should give up.

It just means that our insufficiency will be filled by God’s all-sufficiency, as he himself said to Paul, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your weakness.”* Amen.