



1 THESSALONIANS

GOD'S WORD RINGS OUT

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

MAIN IDEA

God's Word rings out with truth that transforms those who believe. Christians are to live differently as faith-filled examples for the world.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

How do you react when your favorite team wins a big game, your group gets recognition after working hard, or a new baby joins your family? You likely shout it out for others to hear because you are so excited about the result. People celebrate and share about that which excites them. We should consider the things that make us most excited and how important they are in the long run. Today, we will discuss what Paul had to say about this topic to the church at Thessalonica.

- **What makes you excited enough that you can't stop talking about it?**

- **Why do people naturally share about positive things that happen in their lives?**

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-4.

The church at Thessalonica had been established by Paul on his second missionary journey. His time in the city with these believers was brief due to persecution that forced him to leave. Though he was gone, Paul had a great regard for this young church body and wrote this letter out of his love and concern for their continued growth. Beginning his letter with a customary greeting, Paul prayed grace and peace over them as they continued in the face of opposition and persecution.

- **How would it encourage the church to hear from Paul after he departed?**

Paul expressed the gratitude he felt when he thought of the Thessalonian Christians. From telling them how he thanked the Lord for their testimony and consistency, to naming specific things he was grateful for in them, Paul began this letter with words of encouragement and exhortation. Even though the time he spent in Thessalonica was short, this church had grown and thrived in his absence, and Paul wanted them to know he continued in prayer on their behalf.

- **How does gratitude over the faith of others encourage us toward further worship and service of God?**
- **Who causes you to feel gratitude when you consider their faith?**

Paul identified specific things he remembered and appreciated about this church. The way that they worked and demonstrated how they had been changed by the Holy Spirit blessed Paul. He mentioned their faith, hope, and love as evidence of the continued presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives and reminded them they were loved and chosen by God. Paul desired them to cling to the power of this truth.

- **How might you encourage another believer by sharing specific things you appreciate about him or her? Why is it important that we make a practice of this?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 1:5-7.

The virtues of the Thessalonian Christians were a result of the power of the gospel at work in their lives. The gospel is more than mere words; it has power to save and transform. It is a message given and used by the Holy Spirit for transformation and those who share it can believe it wholeheartedly.

- **How have you experienced the transformation that comes through believing the gospel message?**

Notice the progression of Paul's letter. After the greeting and expressions of thanks, he reminded the believers of the effect in their lives after they encountered the gospel message. They received the truth, stopped following the things of the world, and started following Christ. Paul had no hesitation in calling people to follow him because he represented Jesus faithfully—if someone followed him, they were also following Jesus as Paul was.

- **Is there anything you need to turn from to better follow Jesus? How is God speaking to you about that now?**
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The Thessalonians were also becoming examples to others as they followed Paul's example. Every person who places his or her faith in Jesus should strive to live in such a way that they show others what it means to follow Christ. We are to live in a way that stands out from the world.

- **Could you confidently tell others to follow your example as a means of following Christ? Why or why not?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10.

The Thessalonians had been faithful in proclaiming the good work the Lord had done and was doing among them. People all over the region heard about God's work because of their proclamation.

- **What does it look like to proclaim the gospel message in our context?**

Spreading the gospel is not just about words but is also about being transformed and living differently so others can see. Paul even said the Thessalonian's efforts had such a strong impact that he didn't even need to say anything. The way the Thessalonians lived spoke volumes about their faith in Jesus.

- **How can you show others your faith through your actions?**

Once the Thessalonians received the Word of God, they turned away from their idols. What was once commonplace was no longer needed or accepted because they now were worshiping the true God. Further, these believers lived in anticipation of Jesus's return. All Christians are to live in anticipation of Christ's return as we proclaim the message of the gospel through our words and our actions.

- **What does it mean to wait on Jesus with anticipation? What does that look like in daily life?**

APPLICATION

- **Identify at least two ways your life example is encouraging others to follow Jesus.**

- **How is God calling you to proclaim the gospel to others currently?**

- **What needs to change or stop in our lives so we can pursue a life of following Jesus further?**

PRAY

Thank the Lord for His salvation made available through the work of Jesus on the cross. Ask for opportunities to spread the gospel message and boldness to do so faithfully.

INTRODUCTION TO 1 THESSALONIANS

Paul spent a very short time in the city of Thessalonica, but he was able to establish a church during his stay. He may have had little time to instruct the new converts, so it is not surprising that Paul wrote a letter to address some questions.

Author

No serious objections have been made to dispute that Paul was the author of 1 Thessalonians (1:1). The greeting also mentions Silvanus and Timothy. Sometimes Paul wrote from the team perspective, but he was the primary author (2:18; 3:2).

Background

About AD 50 the missionary team led by Paul and Silas (“Silvanus”) left Philippi and traveled westward on the Roman road known as the Via Egnatia. They proceeded toward Thessalonica—the strategic capital city of the Roman Province of Macedonia. Thessalonica was a large port city on the Aegean Sea in modern-day Greece, with a population of about two hundred thousand. The city was filled with pagan worshipers of idols, the full pantheon of Greek and Roman gods, and was well known for its emperor worship. Thessalonica was loyal to Caesar, who had granted its citizens many privileges.

Message and Purpose

Timothy reported to Paul that although the church at Thessalonica was suffering affliction, they were holding fast to the faith. And though they had some doctrinal misunderstandings, they were laboring for the Lord out of love and patiently hoping for the return of Christ. Paul wrote to encourage the church in their faith, to remind them that sanctification was God’s will for them, and to correct misunderstandings about end-time events.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

1:1. Paul used the Latin version Silvanus (2Co 1:19; 2Th 1:1) for the person whom Luke referred to using the Greek name Silas (Ac 15:22). Silas was chosen by Paul to accompany him on his second missionary journey, replacing Barnabas (Ac 15:40). Silas participated in the work of planting the Thessalonian church (Ac 17:4) and was with Paul in Corinth at the time of the writing of this letter. Paul may have encountered Timothy at Lystra on his first missionary journey (Ac 14:8–18). On the second visit Timothy is described as a disciple who was ready to assist Paul in the missionary efforts (Ac 16:1–3). Timothy is not explicitly mentioned as participating in the founding of the Thessalonian church (Ac 17:1–9), but Paul sent him from Athens to assist the newly formed and persecuted church when Paul realized he could not return to the Thessalonians (1Th 3:1–2). Timothy’s encouraging report on the state of the Thessalonian church prompted Paul to write this epistle (3:6). The reference to church (Gk ekklesia) in NT times could refer generically to any gathering or assembly, but Paul specified it here as the local assembly at Thessalonica in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notes:

1:2. In his epistles Paul normally thanked God for those people to whom he was sending the letter and mentioned that they were in his prayers or offered a prayer for them. The only exception to this is Galatians, where he issued a strong rebuke.

1:3. Paul commended the Thessalonians for their work produced by faith, their labor motivated by love, and endurance inspired by hope. Their work and labor were evident in that the gospel had gone throughout not only their province of Macedonia but into the neighboring province of Achaia (vv. 7–8). Endurance was especially needed in the midst of persecution.

1:4. While the Thessalonians were commended for their work, Paul reminded them that God is the one who had chosen them and that they were loved by Him . “Chosen” (Gk eklogon) carries the idea of God’s choice or selection. **Notes:**

1:5–6. The gospel is more than a message of words. It is a message that comes in power and in the Holy Spirit. The basic meaning of “gospel” (Gk euangelion) is “good news.” Paul further specified that it was not just any good news but the good news that came from God (2:2, 8, 13). Even though the church at Thessalonica was founded in the midst of severe persecution, the message was warmly received with joy that came from the Holy Spirit. That God was working there was also evident since Paul and Silas were able to stay only for a short time before they were forced to leave and yet the church started and flourished anyway (Ac 17:1–9). How we lived among you is further explained in 2:1–12.

1:7–9. The Thessalonians’ faith and gospel message spread throughout Macedonia and Achaia. These two Roman provinces—Macedonia in the north and Achaia in the south—make up a large part of modern-day Greece. In NT times, these provinces included major cities such as Philippi, Athens, and Corinth. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia. It appears that Paul’s missionary strategy worked. He evangelized the major cities with the expectation that the gospel would spread from there into the surrounding areas. The Thessalonians’ predominantly Gentile background is evident from the false worship of lifeless idols, from which they turned to serve the living and true God.

1:10. While the Thessalonians were enduring persecution, they were also waiting for the coming Son from heaven—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. The “coming wrath” was not a persecution that Paul and the Thessalonians were experiencing or would experience from the unbelieving world, but a future time of God’s wrath against the unbelieving world. Christians will be rescued from this (5:9). Paul introduced the fact of Jesus’s resurrection here and later expressed the hope of the resurrection for Christians who had died (4:16).