004 – *INCREASE*

DAY FOUR – 1 Thessalonians 3:13 "May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."

I know not everyone falls into this camp, but I love going to the gym. Something about the feeling of growing in strength kicks up a level of joy and endorphins especially when you begin to see results. The results are awesome, but the joy doesn't come from the end product. It comes from the strain in the workout.

If lifting weights isn't your cup of tea, maybe that same sense of excitement comes from finishing a year-long goal at work. It could also come from graduating from school with a degree you are really proud of. Maybe it looks like that sense of accomplishment in a new dating relationship or even cleaning the house. We all love that sense of accomplishment and growth that comes at the end of something, but joy actually comes from the process.

Paul's prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, "May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones," sets the framework for the rest of the book. In chapters 4 and 5 Paul reminds the church that the Christian walk is being prepared for the return of Jesus Christ.

He desires that they would continue to be strengthened amidst persecution and complacency so that they would continue to share the gospel with their city and stand firm.

The church in Thessalonica dealt with a lot of hardship and persecution for their faith, but this ultimately produced a strength and joy that rippled through Macedonia. This pivotal church continued to grow and many people came to know about Jesus because of their faith. They had the strength because of the process. They did not focus on their shortcomings or disadvantages, but focused instead on strengthening their resolve.

We can respond in the same way. One of Shoreline City's 12 stones is that we see with eyes of hope. If it is not good, it's not final and God is not done working it for our good yet. We can be encouraged by the faith of the early church, reminding ourselves to pray that God would continue to strengthen our hearts. In leaning into this, we begin to rely even more on God and that sense of excitement for the final product when we get to see Jesus face-to-face!

Application:
What is one process that brings you joy? This could be painting, worshipping, running, etc. Invite Jesus into that thing with you and as you work through the process, ask for him to reveal this same joy in current or future hardships. His presence never leaves you, and if it's not good, it's not final.

Prayer:
God, help me to see hardship as the opportunity for increase. May I never shy away from doing the hard thing but instead always choose Your way, Your plan, and Your purpose. Please strengthen my heart so that I will be held blameless. In Jesus' name, amen.