

Be Examples Of Faith

Bible Background • 1 THESSALONIANS 1:2–10

Printed Text • 1 THESSALONIANS 1:2–10 | Devotional Reading • 2 CORINTHIANS 5:1–10

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **COMPREHEND** the importance of the witness of the Thessalonian Christians in spite of their trials, **APPRECIATE** the role of faithful imitators of Christ, and **BECOME** positive examples of faith and love to other believers in Christ.

In Focus

Mary shouted, “If one more thing happens, Lord, I don’t know what I’ll do!” Her daughter, Sharion rushed in the room and asked, “What’s the matter, Mama?” Sharion knew her mother had been struggling to keep the faith since Sharion’s dad, Jack, passed so suddenly. He was a man who truly loved the Lord. He kept Mary smiling regardless of what troubles life seemed to throw their way. He would always encourage them to keep the faith. Jack would remind them that God is able, and He would bring them out. Jack was no longer around, and things just kept happening. He was the one to take care of all their needs. He paid the bills. He made sure things were running properly. Mary didn’t have to worry about anything. She was the one to cook and clean; Jack took care of the rest.

The water tank broke, the car wouldn’t start, the electric bill was exceptionally high; Mary was overwhelmed. As Mary flopped down in Jack’s favorite chair, she gasped. “Everything seems to be falling apart. How can I fix it all?” she thought.

Sharion walked over to her mother and picked up Jack’s Bible off the table. A piece of paper fell out, written in Jack’s handwriting. It said, “No matter what happens, keep the faith. God is able.” Once again, Jack had encouraged them to keep the faith.

Who has set the example in your life to be faithful to God, no matter how numerous your trials may get?

Keep in Mind

“As a result, you have become an example to all the believers in Greece—throughout both Macedonia and Achaia. And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don’t need to tell them about it” (1 Thessalonians 1:7–8, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Power (v. 5) *dunamis* (Gk.) — Miraculous and mighty strength; synonymous with “might” as found in Zechariah 4:6

B. Wrath (v. 10) *orge* (Gk.) — Extreme anger, indignation, and punishment

Say It Correctly

Macedonia. MAH-suh-DOE-nee-uh.

Achaia. ah-KIE-uh.

KJV

1 Thessalonians 1:2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;³ Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;
4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.
5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.
6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.
7 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.
8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.
9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;
10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

NLT

1 Thessalonians 1:2 We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly.³ As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ.
4 We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people.
5 For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you.
6 So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord.
7 As a result, you have become an example to all the believers in Greece—throughout both Macedonia and Achaia.
8 And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it,
9 for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God.
10 And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.

The People, Places, and Times

Thessalonica. This is the capital and largest city of the Roman province of Macedonia, a mountainous region of Greece. As a port on the shores of what is now called the Gulf of Salonika with a population of about 200,000 people, Thessalonica was one of the wealthiest and most flourishing trade centers in the Roman Empire. The city was on a trade route, the Egnatian Way, linking it to Philippi, Apollonia, and Berea— other places where Paul, Silas, Timothy, and others traveled during their missionary journeys. Many pagan religions and cultural influences also flourished in Thessalonica. These influences challenged the faith of the young Christians there.

Thessalonian Believers. The Thessalonian church was established during Paul’s second missionary journey. The new Christians in Thessalonica were struggling with their newfound faith. Persecutions against them by the established order (both political and religious) were fierce. The Thessalonian believers had many unanswered questions as they struggled to hold onto their beliefs and waited for Christ’s return.

Background

In ancient letters, it was common to express thanksgiving. In Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, he desired to encourage them. He wanted to be extravagant in his praise for them, so they would understand that he was pleased with what he heard and knew about their faith. The reputation of their commitment to Christ was honorable.

Generally, to be chosen or elected by God was a position the Jewish people reserved for themselves. However, Paul was applying it to a church that had many Gentile converts. Letters that are meant to counsel or persuade, more often than not, remind the reader of what they already know. Reminding them of former counsel became an indisputable means of successfully making points clear.

Teachers encourage their students to imitate them. This was commonly noted in ancient letters. Paul recognized the Thessalonians had already begun practicing this process, which made their conversion clear to the culture around them. A large number of Christians were converted from Gentile backgrounds. This resulted in their facing greater hostility and persecution as the culture rejected them. As people traveled, they would carry news with them. The other churches probably heard of the Thessalonians through the Philippian messengers, Jewish or Gentile travelers, and from Macedonians who supported Paul.

The Old Testament often referred to “wrath” as God’s judgments in history, but this term was stretched in the New Testament to God’s wrath in the final days, the Day of Judgment when Christ will return.

At-A-Glance

1. An Elect People (1 Thessalonians 1:2–4)
2. An Exemplary Enthusiastic People (vv. 5–8)
3. An Expectant People (vv. 9–10)

In Depth

1. An Elect People (1 Thessalonians 1:2–4)

Paul was grateful for the Thessalonians. He and his companions thought of them often and appreciated who they were. The Thessalonians had been chosen by God. It was evident in the way they lived. Their faith guided the way they lived and caused them to work for the kingdom by influencing others to come to Christ. They did this because of the love they had for God. It was not a burden for them to show how much they loved God by being an example of the Gospel. They did it with joy to the Lord. The Thessalonians were able to continue their

labor of love without getting discouraged. They were determined to never give up. Their persistence came from their hope in Jesus Christ's return. In what ways are you endeavoring to put your faith to work through love, and to remain steadfast in hope?

2. An Exemplary Enthusiastic People (vv. 5–8)

Paul was joyful and grateful for the Thessalonians. They received the Gospel that came to them from Paul and companions. The Holy Spirit used the Word with great power, and the Thessalonians received the message and those that brought it.

The Thessalonians were new to the faith. Because Paul was only with them for a short time, they were in some ways "babes in Christ." Like all new Christians, they needed mature Christians as examples and leaders. The Thessalonians followed or imitated their spiritual leaders, even though this led to severe persecution.

The Thessalonians' faith encouraged other churches. Although they were new in the faith, they set a good example for others by being exemplary in the way they lived. They were not perfect, but their faith and actions were commendable. They encouraged others through their faith, love, and hope, which were evident in the way they received the Word and shared the Word. They were so known for their faith that Paul heard about it everywhere he went.

Are you an exemplary Christian, enthusiastic about witnessing?

3. An Expectant People (vv. 9–10)

The Thessalonians were patient in the hope of their Savior's return. They previously worshiped idols and had no hope. However, when they trusted God, they had a living hope. The living God has given all His children a living hope by raising Jesus Christ, His Son, from the dead.

Waiting for the Lord is not being idle but consists of activity and endurance. As we wait, we keep busy and obey God's Word. We may be tempted to stop, but the evidence that we hope in Christ's return is our diligence to stay faithful. The Thessalonians trusted Christ and looked for His return with joyful expectancy. How do you persevere in your trials?

How do you encourage others to put their faith to work, to labor in love, and to remain steadfast in hope?

Search the Scriptures

1. What evidence does Paul give that the Thessalonians were chosen by God (vv. 4–5)?
2. What proof does Paul cite to show that the Thessalonians' witness produced a godly example (v. 8)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why is it important for Christians' conversation (their talk) to line up with their way of living (their walk)?
2. The Thessalonians revered God's Word. Despite many afflictions (suffering), they maintained the joy of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:6). Why is it important to share suffering and joy when witnessing?

Liberating Lesson

In the world we live in today, no one wants to hear negativity. Most of us were taught that if we don't have anything good to say, then we shouldn't say anything at all. We hear people talk about how they only want good vibes, no negativity in their environment. However, as we learn in God's Word, sometimes the things we don't hope for are present. Often these things can be called afflictions. Paul and his companions in this text remind the church that they have endured affliction— suffering while following the way of Christ (2 Corinthians 6:4–5, 7–10). Yet Paul declares that in Christ he is more than a conqueror of all of these things (Romans 8:37). We cannot apply only some of God's Word to our lives. We cannot select the parts we like and leave out the negativity or suffering. For it is through suffering that sin is revealed, confession is made, and strength is given as we wait on Jesus' return. Remember, even Christ Himself suffered for our sakes (Isaiah 53).

Application for Activation

Are you willing to accept that suffering is part of the Christian's way of life? Would you be willing to share your testimony? Paul was not ashamed to share his suffering or to remind the Thessalonians that they had suffered. Despite this, his message is that faith prevails even in the midst of persecution. How can we apply that truth in our daily walk? Are you willing to share your struggle to win some to Christ?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

1 Thessalonians 1:2–10

Bible scholars speculate that while Paul was in Athens, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the new converts were doing. Later, while Paul was in Corinth, Timothy brought back a glowing report that they were remaining firm in the faith and were unified as a body. However, Timothy also told Paul that these converts did have questions about the Second Coming that needed to be cleared up. But before Paul addressed these questions in this letter, he greeted the Thessalonian believers with encouraging words, acknowledging Timothy's report that they were "in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 1). In essence, Paul assured them that they were indeed children of the Most High God. They belonged to Him, and they were in His family—joint heirs with Jesus. Because they had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, they were also "fixed" in Him, and nothing and no one could pluck them out. Paul ended his greeting by proclaiming God's grace and peace for their lives. "Grace" in the Greek (charis, KHAR-ee) means "goodwill, favor." "Peace" in the Greek is eirene (ay-RAY-nay) and means "quietness, rest." In other words, Paul spoke about God's grace and rest in their lives. He knew that only God could give them what they needed—a sense of belonging, favor, and rest—for the spiritual battles that they had to fight.

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.

Paul gives further encouragement by assuring the Thessalonians that the other saints are praying for them. In other words, they are not going through their battles alone. It is important for all Christians to understand this point. When believers are dealing with trials and tribulations, their brothers and sisters in the faith need to undergird them in much prayer. Besieged believers should never be isolated and left to fight Satan all alone.

To further encourage the Thessalonians, Paul acknowledges their “work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 3). In this phrase, Paul joins three virtues that he names together in other letters, too (1 Corinthians 13:13): faith, hope, and love. But in addition, Paul recognizes the hardships the Thessalonians have faced in showing each of these virtues. Faith is “work” (cf. James 2:17). Love is a “labour” (Gk. *kopos*, KOE-poce), a word often paired with toils and travails, and elsewhere refers to a beating. The Greek word for “patience” is *hupomone* (hoop-om-on-AY), which means not just a willingness to wait calmly, but the endurance to suffer while undergoing something unpleasant. In summation, Paul lifted these young Christians up by commending them on their faithful labor for the Lord, all the loving deeds that they had carried out in His name, and their endurance and consistency in both the faith and in anticipating the Lord’s second coming. He reminded them that the Lord saw their efforts—all that they had done did not go unnoticed by God.

4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. 5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

Paul also reminded these fellow believers about God’s “election” (Gk. *ekloge*, ek-low- GAY) of them, which refers to God choosing them from all humanity to be His children. No one need fear when hearing this term, for all are welcomed into God’s elect if we only follow Him (1 Timothy 2:6; 2 Peter 3:9). Thus, these Thessalonians were chosen—divinely selected by God Himself, who loved them and accepted them into His family. And because they were chosen by Almighty God, the Good News did not come to them “in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost” (v. 5). The Word of God, with the forcefulness to save and keep, therefore, came to them with much power—the might and capacity to transform them from sinners to new creatures by the strength of the Holy Spirit, who dwelled within them. In truth, they heard the Word, obeyed it, and their lives were transformed by it. They were saved and given eternal life. The Holy Spirit also gave them the assurance that Paul’s message—the Good News of salvation—was true. Plus, this same Holy Spirit would help them remain strong in their new faith and would also help them maintain their moral character to show unconditional love toward one another, even as they underwent persecution.

6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: 7 So that ye were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

Not only had Paul and his companions been an example of holy living to the believers at Thessalonica, but after the Thessalonians followed in the faith, these new believers were able to become examples or witnesses for the faith to “all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia” (v. 7)—the names of two Roman provinces that cover most of the modern Balkan states, including modern Greece, Bulgaria, and Macedonia. In other words, in the midst of their afflictions and suffering, they imitated Paul, his companions, and the Lord, and in doing so, they planted seeds of faith that extended beyond Greece. Paul admitted to them that wherever he went, he found people telling him about the faith of the Thessalonians. They bore fruit for God that pleased both Paul and the Lord.

9 For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

Other faith communities are so impressed with the Thessalonian believers, they will tell Paul the story of the Thessalonians' conversion, despite the fact that Paul was there himself! The Thessalonian church's testimony is that they turned away from idols and turned to the one true and living God. They turned from their sin to God, and they faithfully and tenaciously served God and looked forward to His Second Coming. They believed His Word. We, too, should follow the example of Paul, his companions, and the Thessalonians. We, too, should turn away from our sins to the holy God. We should encourage each other's faith, lifting up one another's efforts on behalf of God. We should be fervent in our service to Him, winning other souls to Christ, helping make disciples, and showing them how to live for Christ. Finally, we should look forward to the Second Coming and live life as though that coming could be any day. We do not know the day or the hour, but we do know that we must be ready when He comes. This is the message the Thessalonians give through their actions.

10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

Paul continues to recite the basic tenets of the faith that the Thessalonians have put on the lips of everyone in Macedonia and Achaia because of their faith. Paul was sure of Christ's second coming, and he did not deviate from teaching this truth. Because the Thessalonians were being persecuted and even killed, Paul encouraged them to look forward to the deliverance that would be found in Jesus Christ, writing that believers should "wait for his [God's] Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead." There is no other one who can deliver us from the wrath of God to come. The word "wrath" (Gk. orge, OR-gay) refers to "the act of chastising or disciplining, imposing a penalty for an offense." Make no mistake, God will punish sin. As believers, then, our hope is in the Second Coming, when He will return to reign on the new earth forever and ever with His church.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Suffering Leads to Endurance, Character, Hope
(Romans 5:1–5)

TUESDAY

Reconciliation Through Jesus Christ
(Romans 5:6–11)

WEDNESDAY

Be Ready for Christ's Coming
(Matthew 24:36–44)

THURSDAY

Live Christ's Mind and Character Daily
(Philippians 2:5–11)

FRIDAY

Under Persecution, Proclaim Jesus the Christ
(Acts 17:1–9)

SATURDAY

Facing Temptation, Stay Loyal to Christ
(2 Thessalonians 2:1–12)

SUNDAY

Examples of Faith to All Believers
(1 Thessalonians 1:2–10)