

Joyous and Thankful (1 Thessalonians 1:1–10)



SABBATH—JULY 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Timothy 1:15; Galatians 5:19–23; Daniel 12:2.

MEMORY VERSE: “We always thank God for all of you. We pray for you. We never forget you when we pray to our God and Father. Your work is produced by your faith. Your service is the result of your love. Your strength to continue comes from your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: Paul has many good things to say to the Thessalonians in the first letter. Paul praises them for things that are worthy of our attention.

PAUL OPENS HIS FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS BY POINTING TO PRAYER. By showing how much he prays for them, Paul shows the deep love and concern he has for the people in the church there.

In these verses, Paul reports that he is glad to hear that the Thessalonians are still remaining faithful. Their lives show proof of the life-changing power of the Spirit, even though they have faced many challenges.

Paul ends his first chapter by praising the Thessalonians for their openness to him and to his teaching that helped them to become true “Adventists.” They were believers who lived every day in the hope for the day Jesus would come from heaven to save them from God’s everlasting punishment against the sins of the world.

In this lesson we will study such converts (new believers) and how they dealt with the challenges that they faced after evangelism¹ had taken place.

1. evangelism—the act of spreading the good news about Jesus to the world.

SUNDAY—JULY 22**A PRAYER OF THANKS
(1 Thessalonians 1:1–3)**

In the opening words of 1 Thessalonians, we catch a hint of Paul's unselfish spirit. While Paul was clearly the author of this letter (1 Thessalonians 2:18; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:27), he gives credit to his coworkers Silas and Timothy too.

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

The opening of this letter is much the same as the openings of many Greek letters in Bible times. But it has one interesting difference. Paul adds the well-known Jewish greeting “peace” (*shalom* in Hebrew), to the usual Greek opener “grace.”² “Grace” and “peace” perfectly describe what an experience with Jesus is all about.

But who was Silvanus? The name is Latin for 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. Silas was one of Paul's first traveling companions. Paul had trusted lead-

ers of the Jerusalem church with him on his missionary journeys. In this way, he was doing his best to keep unity (oneness) in the church.

What group of words in 1 Thessalonians 1:1–3 has become famous because of the way these words are used in 1 Corinthians 13? Which of them is given special attention in 1 Corinthians, and why?

In his prayers, Paul focuses on real, not foolish, spiritual life. Faith and true love mean serious labor. And hope requires much patience. We should pay attention to the action behind these words. They are not empty ideas. The order of faith, love, and hope may be different in the New Testament. But the most important of the three is listed last in each case. (Read 1 Corinthians 13:13.) The order in verse 3 shows how much last-day events are on Paul's mind throughout the two letters to the Thessalonians.



The words *grace* and *peace* perfectly describe what an experience with Jesus is all about.

Paul is also thankful before God

2. grace—God's gift of mercy that He gives us to take away our sins.

because he remembers how well the Thessalonians have accepted the gospel. Paul probably hopes, too, that their positive acceptance will help them to better listen to the concerns that he will soon share with them.

MONDAY—JULY 23

GOD HAS CHOSEN YOU (1 Thessalonians 1:4)

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4. What does it mean that God has chosen or elected us? Does that mean we do not really have a choice? Or 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 long sentence that Paul began in verse 2 with “we give thanks” (NKJV). 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” too far. They want the believer to forget 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. Such Christians also teach that, once saved, a person cannot choose to be lost.

How do the following verses help us to understand that salvation is our own choice? Joshua 24:15; 1 Timothy 2:4; Revelation 3:20.

Faith is not possible without God’s pulling power. But God also lets human beings make their own decisions about Him. And what He has done for us is to “choose” us in Christ. We have all been “elected [chosen]” to have salvation. If some are not saved, this shows that they have not chosen to be saved. This is not God’s choice. God’s choice is that all people be saved. As Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:4, God wants “everyone to be saved. He wants them to come to know the truth” (NIRV).

Think through what it means to know that you have been “chosen” by God and that God wants you to have salvation. God does not desire that any of us be lost. What encouragement can you receive from this wonderful truth?



Faith is not possible without God’s pulling power.

TUESDAY—JULY 24**PROMISE IN CHRIST
(1 Thessalonians 1:5)**

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5. How do we know that we are right with God? What three examples in the lives of the Thessalonians gave proof to Paul that they were right with God?

Verse 5 begins with “for” or “because.” In this verse Paul gives reasons for his belief that the Thessalonians were “chosen” by God (1 Thessalonians 1:4). He gives more reasons why his prayers are so filled with thankfulness (1 Thessalonians 1:2). Paul shows joy because the Thessalonians have accepted God’s gospel call and God accepts them.

Paul begins the verse with praise to the Lord for the Thessalonians’ acceptance of the gospel. Their acceptance was not just saying “yes” to doctrine (Bible teachings) or teachings. Their daily lives showed the power of God. In everyday church life, things were happening that showed God’s power. Prayers were answered and lives changed. The Thessalonians also showed that their faith was real in their works.

How does one know that the Holy Spirit is present and real in one’s life and in the local church? Read Galatians 5:19–23 and 1 Corinthians 12:1–11.

The “fruit” of the Spirit is powerful

proof 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 (problem) of relationships within the church, the true character (who someone is) can be seen through the false character sooner or later. When the Holy Spirit is living in a person, that person will not do things that come naturally to sinful human beings. For example, Christians find themselves doing acts of grace and kindness that they would not have done before. Paul saw plenty of examples like these, proving that the lives of the Thessalonians had been changed by the power of the Spirit.

For Paul, the final proof that God had chosen the Thessalonians was their deep and firm (strong) belief that the gospel was true. They also showed that God was real in their lives. Such beliefs do not always prove true in every case, but strong faith that we are right with God usually comes with the true gospel.

How much belief in salvation do you have? On what must that belief be based?



The fruit of the Spirit is powerful proof that God is actively working.

WEDNESDAY—JULY 25**DOING WHAT PAUL WOULD DO
(1 Thessalonians 1:6, 7)**

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 7. What is Paul’s message here? How are we to understand this message alongside the idea of Christ as our perfect Example?

Most translations do not show this, but in verse 6, Paul continues the same sentence that he began in verse 2. He also carries it on through verse 10. The main topic of this long sentence is Paul’s list of the reasons that he gives for his prayers of thankfulness. Paul gives thanks (verse 2) because (verse 5, NIV) the Thessalonians have both looked up to Paul and his fellow workers and have themselves become an example for others to look up to (verses 6, 7).

We often warn people that it is dangerous to look up to anyone but Christ. That is true because even the best of people will fail us sometimes. But we really need role models (examples). People need each other at times for guidance, advice, and help with certain problems and even through hard times. Who has not received help from good advice or from a good example?

Also, we may not like it, but once we become leaders in the church, people will look up to us. So, it is important that “veteran” (experienced) Christians live what they preach and show examples in life of the things that they say.

At the same time, Paul has two safeguards (protections) here. First, the

important goal of the Thessalonians was to receive the Word of God (the Bible) and make use of it in their lives through the Holy Spirit. God’s Word (the Bible) can always be trusted. Second, Paul tells the Thessalonians that the Lord is the best example (verse 6). What Jesus did, and would do, is a much safer example than what even Paul would do. After all, Paul knew that he was a sinner like others (1 Timothy 1:15).

After making that point about his being a sinner, Paul praises the Thessalonians’ desire to look up to him as a beloved teacher and coach. Paul also encourages them to become worthy for other people to look up to. In this case, being a good example also comes with joy in suffering. Suffering can make a person bitter or better. The gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit help the Thessalonians to discover special joy in the midst of suffering, just as Paul and Silas did earlier (Acts 16:22–25).

What kind of role model are you in the church? What things about your life are good for others to follow? What things are not?



Suffering can make a person bitter or better.

THURSDAY—JULY 26

FURTHER PROOF OF FAITH
(1 Thessalonians 1:8–10)

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:8–10.
In what ways do these verses give more proof of the Thessalonians' faith?

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

First, the Thessalonians were a model of evangelistic³ effort and success. From them the word of God “rang out” (NIV) into both Macedonia and Achaia and beyond. Paul also considered them to have a model faith because of their openness to him and to the gospel. They were willing to be good learners. They were also willing to make big changes in their lives, such as giving up idols and other popular forms of worship.

Communication was rather fast in the Roman world. Rome had well-built roads and widespread travel. So, the Thessalonians' faith was known “everywhere.” This may show that people in places like Rome and Antioch had already spoken about the faith of the Thessalonians when they communicated with Paul.

It is also true that people want to live up to the high expectations of others. Praise is part of the high expectation.

By praising the Thessalonians' faith, Paul was encouraging them to grow in that faith more and more.

It seems there was something wonderful about the Thessalonians' conversion (change in beliefs and life). As idol worshipers they had to overcome two big obstacles. First was the “crazy message” about some man (Jesus) who was dead and came back to life again. Then there was the fact that it was a crazy *Jewish* message. Many Gentiles (non-Jews) probably laughed when they heard the Christian message. The Thessalonians did not. Instead, they changed their lives completely according to the gospel.

“The Thessalonian believers were true missionaries. Their hearts burned with quiet desire for their Savior. Jesus had saved them from fear of the terrible Judgment Day. Through the grace of Christ, a wonderful change had taken place in their lives. And the word of the Lord, as spoken through them, had great power. Hearts were won by the truths they gave. And many souls became believers.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 256.

Read again 1 Thessalonians 1:10. What is Paul talking about? What is the “wrath to come”? How is Jesus' return to life connected with the point Paul is making? Why is this promise so important to all that we believe? Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–17; John 11:24, 25; and Daniel 12:2.

3. evangelistic—spreading the good news about Jesus to the world.

FRIDAY—JULY 27

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia during Paul’s stay in Corinth had greatly cheered the apostle [teacher and leader]. They brought him good news of the ‘faith and charity [love]’ of those who had accepted the truth during the first visit of the gospel messengers to Thessalonica. Paul’s heart went out in love and mercy toward these believers, who had remained true to God, even though they suffered and had hardships. Paul wanted 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 gives his thanks to God for the joyful news of their strong faith. . . .

“We always thank God for all of you. We pray for you. We never forget you when we pray to our God and Father. Your work is produced by your faith. Your service is the result of your love. Your strength to continue comes from your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3, NIV).

“Many of the believers in Thessalonica had ‘turned away from statues [idols] of [false] gods to serve the living and true God’ (1 Thessalonians 1:9, NIV). . . . The apostle [Paul] announced that in their faithfulness in following the Lord they were ‘a model [example] to all the believers in the lands of Macedonia and Achaia’ (1 Thessalonians 1:7, NIV).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 255, 256.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think more on the question of role models, other than Jesus. What advantages and disadvantages come with other role models?
- ② Paul spends a large part of this letter giving thanks to God for the Thessalonians. How important is the spirit of thanksgiving in our worship experience, as a person or as a church group?
- ③ If people around you were looking for proof of your church’s faith, what would they find? How could, or should, things be different?
- ④ Why is it so important to support others? At the same time, why must we be careful as we give this support?
- ⑤ Think through again how important the doctrine (Bible truth) of the Second Coming is to our faith. What good reasons do we have for trusting in something that is so different and has never happened before?

SUMMARY: Paul found much joy in offering thanks to God for many examples of proof of His work in the lives of the Thessalonian believers. In sharing his prayers with them, Paul hoped to encourage them to continue growing in the faith and in their outreach work (acts of giving or helping) among others.