

Season 6, Episode 4: Real Joy (2:17-3:11)

The following is an uncorrected transcript generated by a transcription service. Before quoting in print, please check the corresponding audio for accuracy.

Felicity: This season is sponsored by Crossway and I've really enjoyed one of their titles recently. This book is called A Hunger for More by Amy Demarcangelo. I love the way that Amy drills down into our hearts desires, seeing where we are hungry, room for more, and responds to those desires with biblical brilliance. She presents Christ in all his fulfilling glory and helps us see how God has given us all we need, even when we seemingly crave something more. She talks of craving, happiness, comfort, strength, community, love and so much more. It's a valuable, heart, engaging book that I'm looking forward to sharing with others. Grab a copy wherever you get your book.

Sarah: Welcome to two sisters and a cup of tea. My name is Sarah and I live in the UK. This is my sister Felicity. She lives in the US. And today we're really looking forward to getting stuck in to chapter two of first thessalonians beginning at verse 17 and going through to three verse eleven. We've got cups of tea, we've got Bibles open for we talk a lot about asking someone to read the Bible with us because we really see the value of doing it in community with others. What happens when people say no? What do we do with that?

Felicity: Oh, it's hard because you've probably been praying for a while and kind of getting up the courage and like I'm going to ask and they're going to say yes and then you get this no. And I think there's something in that that you have been praying. I really would encourage you to be praying before you ask someone. And as we've been praying, actually we're trusting God with this whole thing as to whether they're the right person to ask and all of that kind of question. So if they then turn around and say no, we can still be trusting God with that and we can keep praying. I think that's one of the key things. But also it is fine for someone to say no and that is not necessarily an indicator of where their heart is. It might just be they don't really know what you're asking or they're not quite sure they've got the capacity at this point. It might be a whole range of different reasons. And just because someone says no, we maybe don't know the background for that. So probably don't just kind of shake your feet off and move on straight away, but keep praying and maybe there'll be another opportunity and even saying to them, that's fine, I totally understand if you ever want to do it. Maybe I'll ask you again in a few weeks time to see what you think. What about you? What's your open, your experience?

Sarah: Yeah, all of that is good. I think you're right. It is committing them and your desire to read someone to the Lord, isn't it? And as you ask someone to read the Bible with you, I think what I found helpful is giving people in out as well. So you're not going to read the Bible for ten years together? I want to go through one thessalonians at the moment. I just wondered whether you want to do that with me, and then at the end, it's quite an easy thing to say. Do you want to keep going or be happy to just stop for the moment and pick up again in a few months? Maybe? Just always giving people an out is a really helpful way to lessen the intensity of what you're asking, because it can feel quite intense to say, Jon, read the Bible with me, especially when.

Felicity: It's something you haven't actually started doing yet. So they don't quite know that it's more relaxed than it sounds, like you're just having a property and opening up the Bible.

Sarah: Yeah. So, yeah, I think just having the options of, as you were saying, explaining what it could look like and trusting the Lord when it is a no. And that's okay.

Felicity: Very much so, even though it can still make you sad and that's okay. Talking of which, opening up the Bible and reading it, shall I read our passage? For today? We are in chapter two, and I'm going to read verses 17 right through to 311. But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time in person, not in thought, out of our intense longing, we made every effort to see you, for we wanted to come to you. Certainly I paul did again and again. But Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy. So when we could stand it

no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves. In Athens, we sent Timothy, who is our brother and coworker in God service and spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith so that no one would be unsettled by these trials, for you know quite well that we are destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted, and it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the Tempter had tempted you and that our labor might have been in vain. But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love.

Sarah: He's told us that you always have.

Felicity: Pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also longed to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution, we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live. Since you are standing firm in the Lord, how can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God? Because of you, night and day, we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. Sarah as I've been reading that, it might seem to some that I have stopped short. I mean, they might be thinking that maybe I've forgotten that there's two more verses in the chapter. And maybe you could help us to think about this because actually we're thinking about the structure tool this week, which helps us to understand a bit more of what God is saying to us. And this particular passage, I think, would be good for that. So could you help us just think through that a bit? What is this structure to? What's the point of it?

Sarah: Yeah, I mean, it seems quite controversial, isn't it, that you just stopped halfway through the prayer? It's like a big prayer that Paul's praying and you're like, you went for it and then we stopped. Why have we stopped there? This prayer is basically the hinge of the book, the hinge of the letter. So it kind of bridges the two halves of the letter. And the first half of the prayer is about the first half of the book and it has to do with them longing to see the thessalonians and that kind of theme that we can see coming through as we're reading this half a letter. The second half a letter is about matters of Godliness and about information about Jesus returning and that is what is prayed for in the second half of the prayer. So using the structure tool, we can see that there's a clear structure to this prayer. There's a clear kind of cut, so to speak. And so we are using that structure tool to get okay, we're actually going to split the prayer because the first half links with what we linked back to what we're looking at today, and the second half of the prayer links forward, if that makes sense.

Felicity: But we can also look at the.

Sarah: Structure tool with what we're reading today. Really what the structure tool is seeking to do is looking at how a book or a passage has been put together. And so with this package we've got today, we seem to have two ideas that are weaved together. So we've got something about joy and keeping going in the face alongside Paul and Timothy's desire to see the thessalonians. And as we start to read the passage, we can see there's a pattern and a structure in place to help us see those ideas weave together. And it kind of basically goes in an ABAB format. So you get them really longing to see them. We then get something about their joy. You then get them sending Timothy so that they can find out how they're doing. We can get something else about their joy and link to them being worried about their faith and their work being in vain. We've got joy link to them standing firm, we've got them clearing away for them to come to them. And we've got him praying that that happened at the end. So we've got these two ideas, but the structure of the passage helps us to see how interlinked they are. Does that make sense?

Felicity: That's brilliant. That's really good. And taking a step back from that, then as we see those ideas and we see how they're intertwined, we then begin to see more of what Paul is wanting to communicate, like how, why he's writing, what's the purpose? What's the big deal for the thessalonians? I think it gives more depth, doesn't it? Understanding the structure helps us to just get a bit more into the nitty gritty of what he's actually saying and why.

Sarah: Yeah, I find it quite exciting when I start to spot the patterns and start to see the way that something has been written. Last time we were thinking about the tone and the

feel of the way something has been written. This time it's more why is it being structured that way? Why is this kind of bit being put next to this bit? And why is this prayer here? But I find that exciting because then it starts to piece together the letter as a whole and you see how wonderfully creative Paul is in wanting to use every word to encourage and assure the thessalonians. And this again is another passage of assurance, isn't it, as he seeks to encourage them in their faith. What struck you as we just read that in terms of the encouragement, even.

Felicity: Just in that first verse, we read verse 17, our intense longing. We made every effort to see you. And I think we have this throughout the whole passage, this kind of idea that all of Paul is in and up for the thessalonians keeping going, there's this kind of intertwinedness like Paul's well being, even, is connected to whether thessalonians are going well or not. That is just huge, isn't it? And we talk to Tony, feel like the emotions in this passage are huge as well.

Sarah: So we're in to use the word orphans. Yeah, just huge, isn't it? But I guess because before he was saying about all these family connections and links of how he was describing his behavior with them, and then to say we were orphaned by being separated from you, like, it's just so beautiful and intense, isn't it? Level of feeling.

Felicity: I know, I think that's right. But also I read it and I'm like, oh, am I supposed to feel like that? There's a slightly intimidating aspect of the way that he's feeling about these people I think that's one of the questions that I've had. Like, is this a Paul thing? Just because he's Paul and he's like, you know that guy, or is it an us thing? Is this a gospel thing? Are we all supposed to be feeling like this about one another? Because that's, I think, huge challenge if that is the case.

Sarah: Yeah. Well, I think one of his big concerns where is it? In verse five, he's concerned that all his work might have been in vain, isn't he? Concerned that the devil would have got a foothold and persuaded them that not to keep going. And I think that goes some way to explaining the intensity of feeling, isn't it? Like he's really concerned that they're keeping going. He's really concerned that they keep going on the final day when Jesus returns, isn't he? And that shapes how he's feeling now that since it is a challenge to us, isn't it? Because we should be that concerned for our brothers and sisters to keep going, but it will come in different intensities.

Felicity: I think that's right. I think the thing is there that our heartbeat can be beating along with Paul's in this kind of being entwined with other people. And it's probably not the way that we naturally think or behave, like we're more likely to withdraw than we are to press in. And I think it's a beautiful thing, isn't it? It's a beautiful picture and it's desirable to be a part of that, to be like Paul in that.

Sarah: Well, what an extraordinary thing to receive that word, isn't it? Saying, you're my hope, you're my joy. I'm standing firm because you live. I live because you're standing firm. What? That would be amazing.

Felicity: And it really emphasizes just the value of keeping going, doesn't it? Like he's so concerned, he'll do everything. He'll send Timothy, he'll leave himself lacking in order that these guys would keep going. I was thinking, do I talk about keeping going much with other people? How can I encourage you to keep going in Christ? I think that's just something maybe we should be talking about more with one another and be concerned for one another in that. Anything that struck you, particularly as you were in this passage?

Sarah: I was interested that he talked about Satan blocking their way. It's interesting that he's used that phrasing rather than God prevented us. Why.

Felicity: Throw in the Satan grenade?

Sarah: We don't really know what to do with it. But I think it's helpful. It's helpful to have an awareness, isn't it, of Satan's deception in the way that he is going to try and stop gospel work going on. But why do you think the thessalonians need to hear that?

Felicity: Well, I've been thinking that we hear Satan. He's like, Satan has tried to stop us, but actually the gospel work is continuing. The thessalonians are going strong. Timothy was over here. I feel like Satan we almost see Satan being defeated here because the thessalonians are still going strong. So like Satan has tried, he says in verse five I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you, but that's not true. The labor have not been

in vain, thessalonians are still going. So I think it maybe gives me assurance that God is bigger and the Gospel yeah.

Sarah: In the way that he then prays. In verse eleven now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. God is bigger, he can clear the way. But he sent Timothy and that's been a fruitful experience both for Timothy and for this church, isn't it? And in that sense the Lord has still been at work.

Felicity: I think the evidence of that work is all the more so when you read about the suffering that they are experiencing and this idea versus so that no one would be unsettled by these trials quite well, we were destined for them. The reality of suffering, I think that struck me again this week is this is what we are to expect in the Christian life and while Satan will be seeking to knock us off course, actually God himself keeps us and holds us through the trials. That's just a helpful perspective, isn't to have, isn't it?

Sarah: It's such an encouragement that, isn't it? I think you can have bolstered yourselves with these trees, aren't you? Knowing that actually we're not being persecuted in any way compared to our brothers and sisters in different parts of the world right now, but actually this should assure us and encourage us to pray for them and pray for our own selves as and when we face persecution that the lords at work is me and that isn't. Yeah. But the suffering can so often be a stumbling lock and I feel like what Paul is doing through the course of this letter so far is trying to encourage the best learnings that the suffering is not a stumbling block. You can keep going, you are keeping going and do keep going yeah.

Felicity: And even be strengthened in that and I mean, we know that to be true, don't we even hear about gospel things over in the Ukraine? And you think in many ways the church is in a healthier position over there through suffering than it might be otherwise. Yeah. Always challenging to think about suffering, isn't it?

Sarah: Big time. So where is it in your heart lifty? Where do you feel the challenge.

Felicity: I just can't get past versus 19 to 20 and this idea of what is our hope, our joy or the crown in which we're glory, is it not you? And that kind of interconnection between Paul and other believers that his gospel heart is not just for himself actually it's maybe even more so for others. And so that's just really been challenging me as to how I think about others, how I pray for others. What am I really bothered about? Like, am I really bothered about other people's perseverance? What about you? Where's the heart hit?

Sarah: Yeah, similarly, but I guess it's a similar phrase. It feels like in chapter three, verse eight, and he says, for now we really live since you are standing firm in the Lord. Like what a friend that really challenged me and my heart on. Is it really like life giving to see my sisters in Christ in my bubble Greek, to be standing firm in the Lord? Is that what's giving me life and making me live? Yeah. As people turn up on a Sunday and they're eager to hear the sermon and eager to listen to God's word, for now I really live. Because you're standing, you're keeping going. I think it's a very simple challenge, isn't it? But actually praying my prayers would be shaped to that end.

Felicity: It's an eternal perspective, isn't it? Again, I'm really bothered about the spiritual. Wellbeing, yeah.

Sarah: And I'm really bothered about people keeping going to the end. It's not a flash in the pan saying, this is until eternity, isn't it? Until Jesus returns. And that's where we see the kind of his return shaping every part and every thread of the letter, don't we? Even when it's not particularly mentioned. It is mentioned here, isn't it?

Felicity: Yeah. It's not front and center, though, is it? Why don't you pray for us as we ponder such big things?

Sarah: Yeah, I'd love to. Father, we just thank you so much for this letter and all that you're teaching us through it. Lord, how we long for our prayers to be shaped in the way that Paul is writing here. How we long to be able to say that now we really live since our sisters in Christ, our brothers and sisters in Christ in our local churches are standing firm. Lord, please, would you give us that perspective, please? Would you shape our view in light of Jesus return, that we would be praying and laboring to see brothers and sisters stand firm in the Lord? Thank you for this perspective. Thank you. That we need our perspective to be shaped by Your Word in this way. Lord, please keep doing that shaping work of our own hearts to the praise of Your glory. Amen.

Felicity: Amen.

Sarah: Wow.

Felicity: Good stuff again. So next week we're going to be cracking into the next chunk, really the next the second half of the book, but hearing the rest of the prayer and pivoting into the second half of the letter. In the meantime, what can we be.

Sarah: Doing, Sarah, in the meantime? Why not follow us on social media, if you don't already? This season we're on social media. We're actually producing some reels we're going very technological and we're producing some reels around these Bible tools that we're talking about each week. And they're kind of coming out as the episodes come out. So do follow us. Do have a look at them. Hopefully they're a good resource for people to save and then be able to think and use later as and when you need them. So follow us on social media, Instagram or Facebook.

Felicity: I think that's it. I think that's it. We'll see you next week.

Sarah: Yeah, see you next week.

Felicity: Bye. Bye.

Sarah: Bye.

Felicity: This episode was sponsored by Crossway.