

Joyous and Thankful

(1 Thess. 1:1–10)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Thess. 1:1–10, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 Tim. 1:15, Gal. 5:19–23, Dan. 12:2.*

Memory Text: “We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (*1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3, ESV*).

Key Thought: Paul has many good things to say to the Thessalonians, at least when he begins writing to them in the first letter. What he praises them for is worthy of our attention.

Paul opens his first letter to the Thessalonians by emphasizing prayer and stressing how much he prays for them, which itself reveals the deep love and concern he has for the church there.

In this passage Paul then rejoices that the Thessalonians, on the whole, appear to be remaining faithful. Their lives offer abundant evidence of the life-changing power of the Spirit, despite the many challenges that they face.

Paul concludes his first chapter by remarking how the Thessalonians' openness to Paul and his teaching have led them to become true “Adventists.” They were believers who lived every day in anticipation of the day that Jesus would come from heaven to deliver them from “the wrath to come.”

In this lesson we get an intimate glimpse of how new converts dealt with the challenges that come after evangelism has taken place.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 28.*

A Prayer of Thanks (1 Thess. 1:1–3)

In the opening words of 1 Thessalonians, we catch a glimpse of the selflessness of Paul. While he was clearly the author of this letter (1 Thess. 2:18, 3:5, 5:27), he gives recognition to his coworkers Silas and Timothy.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1–3. For what things are Paul, Silas, and Timothy giving thanks? What do these things mean in a practical sense? That is, how would they be manifested in daily life? For example, how is the “work of faith” expressed in how we live?

The opening of this letter is typical of ancient Greek letters, but with an interesting twist. To the typical Greek opener (“grace”), Paul adds the familiar Jewish greeting “peace” (*shalom* in Hebrew). “Grace” and “peace”—these are apt depictions of what an experience with Jesus is all about.

Who was Silvanus? The name reflects the Latin equivalent of the Aramaic name “Silas.” Jews who lived outside Palestine usually adopted Greek or Latin names to go along with their Jewish ones (this is how “Saul” became “Paul”). Silas was a Jerusalem Christian like Mark, who was one of Paul’s first traveling companions. By having trusted leaders of the Jerusalem church with him on his missionary journeys, Paul was doing his best to maintain unity in the church.

What group of words in 1 Thessalonians 1:1–3 has become famous because of the way it is used in 1 Corinthians 13? Which of these words has the primary emphasis in 1 Corinthians, and why?

In his prayers, Paul concentrates on reality, not giddy spirituality. Faith provokes serious work. Genuine love produces much labor. And hope requires much patience. The stress in these words is on action, not abstract ideas. The order of faith, love, and hope varies in the New Testament, but the most important of the three is listed last in each case (see 1 Cor. 13:13). The order of these words in verse 3 underlines the importance of last-day events in Paul’s mind throughout the writing of these two letters to the Thessalonians.

Paul is also thankful before God because he remembers the way in which the Thessalonians have responded to the gospel. He probably hopes, too, that their positive emotional response to the praise Paul offers them will incline them to be more open to the concerns that he will soon express to them.

God Has Chosen You (1 Thess. 1:4)

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4. What does it mean that God has chosen or elected us? Does that mean we don't really have a choice? On the other hand, does it mean that someone who is not chosen by God cannot have salvation even if he or she wants it?

Verse 4 continues the same extended sentence that Paul began in verse 2 with “we give thanks.” One of the reasons Paul gives thanks to God is that he knows God has “chosen” the Thessalonians.

Some Christians have taken this idea of being “chosen” to an extreme. They want to move the believer away from any focus on lifestyle or behavior. Instead, they teach that our salvation depends on God's choice rather than on our own. Such a teaching can also lead to the idea that God's grace is only for a few and that, once saved, a person cannot choose to be lost.

How do the following texts help us to understand that salvation is our own choice? *Josh. 24:15, 1 Tim. 2:4, Rev. 3:20.*

Faith is impossible without God's drawing power. Yet, in the end, God allows human beings to make their own decisions regarding Him and what He has done for us. And what He has done for us is to “choose” us in Christ. We have all been “elected” to have salvation. That some won't be saved—won't claim that salvation for themselves—reflects their choice, not God's. God's choice is for all humanity to be saved. As Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:4, God wants “all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (*NKJV*).

Think through what it means to know that you have been “chosen” by God, that God wants you to have salvation, and that to be lost is a deviation from God's desire for all of us. What encouragement can you draw from this wonderful truth?

Assurance in Christ (1 Thess. 1:5)

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5. How do we gain the assurance that we are right with God? What three pieces of evidence in the lives of the Thessalonians indicated to Paul that they were right with God?

Verse 5 begins with “for” or “because.” In this verse Paul details the grounds for his conviction that the Thessalonians were “chosen” by God (*1 Thess. 1:4*). He is also underlining further reasons as to why his prayers are so filled with thankfulness (*1 Thess. 1:2*). Paul rejoices at the real-life evidence that the Thessalonians have responded to God and that He approves of them.

Paul begins the verse with rejoicing at a visible and outward sign of the Thessalonians’ position before the Lord. Their acceptance of the gospel was not merely a mental assent to teachings or doctrine. Their daily lives exhibited the presence and power of God. In everyday church life, things were happening that could be explained only as divine intervention. Prayers were answered and lives changed. The reality of their faith was being manifested in their works.

How does one know that the Holy Spirit is present and real in one’s life and in the local church? See *Gal. 5:19–23, 1 Cor. 12:1–11*.

The “fruit” of the Spirit is powerful evidence that God is actively working. Things such as love, joy, and peace can be faked only for so long; in the day-to-day stress of relationships within the church, the genuine is eventually sifted from the false. When the Holy Spirit is a living presence, things that are not natural to sinful human beings start to become natural in the life of the believer. Christians find themselves doing acts of grace and kindness that would not have occurred to them before. Paul saw plenty of evidence that the lives of the Thessalonians had been changed by the supernatural working of the Spirit.

For Paul, the final evidence that God had chosen the Thessalonians was their deep conviction and inner assurance that the gospel was true and that God was real in their lives. Though such convictions don’t prove true in every case, strong assurance that we are right with God usually accompanies the genuine gospel.

How much assurance of salvation do you have? On what, in the end, must that assurance be based?

Doing What Paul Would Do (1 Thess. 1:6, 7)

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 7. What is Paul’s message there? How are we to understand this in light of the idea that Christ is our ultimate example?

Most translations do not show this, but in verse 6 Paul continues the same sentence that he began in verse 2 and carries it on through verse 10. The main topic of this lengthy sentence is Paul’s list of reasons for the thanksgivings that he recites in his prayers. Verses 6 and 7 add two items to that list of thanksgivings, building on the “because” (*NIV*) at the beginning of verse 5. Paul gives thanks (*vs. 2*) because (*vs. 5, NIV*) the Thessalonians have both imitated him and his colleagues and have themselves become an example to imitate (*vss. 6, 7*).

We often caution people that it is dangerous to imitate anyone but Christ. That’s true, because even the best of people will let us down sometimes. But in reality we need role models. People need each other at times for guidance, counsel, and help in working through specific issues and even hard times. Who hasn’t experienced the blessing of good counsel and of a good example?

Also, whether we like it or not, once we become leaders in the church, people will imitate us. How important, then, that “veteran” Christians live what they preach and model the things that they say.

At the same time, Paul has placed a couple of safeguards here. First of all, the imitation (*vs. 6*) follows the receiving (*vs. 5*). The primary focus of the Thessalonians is on receiving the Word of God and applying it directly to their lives through the Holy Spirit. God’s Word can always be trusted. Second, Paul directs them to the Lord as the primary model (*vs. 6*). What Jesus did, and would do, is a much safer model than what even Paul would do. After all, Paul is under no illusions about himself or his character (*1 Tim. 1:15*).

Having said this, however, Paul affirms the Thessalonians’ desire to imitate him as a beloved teacher and mentor and also to become models worthy of imitation themselves. In this particular case, what is being modeled is joy in suffering. Suffering can make one bitter or better. In the context of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit, the Thessalonians discover supernatural joy in the midst of suffering, just as Paul and Silas had earlier (*Acts 16:22–25*).

What kind of role model are you in the church? What ways in which you conduct yourself in your life are good for others to follow? What ways aren’t?

Further Evidence of Faith (1 Thess. 1:8–10)

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:8–10. In what ways does this passage offer additional evidence of the Thessalonians' faith?

Paul continues the sentence that began in verse 2 by explaining how he knows the Thessalonians have become a model, or type, for the other believers in Macedonia (where Thessalonica was located) and Achaia (where Corinth was located).

First, they were a model of evangelistic effort and success. From them the word of God “rang out” (*NIV*) into both of these provinces and beyond. Paul also considered them to have a model faith because of their openness to him and the gospel. They were willing to be taught. They were also willing to make radical changes in their lives, such as giving up idols and other popular forms of worship.

Communication was relatively rapid in the ancient Roman world, thanks to well-built Roman roads and widespread travel. So, the claim that their faith was known “everywhere” may indicate that people in places such as Rome and Antioch had already made reference to it in their communications with Paul.

It is also true that people want to live up to the high expectations of others. Praise contains an implied expectation. By praising their faith in such an overwhelming fashion, Paul was encouraging them to grow in that faith more and more.

It seems there was something uniquely remarkable about their conversion. As pagan idolaters they had to overcome two major barriers. First was the “crazy message” about some man who was dead and came back to life again. Then there was the fact that it was a crazy, Jewish message. Many Gentiles probably laughed when they heard the Christian message. The Thessalonians didn't. Instead, they completely rearranged their lives in light of the gospel.

“The Thessalonian believers were true missionaries. Their hearts burned with zeal for their Saviour, who had delivered them from fear of ‘the wrath to come.’ Through the grace of Christ a marvelous transformation had taken place in their lives, and the word of the Lord, as spoken through them, was accompanied with power. Hearts were won by the truths presented, and souls were added to the number of believers.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 256.

Read again 1 Thessalonians 1:10. What's Paul talking about? What is the “wrath to come”? What does the resurrection of Jesus have to do with the point he is making? Why is this promise so crucial to all that we believe? See *1 Cor. 15:12–17*; *John 11:24, 25*; *Dan. 12:2*.

Further Study: “The arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia, during Paul’s sojourn in Corinth, had greatly cheered the apostle. They brought him ‘good tidings’ of the ‘faith and charity’ of those who had accepted the truth during the first visit of the gospel messengers to Thessalonica. Paul’s heart went out in tender sympathy toward these believers, who, in the midst of trial and adversity, had remained true to God. He longed to visit them in person, but as this was not then possible, he wrote to them.

“In this letter to the church at Thessalonica the apostle expresses his gratitude to God for the joyful news of their increase of faith. . . .

“ ‘We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.’

“Many of the believers in Thessalonica had ‘turned . . . from idols to serve the living and true God.’ . . . The apostle declared that in their faithfulness in following the Lord they were ‘ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 255, 256.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the question of role models, other than Jesus. What advantages and disadvantages come with them?
- 2 Paul spends a great portion of this letter giving thanks to God for the Thessalonians. What role can, or should, thanksgiving play in our worship experience, both personally and corporately?
- 3 If people around you were looking for evidence of your church’s faith, what would they find? How could, or should, things be different?
- 4 Why is affirmation of others so important? At the same time, why must we be careful as we do this?
- 5 Think through again how important the doctrine of the Second Coming is to our faith. What good reasons do we have for trusting in something that’s so radical, that’s so unlike anything that has ever happened before?

Summary: Paul found much joy in offering thanks to God for the abundant evidence of His work in the lives of the Thessalonian believers. In sharing the content of his prayers with them, Paul hoped to motivate them to continue growing in the faith and in their outreach efforts toward others.

Talking Hands

Six children of the Jacksonville Southpoint Seventh-day Adventist Church in Florida wanted to share their faith with others. They attended a weekend, training program for kids called “Go Fish!” and learned several, fun ways to tell others about Jesus. They learned to tell stories, lead singing, and use puppets. They returned home excited about what they had learned.

“So,” their pastor asked with a smile, “how are you going to tell others about Jesus?”

The children loved learning to work with puppets, making them look as if they’re alive as they talk, listen, and wonder. At the end of the training session each child received a puppet of his or her own. “We want to use puppets to tell about God,” one of the children said.

The children wrote their own scripts and made their costumes and props with help from their parents. “One of our skits is about two boys who get into a fight,” says Tenver, one of the puppet ministry kids. “The puppets’ friends stop the fight, and they talk about how peace is one part of the fruit of the Spirit.”

“We also do skits about Bible characters,” says Isabel, another member of the group. “One of our skits is about the ten lepers Jesus healed.”

It took a lot of practice to learn the lines and coordinate the puppets’ movements with the words so they looked realistic. But the children, who are between 10 and 12 years old, were willing to work hard so others could learn that God loves them and has a plan for their lives.

“It’s easier to tell others about Jesus when your friends are working with you,” says Tenver. “At first I was a little scared because I had never done something like this before. Now when I see the smiles on people’s faces when we finish a program, I know it’s worth the work.”

Sharing Jesus with others is an important part of the team’s ministry. “Recently we took our puppets to a program that helps teenagers who have dropped out of school and gotten into trouble,” Abigail added. “We pre-

sented several skits for them and prayed that we helped them get their lives back on track.”

For the children in the puppet ministry, learning how to be God’s disciples has involved learning to talk with their hands. They are helping other boys and girls learn that Jesus wants to be their best friend forever.



The children in the puppet ministry attend the Jacksonville (Florida) Southpoint Seventh-day Adventist Church.