

A graphic featuring the word "STEADFAST" in a large, white, sans-serif font, centered within a double-lined white circle. The circle is set against a background of a warm orange-to-brown gradient. A dotted white circle surrounds the main circle. Two white 'X' marks, formed by two parallel lines, are positioned diagonally across the circle, one in the upper right and one in the lower left.

STEADFAST

Sometimes the hardest thing to do is stand still. The pressures of life and society, the pain and struggle we experience, can make us shaky in our faith. When you are holding on to the last rung of the ladder, be encouraged and stand firm. Christ is faithful to you and will help you remain steadfast in Him.

“Still Standing.” What does that phrase evoke in you? What picture comes to mind? After the hurricane, the house was still standing. After the fire, the shed was still standing. After the battle, the flag was still standing. For my generation, the defining moment is September 11. I remember where I was, I remember how it felt, everything about that day. Even now, when I use that phrase “still standing,” the first picture that comes to my head is the cross that stood in the rubble, part of the steel-beam structure of the building. Remember that? Now it’s part of the permanent memorial. But I remember actually seeing that cross when I was watching the news, before it was noticed and something was made of it. I remember seeing that and thinking, how fitting. The cross endures. Right there, where people conspired to do their worst to one another, right there, the cross still stands.

Still standing. In 100 years, what will still be standing? My grandmother used to have a saying, “In a hundred years, we’ll all be dead.” I didn’t say it was a happy saying. But it was useful from time to time, like when a relative brings up politics. You might want to keep it in your pocket this week for Thanksgiving. When you get cornered in an awkward conversation, “Whelp! In a hundred years, we’ll all be dead,” then go get some pie! She was right, of course. In 100 years, we’ll all be dead. What will still be standing of us? Of our lives? Of our church? Of our opportunity to serve Christ in 2019? If anything still stands 100 years from today, it will have to be built on pretty firm foundations. It will have to be steadfast.

There’s something nice about getting a whole letter of Scripture read, isn’t there? Scripture is foundation work. If you’re not building your life on this, what are you building it on? Advice from friends, things you picked up in movies, Instagram memes and t-shirts, these are only going to get you so far. World philosophies, current understanding, the latest news cycle. When it all comes down, what’s under your feet? Scripture is foundation work, foundations to build things steadfast and still standing. At the end of Jesus’ greatest sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, he closed with this: “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock” (Matthew 7:24–25). Not just “heard” these words, but acted on them. Trusted them. Put

them into practice. But sometimes we don’t, so Jesus said, “But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash” (Matthew 7:26–27). In 100 years, what will our great-great grandkids see and say: “Look, still standing!”

In our last look at 2 Thessalonians, we are in deep on the third problem the church was facing. There were three challenges. One, they didn’t understand why persecution was rising against them; why is following Jesus so hard in this world? Two, they had confusion over the end times and the “Day of the Lord.” And three, they had idle people. Idle people who stopped working or contributing on spiritual grounds saying they didn’t want to do anything because Jesus was coming back soon. That’s what this passage addresses today, and Paul is very firm, very firm about how to address it. Why? Because it’s at the very foundations. It’s like someone mixing some kind of impurity in the cement when the foundation is getting poured. It’s going to erode the whole structure if it isn’t stopped. Paul’s heart is to find the church still standing. Steadfast.

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us” (2 Thessalonians 3:6). Does that strike you as strange? This is a command to keep away, to separate. Even more, it’s a command to keep away from believers! Paul’s concern is for the influence. Like when Jesus said to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees. Paul is saying, do this not that, follow this way not that way. Why is there such a danger? Well, it isn’t just that some people settled into lethargy and laziness. They are idle, but they are “idle and disruptive.” The same phrase gets repeated in verse 11, “idle and disruptive.” The same phrase was used in the first letter Paul sent, “And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone” (1 Thessalonians 5:14). But patience was beginning to run thin as these folks disrupted the body, spread false rumors and blocked what needed done while the mission was clear. Their commitment to non-doing was getting in the way of the doers who wanted to see the gospel spread like wildfire! Idle and disruptive. General Patton once said, “Lead me, follow me, or

get out of my way." We have what I call a crash corner in the kitchen. I think every kitchen has one. It's where the microwave, the toaster, the coffee maker, the sink and the dishwasher all intersect. I find myself saying in that corner, "Hey, you don't have to help, but don't stand there! Do a dish, help do a dish, or move away from the dishes!" Lead, follow, or get out of the way. The worst offender of all is our dog, but his motives for being around the dishes are a little different. Somehow, they were idle and disruptive. Paul says pull away from them. Don't get influenced by that spirit. That's not what you saw in us. We were doers, "For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat'" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). By the way, that's our theme verse for Thanksgiving this year! We were doers, not idlers disrupting what needed to be done.

"We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies" (2 Thessalonians 3:11). That's a little convicting to me. Am I busy or am I a busybody? Am I moving ahead or just buzzing around? Engaged and helping or spinning in place—a busybody. Busybodies are always at work and never accomplishing anything. Jesus was friends with two sisters, Mary and Martha, who lived in Bethany near Jerusalem. They had a brother named Lazarus. There is a story in Luke 10 about how Jesus visited and Martha worked her fingers to the bone hosting while Mary sat at Jesus' feet to listen to his teaching, like a student training under a Rabbi. Martha got angry. "'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her'" (Luke 10:41–42). Here's the truth from that: there is an enormous difference between doing things for Jesus and doing things with Jesus. Martha did for. She got sucked into the busybody mode. Mary wanted to do with. The busybody is always in a panic. Never done at the end of the day. Hardly takes a full breath. No time! I get the image sometimes of sinking in quicksand, grasping every direction at once for something solid, busybody. Busy is different. Doing with is different. What is Jesus doing and how does Jesus want me to be involved? What is missing in the busybody is submission to the Lordship of Jesus. Don't run off on your own steam to do for Jesus; submit to what Jesus is doing, and where you can, jump in.

Well, Paul is concerned that this little church could get sucked into a disruptive idleness, a busybody

mode where everyone's exhausted and nothing is getting done with Jesus. The frustration with the disruptive party is clear, but Paul says, don't make an enemy out of anyone, "Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer" (2 Thessalonians 3:15). And bring everything under the Lordship of Christ. There is where we find peace. There is where we have a footing: "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you" (2 Thessalonians 3:16). Then he signed it with his own hand. Most letters were taken down as dictation, so Paul signs it and says to pay attention from now on to his handwriting. No more fakes! A firm foundation. What will they find still standing?

The church had a solid footing. In Acts, we get stories about it and the faithful disciples it produced. Years later, 300 years later, Thessalonica was called The Orthodox City. The city of right belief. In the middle of confusion and heresy and war and all that, people would ask, what do they say in Thessalonica? What do they say in the faithful city? Three hundred years later, still standing. Not a structure; a people—a people devoted to a Lord. Not a building; a body. How about us, church? Three hundred years from now, what will they find still standing? Look around. What will they find? Not these bricks, not this carpet or these lights, not these chairs, not this beautifully tinted glass (careful pastor! I know, don't worry, I love it too!) but you know in 100 years, in 500 years, this isn't what they will find still standing. If there is anything they find still standing of us, it will be a legacy of faithfulness. If there is anything that lasts, it will be there because we, way back in 2019, we were urgently devoted to the Lord's business. We were moving with Jesus, willing to do whatever He asked, to move out on His mission to seek and to save the lost, to nurture the faithful, to glorify His name in all the earth. If we are urgently devoted to the mission of Jesus today, then, that will be found still standing.

Tomorrow, my family and I travel to Pennsylvania for Thanksgiving with Abigail's parents. We'll drive over a bridge that spans the Susquehanna River at over a mile wide. There have been a lot of bridges there. One was built in 1814, wood covered. It was destroyed by ice in 1832. The stone footers were still standing. They rebuilt it, and in 1863 when Confederate forces were advancing from the West to take the capital, Union forces burned it to stop their advance. The footers were still standing. Rebuilt, a hurricane destroyed it in 1896. The footers were still

standing. A railroad bridge was built and ran until they dismantled it in 1963. Now you drive over a new bridge, and when you look out your car window you can see, in the middle of the river, the stone footers are still standing. A solid foundation can last. After the storm, still standing. After the fire, still standing. After the cancer, after the economic collapse, after he walked out on me, after she never texted me back, after the attack, after it fell apart, after I wondered if all hope was lost, still standing. Even when I draw my last breath, even then, still standing. As my life is hidden in Christ who lived and died for me, my life will be found still standing.

As we close this series, I want to give you an opportunity to pray. How many, show of hands, how many in the house today need to know that your life is on a solid foundation, a firm foundation? You need to know, the work you are doing, the things you are suffering, the busy isn't just busybody, it's for the Lord, and it will last. If that speaks to you, just put your hand in the air. "Lord, build our lives on firm foundations. Build our families on firm foundations. Build your church on firm foundations. Don't let us run around busybodies. Let us serve You and Your mission, whatever it takes. And let there be something in our faithfulness to You today that generations find still standing."

Now, one more question. Some of you here this morning are not sure what's under your lives. You don't know what the foundations are under there, and you are wondering how to get your life founded on Jesus. Who is Jesus? He is God come to us to bring us life and show us the way home. Who is Jesus? He is the Lord who holds on to us when we're not sure how to hold on to Him. Who is Jesus? He is the one who persevered through suffering and pain to die on the cross for you and for me, to pay the price for our sins, so we didn't have to, to forgive us and offer us eternal life. You don't need a new philosophy, you don't need a new career, you don't need a new move or a new spouse, you need a Savior! You need a Savior. And He is right here. I'm going to pray now, and I welcome you to pray after me, but let's all pray together church, all who are willing: "Lord Jesus, I'm not sure what I've built my life on, but I want my life built on You, sturdy and steadfast in Your love, forgive me my sins, strengthen my foundations, let my life be found in You, my Lord and my Savior. In Jesus' name, Amen."

STUDY GUIDE
STEADFAST • "Still Standing"
2 Thessalonians 3:6–18

UP: **UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word¹**

Read aloud the passage for the week: 2 Thessalonians 3:6–18.

- 1) One of the primary issues Paul writes to address in 2 Thessalonians is "idle and disruptive" people. Some people had quit working because they believed Christ's return was imminent and they were beginning to cause problems in the community. When have you seen a problematic interpretation of scripture negatively impact the church?
- 2) Reread verses 11–12. Paul describes these people as busybodies; gossips and generally meddlesome. When have you seen "busybodies" negatively impact the life of the church? How do you interact with these sorts of people in your own life?
- 3) Reread verses 14–15. Paul seems to say, "don't waste your time on these sorts of people." When you face adversity or discouragement from others, how do you tend to respond?
- 4) How might these verses encourage you to grow in faith, love and perseverance in a difficult season of life?

OUT: **Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)**

Reread verse 13. God continues to be at work in the world and has called us to join in His mission. Where are you currently "doing good?" When are you tempted to not "do good?"

IN: **Connect with Each Other**

Take a moment to consider whether you have been a "busybody" recently. What small change might you make in your life that could turn you from idleness or being a busybody?