

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(November 14, 2021)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Taking Our Next Steps into Faithfulness

(Studies in 1 Thessalonians)

Supporting Our Suffering Christian Family¹ Study #1

(1 Thessalonians 2:13--3:13)

Introduction: Fumbling...

I'm no prophet. But I can pretty well guarantee that this afternoon, in NFL games played around the country, highly skilled players making millions of dollars will drop perfectly catchable passes. Others, having caught passes, will fumble the ball downfield.

We'll hear all sorts of reasons for losing the ball: Bright sun in the eyes, traffic at midfield, lapse in concentration, fear of getting hit, actually getting hit.

The bottom line is that in every case the player who drops or fumbles the ball will have missed a chance to be a star and has cost his team a chance to make progress.

But, of course, if that player holds on to the ball and carries it up field, while facing opposition, the whole team advances.

¹ See Appendix, page 9, *Suffering in 2021*.

² Paul's missionary strategy consisted of going to the larger cities of his day to establish churches, knowing that the message of the Gospel would then make its way to the smaller surrounding villages.

³ Many Thessalonians were Epicureans, Cynics, Skeptics, or Pythagoreans. Others were still devoted to the gods of ancient Greece, such as Zeus, Apollos, Demeter,

And, as in football, so in our faith.

Twenty centuries ago, the Apostle Paul threw a perfect Gospel spiral to some men and women in the city of Thessalonica. They caught the ball (believed in Jesus) and headed toward faithfulness, despite fierce opposition, moving the whole Jesus movement forward.

Today, we learn that we - teammates of our opposed family - can lovingly help them hold on to Jesus as they race toward the goal.

Background to Thessalonica and to Paul's visit there.

This is our third Sunday to focus on the first letter Paul wrote to some brand-new believers in Jesus in the city of Thessalonica.

Home to two hundred thousand residents, it was the capitol city of Macedonia and a center of commerce and of politics.²

There was a lot of ethnic diversity in this city made up of Romans, Greeks, Asians, Persians, along with Jews. There was a lot of religious diversity, too.³

Into this eclectic population came Paul and his friends, Silas⁴ and Timothy, with the Gospel of Jesus. They were already deep into what we call the Second Missionary Journey.

When these three entered Thessalonica, they were bruised, battered, and bloody from their time in Philippi, where Paul and Silas had spent some time in jail.

But their *condition* didn't keep them from their *mission*. They went straight to the Jewish synagogue to teach about Jesus and share the good news about salvation through faith in Jesus.

and Poseidon. Others were connected to Eastern "mystery religions," frightening cults that engaged in snake worship, sexual orgies, physical mutilation, horrible sacrifices, and drunkenness.

⁴ We assume Silas / Silvanus was an able teacher, a godly man, and a committed Christian. Timothy was the youngest of the three. He was a warm, timid man.

Sadly, they didn't get to stay for a long time in Thessalonica.

But they stayed long enough for the message to take root in the hearts of a few people, long enough for some lives to be changed by God's power, and long enough for a gathering of those who believed to come together - a gathering Paul called a church / ekklesia.⁵

In Thessalonica, because of the work of God in the lives of a few people, the church almost immediately began to have great impact and far-reaching witness. And why did all these changes happen?

It was all because of the way in which the Thessalonians received the message Paul brought.

How to Receive God's Message (2:13)

[13] For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of mere men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which also is at work in you who believe.

There are all kinds of things that the Thessalonians could have done with the message once they heard it. There really wasn't a choice in hearing it. When the sound waves hit their ears, they heard.

After that, though, they might have rejected or resisted or dismissed it. They might have endlessly debated it or argued it. Instead, after thoughtful consideration, they *received* the message.

They recognized that this message Paul brought was different than any other message they had ever heard. The message about Jesus was God's message.

When they accepted the message as God's message, its life-changing power was unleashed to work in and through them.

And, as it was then, so it is now. The message of Jesus does its work when we receive it - when we HEAR it - for what it truly is: God's message.⁶

Speaking scripturally, it is the ear - not the eye - that is the receptacle for God's word.⁷

There are places in the Bible (like Psalm 40) where we find the image of God "digging" ears for us.

It's like our two natural ears aren't enough to hear His Word right. So, He takes a shovel and digs additional earholes in our skulls' cranial granite so that we can really HEAR and accept His message.

Would you, right now, ask God to (figurately) "dig" ears for you so that you can hear Scripture, today, as the word of God it is? In other words, would you ask God to place you in a mental and spiritual posture of receptivity?

Imagine if each of us here today were receiving the WORD for what it really is - not a word like any other word - but as the WORD of GOD. If we did that, there'd be no fumbling the ball, no dropping the "make disciples" command.

We'd be like the first-century church at Thessalonica, making progress, together.

Not that life was easy for them. No, life was tough for these followers of Jesus. Paul knew how tough things were for them.

So, he reminded them that followers of Jesus had faced tough times from the get-go.

⁵ See Acts 17:2-3.

⁶ We could say the same thing about Jesus. He is - objectively - the Son of God and the Savior. But He only saves those who receive Him for who He really is.

⁷ In the art of the Medieval church, the organ of conception in the Virgin birth was pictured as Mary's ear, when she received the word/Word of God.

Suffering Saints (2:14-16)

A Pattern of Persecution (2:14)

[14] For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches⁸ of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews

The experience of the churches in Judea (v. 14a)

Within a very short time after the birth of the church, strong opposition surfaced in Jerusalem.

- The apostles were repeatedly beaten and jailed for talking about Jesus. (Acts 4 and 5).
- A church leader, Stephen, was stoned to death for his bold testimony about Jesus (Acts 7).
- Then, widespread persecution broke out with house-to-house raids that forced many believers to flee Jerusalem.

Paul brings up the early church's suffering when writing to the Thessalonians to remind them that their experience of suffering was not unique. They - and we - come from a long line of the persecuted.

The experience of the church at Thessalonica (v. 14b)

When Paul, Silas, and Timothy rode into Thessalonica, they presented Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah on three straight Sabbaths in the Jewish synagogue.

A few of the Jews believed.

And so did ***[Acts 17:4] a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women*** of the city.

But the Jews who didn't believe became jealous of the Gospel's success. They incited a riot against the Christians, while the Romans in town accused the Christians of treason against Caesar.

How's THAT for an introduction to life in Christ for the new Christians in Thessalonica?

Opposition was so fierce that Paul and his friends left to go to the nearby city of Berea, where things went well...until the Jews who had opposed Paul in Thessalonica came over to Berea to stir up trouble there, too.

So, Paul and his friends soon left Berea, leaving the trouble-making Thessalonians to return home...to continue making life hard for the new Christians in Thessalonica.

Paul paused for a moment to reflect on those who were doing the persecuting.

Concerning the Opponents... (2:15-16)

[15] who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all people, [16] hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always reach the limit of their sins. But wrath has come upon them fully.

Technically, Jesus was put to death by the Romans since the Jews were forbidden to carry out any form of capital punishment.

But the Romans put Jesus to death only because the Jews delivered Him up to them. So, Paul correctly says that they ***"killed the Lord Jesus."***

⁸ "Church" in Greek is ecclesia (ἐκκλησία). It is not necessarily a word that refers to a religious community. In fact, ecclesia is never used to refer to the religious brotherhoods of the Greeks.

From the days of Abraham forward, God called the Jews to be a source of blessing to the whole world. But in persecuting those who preached Jesus, they were doing the exact opposite.⁹

- 1 - They were hurting the Christians they were persecuting.
- 2 - They were hurting the people who would never hear about Jesus.
- 3 - They were pitting themselves against God.

The whole thing is really tragic. So, here's a loving thought about those who seek to make life tough on Christians.

Christian history is filled with the stories of believers responding to their tormentors exactly as Jesus did when He was crucified. From the cross, Jesus prayed, **[Luke 23:34]... "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."**

As we saw in the video this morning, Richard Wurmbrand, the founder of **Voice of the Martyrs**, was a faithful Romanian pastor who suffered tremendously in Soviet Union prisons for Jesus.

Wurmbrand wrote several books in which he recounts some of his experiences and those of others who were sentenced to imprisonment and torture.

He writes about how he prayed for his persecutors. He tells of witnessing fellow Christians praying for their tormentors while suffering terribly.¹⁰ And that was also Paul's practice.

When writing to the Christians in Rome, he told them, **[9:2]...I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart**" and **[10:1]...my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation."**

Many in the persecuted church today pray fervently for their persecutors who have not yet tasted God's grace.

These persecutors are not the enemy. More correctly, they are the victims of the enemy. And they are under the wrath of God. It is the ultimate in mercy when the persecuted pray that their persecutors find the same mercy they themselves have found.

But persecution is tough, and it was exactly what the brand-new Christians in Thessalonica were suffering. And Paul was very concerned for their spiritual welfare.

Loving Concern (2:17--3:8)

A Painful Separation (2:17-20)

Longing for a visit (vv. 17-18)

[17] But we, brothers and sisters, having been orphaned¹¹ from you by absence for a short while - in person, not in spirit - were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.

Having been separated, he was desperate to see them. But to this point, he has not been able to make it back to see them. And he knew why.

[18] For we wanted to come to you - I, Paul, more than once - and Satan¹² hindered us.

There had been nothing wrong with the plans Paul had made to make it back to Thessalonica. They were good plans. Ministry plans. Plans to serve Christ.

⁹ See Matthew 23:13, 32; Genesis 15:16.

¹⁰ "I have seen Christians in Communist prisons with fifty pounds of chains on their feet, tortured with red-hot iron pokers, in whose throats spoonfuls of salt had been forced, being kept afterwards without water, starving, whipped, suffering from cold - and praying with fervor for the Communists."

¹¹ Paul imagines himself - their spiritual father - being "orphaned" when he had to go on to Berea and to separate from them.

¹² Paul must have given the church at Thessalonica, a primarily Gentile church with little if any background in Jewish teaching, instruction about the adversary, since he names SATAN, without explanation, assuming that they would understand who he was talking about.

But the plans didn't work out. SOMEBODY put a roadblock in the way, making the road to Thessalonica impassable.¹³

We don't know what roadblock Paul encountered that kept him from visiting his friends in Thessalonica. We do know, though, that the roadblock was put in place by Satan.¹⁴

And it doesn't surprise us that Satan would oppose Paul's attempt to visit the new Christians in Thessalonica.

The reason he wanted to get back to Thessalonica was to equip and to strengthen these young believers so that they would be better able to stand firm for Jesus, while being opposed.

It's only reasonable that the enemy - Satan - would want to stop such a thing from happening. But, as he goes on to tell us, these new Christians were precious to Paul.

Treasured friends and partners (vv. 19-20)

[19] For who is our hope or joy or crown of pride, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? Or is it not indeed you?

[20] For you are our glory and joy.

Paul's simply saying, "I'm proud of you." And it's easy to see why. They were living in the lion's den of persecution and suffering and were still standing firm for Jesus.

As it was then, so it is today. We are proud of our brothers and sisters around the world who are suffering for Jesus, and we are honored to be their partners in serving Jesus.

And given the persecution they were suffering, Paul was worried that they might drop the ball. They might fumble the message. We get that.

Try to imagine what it would be like if one of your closest friends, or a family member who lives not too far from you was facing grave danger. Maybe the danger is due to a spike in a pandemic or riots or economic pressures.

Or, to parallel Paul's thoughts, imagine that your friend was facing overt persecution for their bold stand for Jesus.

As Rochelle reported earlier, this is exactly what is happening in countless places today. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are very often suffering just because they are living for Him.

You'd be worried sick. You'd want to do something to help, to visit them - like Paul wanted to do for the Thessalonians, but couldn't.

So, Paul did what we do today when we care - he sent the very best. Not a Hallmark. Not a message or a letter. He sent Timothy.

That's right, when you care enough to send the very best, you send a person.¹⁵

Concern for the Thessalonians (3:1-5)

Unendurable concern (vv. 1-3a)

[1] Therefore when we could no longer endure it, we thought it best to be left behind, alone at Athens, [2] and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the benefit of your faith, [3a] so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions.

The unendurable hardship was the hardship of not being with, not knowing the welfare of, not being able to help the Thessalonians.

Paul was frantic to do something to help. So, he sent Timothy - and that would have been a sacrificial move.

¹³ When a military force wanted to keep an advancing army from making progress, they would set up a roadblock by felling trees and laying them across a road.

¹⁴ See Appendix, page 9. *Satan and the Gospel*.

¹⁵ It might be that Timothy was able to return to Thessalonica when Paul was not because he had not raised the ire of the Thessalonian officials as Paul had.

It was sacrificial for Timothy because traveling takes a toll on the traveler. It does in 2021, and it certainly did in the first century when travel was on foot over all kinds of terrain in all kinds of weather.

But Timothy's trip back to Thessalonica also cost Paul dearly.¹⁶ These two men relied on each other. They were friends. And Timothy was Paul's *fellow worker* as well as *brother*.

Timothy would have been helpful to Paul had he been with him in Athens, if he had been traveling with him, if he had been with Paul when he first landed in Corinth.

But because of Paul's passion for the Great Commission, and because of his love for the Thessalonians, he eagerly sent this treasured partner to protect them against falling away from Jesus, due to a hardship he had explicitly warned them about.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed (vv. 3b-4)

[3b]...For you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. [4] For even when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it happened, as you know.

Paul isn't saying, "I told you so." but, "We showed you so."

The Thessalonians would have seen Paul's and Silas' Philippian wounds. They would have heard about other hardships the apostles had suffered. They watched Paul get kicked out of their own city.

They understood that following Jesus could be dangerous.

So, while Paul had not stayed in Thessalonica long enough to teach these new converts all that he would have taught them if there had been more time, he did faithfully stress suffering. He did warn them that suffering was likely if they remained faithful to Jesus.

From day one, a warning label had been glued to their Bibles: THE APOSTLE PAUL HAS DETERMINED THAT FOLLOWING JESUS MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH.

And before Paul knew it from experience, he knew about it from Jesus, who warned Paul, personally, that he was going to suffer for following. (Acts 9:16)¹⁷

And it really wouldn't be right for me, of all days, and looking at this passage of all passages, to not warn you today of the danger that often comes to those who follow Jesus.

A man I came to know in Russia, Igor Petrov, once remarked that in Russia, "Short periods of religious freedom are followed by long periods of persecution."

Our brother was correct about Russia, but that statement could be expanded to apply to all places.

You and I are living in a time and a place in which we are not being persecuted for our faith in Jesus. That's a good thing and I thank God for that.

Nothing says that this can't change, either in the micro-culture in which you traffic or on the larger American stage.

If subtle or overt opposition to following Jesus comes your way, know in advance that this is common. Don't be surprised. And stand firm.

You come from a long line of the persecuted who didn't drop the ball, even when opposed. We can decide now that if that day comes, we will join them.

We will be faithful and stand strong for Jesus, then, just as we are seeking to lovingly stand strong for Jesus now.

¹⁶ See Appendix, page 10. *From the Testimony of Chuck Colson.*

¹⁷ In addition, check out these from Jesus (John 15:20, 16:33; Luke 21:12); these from Paul (Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 3:12); this from Peter (1 Peter 3:14).

History bear out that one of the most powerful apologetics for the truth of the Gospel is the willingness of Christians to faithfully endure hardship.

Neither numerical growth nor cultural popularity comes near to accomplishing for the cause of Christ what steadfast determination to obey God in the face of hardship will do.

Hardship came in full force to the Thessalonians. And Paul didn't want that hardship to spiritually disturb¹⁸ them.

Let's imagine what thoughts might have been swirling around in the minds of young Christians as they suffered one attack after another, one accusation after another?

Were they wondering, "*Are we doing something wrong? Has God forgotten us?*"

Paul would have assured them, "*No! You're doing everything right. God has not forgotten you. You are still His treasured people. Jesus' followers have suffered at the hands of the opposition from day one.*"

Which, again, was why Timothy showed up at Thessalonica. To check things out. To remind them that nothing is more important than standing for Jesus.

Fear of good-for-nothing labor (v. 5)

[5] For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be for nothing.

They had been forewarned. And they were, indeed, standing strong!¹⁹

¹⁸ The word we translate "disturbed" can also mean, "to shake, to sway back and forth" and was used of a dog wagging his tail. From this, it came to mean "to fawn over, to flatter" - conveying the thought of being deceived.

Concerns Allayed by a GREAT Report (3:6-8)

Timothy's GREAT report (v. 6)

[6] But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you

Their faith was intact. And their love for Paul, Silas, and Timothy was also intact. What great, refreshing, invigorating news.

Paul's GREAT encouragement (vv. 7-8)

[7] for this reason, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith.

I know how deeply encouraged I am when I read stories from fellow believers who are standing firm despite suffering. And I hope that you will avail yourself of these inspiring stories, too. You'll be strengthened by the stories of their strength.

That - deep encouragement - was exactly the effect of the Thessalonians' faithfulness on the Apostle Paul.

[8] for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.²⁰

You and I knew that the Thessalonians' spiritual lives were nurtured by the spiritual health and vitality of Paul, Silas and Timothy.

That just stands to reason. They brought the Gospel and established the new Thessalonian believers in the faith. They were the spiritual parents.

Now we learn that Paul, Silas and Timothy were spiritually enriched by the spiritual health and vitality of the Thessalonians.

¹⁹ This does not mean that Paul's fears were unwarranted. Knowing the enemy and knowing the fickleness of people, Paul's fears were altogether reasonable.

²⁰ One ancient pastor (John Chrysostom) asked of this passage, "*Do you see the unchecked madness of love which is indicated by these words?*"

We talk about interdependence in the body of Christ. Well, here it is in living color.

Here in the church, none of us are as strong and healthy in Christ alone as we are when those around us are also standing firm.

That's part of what it means to be a "body" of Christ. We need each other. We are better together.

One of the many reasons we each are to fervently follow the Lord is that to do so is to lovingly support our friends. People you love benefit from your steadfast walk with Jesus.

Conclusion: Prayer...

Paul wrote this letter to encourage his friends in Thessalonica, and I'm sure that the letter was a great gift. Embedded in the letter is another gift he was eager to give them: the gift of prayer.

The final verses of our passage are thoughts about prayer, and an actual prayer.

Today, when asked, persecuted Christians tell free Christians that what they need from us, first and foremost, is prayer.

So, today, while you and I may be able to give all kinds of other gifts to our suffering family, we can certainly give them the gift of our prayer.

***Thanksgiving for the faith of our suffering family (vv. 9-10)

[9] For what thanks can we give to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice because of you before our God, [10] as we keep praying most earnestly night and day that we may see your faces, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?

***Supportive fellowship for our suffering family (v. 11)

[11] Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you

***Loving relating for our suffering family (v. 12)

[12] and may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you

***Holiness, faithfulness, effectiveness for our suffering family (v. 13)

[13] so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

APPENDIX

Suffering in 2021

It is certainly conceivable that any of us could be on the receiving end of some level of persecution.

I've known people who have taken a stand for Christ and have been shunned from their family and sneered at in professional circles.

Identifying yourself as a devoted follower of Jesus could lead to being passed over for a promotion at work or being ridiculed at school. But such opposition is not widespread here.

However, as you heard from Rochelle earlier, persecution against Christians is a current, widespread, and life-threatening reality in many parts of the world today. Wide swaths of our planet represent danger zones for Christians.

And you and I are especially honored that, among those our church supports who have gone out for the sake of the Name of Jesus, several serve Him in what are referred to as "creative access" countries.

At Northwest, we are financial and prayer partners with some who serve in places where it is not safe to be an outspoken follower of Jesus.

Generally speaking, Christian missionaries are not welcomed in these countries. So, in some cases, the individuals and families we support live where they do "under cover."

We support others who have ministries that include travel to some of the most dangerous places on earth for Christians.

These folks share Christ secretly, are often exposed to danger, live and travel inconveniently, and take on serious risks for the sake of the Gospel. And the dangers these missionaries face are typically not as great as the dangers faced by the national Christians in those countries.

The citizens of some of these countries may be imprisoned, suffer loss of property, endure beatings and torture - just for living for Jesus.

In many places, things have not changed much in the last two thousand years. In many places, the Thessalonian situation repeats daily.

Today, in many places, those who believe in the same Jesus you and I do suffer loss. They have lost homes and seen their churches destroyed, have been maimed for life, have been sold into slavery and have lost family members to martyrdom.

Persecutors in their lands have done to them what the opposition did to the Thessalonians in AD 50.

Persecution is not anything that any of us would wish upon our brothers and sisters. But those who are persecuted tell us that suffering for the sake of Jesus crystallizes what is most important in life. They assure us that there is a sanctifying cleansing that occurs in the heart of the believer who entrusts himself or herself to God while suffering for the faith.

And just as the first century church was not exterminated by the persecution they suffered, but rather came to know the Lord in powerful ways while enduring mistreatment for Him, the same thing is happening in many places today.

I certainly don't want to romanticize suffering, but it is still true that persecution has often served to purify, fortify and galvanize the church to accomplish great things for God.

Satan and the Gospel...

Satanic opposition to the plans and purposes of God are no less real today than they were in the first century.

And it is not overreaction to conclude that the enemy has a hand in obstacles you face in doing what is in your heart to do for God.

We understand from the scenario Paul provides (and from many other places in Scripture) that on occasion Satan is given permission to hinder the work of God's servants.

For reasons God does not reveal to us, He sometimes permits Satan to do things that make life harder for us, that even keep us from serving Him in some ways that we would long for - but that in the long run will end up bringing Him glory and working for our own growth.

So -
when our missionary friends are having trouble getting visas that will allow them to stay in a country that is hostile to Christianity; or when they are having trouble getting permission from officials to start a business so that they can stay in country; or when they experience health problems at a critical time of the year when there is an open door for ministry -

we would do well to think as Paul thought and pray against the *“spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6).

When you want to accomplish something great for God and run into all kinds of obstacles, roadblocks, and hindrances, don't believe it is all happenstance, coincidence, or bad luck. Satan might be opposing you.

And in case that is the case, your best recourse will be to prayer that the Lord will overwhelm your adversary.

We understand from this passage (and from many other places) that Satan has the power (on occasion) to hinder the work of God's servants.

He is the **adversary** (that is what “satan” means) who constantly opposes the work of God and disrupts God's people and their service. His activity is always and only within the sphere of what God gives him rein to accomplish.

Yet there can be no doubt that sometimes, for reasons the Lord knows well enough (and we often don't), He allows Satan to flex his muscles against Christians.

From the testimony of Chuck Colson

***This story is taken from the book Born Again, by Chuck Colson, and is included here to highlight the transforming power of love when passed from Christian to Christian.

Chuck Colson, founder and president of Prison Fellowship Ministry, was for a long time better known for his involvement in the Republican Party's break-in at the Watergate Hotel and the scandal that followed than for his involvement in Christian ministry.

As most of us know, Colson spent time in prison for his misdeeds, an experience which prompted his lifelong interest in serving the incarcerated population around the world.

During the time that his prison stay at Maxwell Penitentiary was nearing a close, his family, surviving in the outside world, was in dire straits.

His father had died while Chuck was in prison, his eighteen-year-old son had been arrested on marijuana possession charges, and his wife, Patty, was in deep anguish over the course life had taken.

Colson was at this time a fairly new Christian, but had made wonderful friends with a few believing men, some inside and some outside of prison. One of those friends was Al Quie.

Quie was the sixth-ranking Republican in the House of Representatives, the senior minority member of the Education and Labor Committee, and one of the most respected public figures in Washington. He was also a committed Christian.

On a cold January day in 1975, when life was caving in on Chuck Colson's family - and he could do nothing about it - Al Quie called Colson in prison.

He said, *“Chuck, I've been thinking about what I can do to help you. All of us today (his other new-found Christian friends) signed and sent a letter to the President (Ford) appealing for a quick release for you.”*

But there was something else Quie had in mind to do for Colson. *"I have been thinking. There's an old statute someone told me about. I'm going to ask the President if I can serve the rest of your term for you."* Colson protested that he couldn't let him do that.

Al Quie responded, *"I mean it, Chuck. I haven't come to this decision lightly."*

Colson was speechless. That very day, another friend, Doug Coe, sent him a handwritten note, stating that all the "brothers" would volunteer to serve his sentence. In that note are these words,

*"These past three weeks you have been on my mind constantly. Chuck, a band of like-minded men is being formed by God around the world. The thing you always dreamed of doing for our country and for the people - peace and a better life - can still take place. Only now God will get the credit. I love you, friend - and all your companions love you!!
As always, Doug"*

When we let our imaginations run wild and dare to dream of what we might mean when we use words like *"fellowship"* and *"church"* and *"brothers and sisters in Christ"* and *"co-workers for the Gospel"* - don't we mean something like, *"I'll serve the rest of your prison term for you?"*

Some years after his prison days were over, Colson said that next to his conversion, the most profound step in his spiritual life was taken when Al Quie, a member of his prayer group and member of the House of Representatives from Minnesota, asked President Ford if he could serve out the rest of his prison term.

Al Quie gave Colson a taste of community, a taste of the genuine, sacrificial, selfless love of Christ. That taste fueled Chuck Colson's spiritual tank to want to provide love and acceptance and to serve others as he had been served.