

A Practical Study of 1 Thessalonians

Delighting The Heart of God “Learning to Bring Pleasure to God”

Question Number One – Did You Make the Right Start? – 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

The key verse, as you’ll notice at the top of your study guide, is chapter 3 and verse 10.

Paul is saying “I’m writing this basically to complete what is lacking in your faith.”

Now in order for you to understand that phrase, you need to realize a little bit of background about Thessalonica, why Paul went there, how long he stayed there, and some of the reasons for the writing of the letter.

Now what I’m trying to do with this study is I want for you to make a spiritual checkup. Now if you go to the doctor’s office and you’re not feeling good, he starts asking all kinds of questions, doesn’t he? And he’s trying to trace down some of the symptoms so he can diagnose the circumstance and be of help to you.

We don’t do that enough spiritually. We don’t reflect and think and try to discern our true spiritual condition. We like to

assume that it's better than it is. We like to assume that we're better than so-and-so. We like to assume that we're really okay and it's going to be just fine.

But we get away like this in times when we can really reflect that we're going to get a real true picture. But we're only going to get that picture if you're honest. You're still going to blow smoke and crawl under your chair and live with your pride up front, then we're not going to get anything done.

But if you'll be honest and if you'll allow the Spirit of God to take each one of these lessons—because each one will build on the other and we'll be addressing a new question in each of the studies.

Now let me just share briefly with you some background material.

Paul in Acts chapter 16, along with Silas and Timothy, were on their second missionary journey. Paul had just had a very, very crushing experience in his life in that Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along with them on the second journey. And John Mark got out about a guess a couple of months on the first journey, and he flicked it in at Pamphylia and went back to Jerusalem.

And when a guy did that to Paul, he had a hard time taking him on a second journey. And he felt like that John Mark had really failed him.

Barnabas was really a guy by the name of “Son of Encouragement” and he wanted to take Mark. And Paul said “over my dead body” so that was enough for Barnabas so he and John Mark took off to Cypress. And Paul found Silas, who was actually one of the representatives from the Jerusalem council to the Antioch church. Paul had heard him speak, knew that he was a good guy and so he hooked up with him.

And they went on the second journey and they headed straight out across Asia Minor to several of these places. When they finally got to Troas, they’d tried to go to Bithynia and the Lord restrained them from going there. And they had no where to go straight ahead. And when they got to the sea that night, as Paul was laying in bed, he had a vision and it was a vision of a man that said “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

So basically, Dr. Luke and Paul and Silas and Timothy got into the boat and they headed on north and landed at Neapolis. It was shortly thereafter, just 8 miles down the road, that they started the little work in Philippi. Lydia was one of the prominent figures in the beginning of that church. She was a business lady from Thyatira that was there in town. And she helped get that church established.

And then you’ll remember that there was a girl who was demon-possessed that kept hassling them in the streets. And Paul turned around one day and just cast that spirit out of that girl and the two men that were making a lot of money off of her spirit of divination really got ticked and they took them

into the city square, they were beaten with rods and thrown into prison.

Paul and Silas, while they're sitting in prison, about midnight they start to sing. Of course the house comes down. It's really a fabulous story in Acts 16. As of result of that, the jailor and his family become Christians and become part of that little Philippian church.

But because of all of that harassment and everything, they had to leave Philippi. So they went down to Thessalonica, 50 miles away.

You know I admire these two guys. They don't quit. And just because they get beat up and have a hard time, they just keep going. You think sometimes that Christianity's for wimps but you can't read the book of Acts or any of these other accounts of these men who followed the Lord and realize that it isn't, it takes a tremendous man to be able to endure what these guys went through. And the consistency of their lives is absolutely incredible.

When they got to Thessalonica they started the same thing and then the Jews in town got ticked at them and the persecution got so severe, they drove them out of town. They'd been there three weeks.

So what's going to amaze you as you study this letter is how much Paul told them in three weeks. How much truth he taught them. And how incredible their lives were as a

demonstration of what a Christian ought to look like. In just three weeks.

Now from there they went to Berea which is another 50 miles. And all the guys from Thessalonica that were stirring up the trouble of there went to Berea.

They established enough of a work in Berea—according to Acts 17:11, Paul says:

Acts 17:11

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

So they dug right in.

Paul was so impressed with the Bereans that he left Silas and Timothy there and he went on south to Athens all by himself.

Now when he got to Athens he was so overwhelmed with the idolatry there—there's no church established in Athens. Paul really is alone and it's like pretty soon he leaves Athens and he goes 40 miles to Corinth.

Now you stop and think about that for a minute. If you've got your hide nailed up in Philippi, would you go to Thessalonica and would you keep on when you got to Thessalonica? And

then you got stabbed in Thessalonica and several of the Christians are getting killed and the persecution in Thessalonica, you go on down to Berea and the same guys hound you to Berea. Then you go on down to Athens and you can't even establish a church among those Athenians and so you go 40 miles to Corinth and when you get there, they start doing the same thing again. They're driving you out of the synagogue and they're giving you a tough time.

Well listen, Paul, when he gets to Corinth, waits for Timothy and Silas to catch up and give a report and he writes these two letters.

These two letters, First and Second Thessalonians, are the earliest—some of the earliest—letters in the New Testament. They even precede some of the gospels as far as the time is concerned.

This little letter is so important that Swindoll in his ministry has decided to change from giving new Christians 1 John to giving them 1 Thessalonians. Because it does encompass so much of the foundational material that you need to know and to understand if you're naming the name of Christ.

Now what's the purpose in writing this letter to them?

Here comes Silas and Timothy down to Corinth and they give a report and Paul gets ready to write.

Well the first thing he wants to do is he wants to:

1. PRAISE them. Because boy they've been hanging in there and they've been making great progress and so the letter is an "up" letter.

You're going to see in this first chapter, he really is impressed by their Christianity.

Secondly, he wants to:

2. ASSURE them that he loves them even though he had to leave after three weeks.

I mean, there were rumors running around town after three weeks that this guy took all the offerings and left. I mean, that's basically the Greek culture and the mentality of these false teachers.

"See, he comes in and he can't stand the heat so he leaves."

So Paul has to write back and assure them that he loves them and he is intimately involved in their lives even though he couldn't stay.

Third, he wants to:

3. TEACH them. And one of the big things he wants to teach them is that suffering is part of the divine curriculum and it goes with the program and you can expect that.

Then fourth he wants to:

4. TESTIFY to them the joy of their—joy to him of their faithful and example.

And then he wants to:

5. INSTRUCT them and supply what is lacking in some of the areas of their lives.

He wants to:

6. EXHORT them to holiness.

And he wants to:

7. GIVE AN ANSWER to these Jewish opponents who are already stirring up trouble there in creating so much of the havoc that's taking place.

Now our key verse—chapter 3, verse 10.

1 Thessalonians 3:10

to supply what is lacking in your faith.

Okay, you've entered the spiritual doctor's office. We're coming for a time of spiritual check-up. Basically I'm going to ask you TWELVE QUESTIONS that flow out of the study.

And each of your studies is titled with a title of the question so you'll know what you're getting into when you come.

1. Did You Make the Right Start? [1:1-10]
2. Are You a Phony? [2:1-12]
3. Has Satan Hindered You? [2:13-20]
4. Are You Discouraged by the Problems? [3:1-5]
5. Are you an Encouragement to Others in Your Walk with the Lord? [3:6-10]
6. How's Your Prayer Life? [3:11-13]
7. Have You Gotten Dirty? [4:1-8]
8. Is Your Life a Witness? [4:9-12]
9. Are You Afraid of Death? [4:13-18]
10. Is the Future Foggy? [5:1-11]
11. Have You Tried This? [5:12-22], and finally
12. Are You Plugged In? [5:22-28), those last wonderful verses in chapter 5.

Okay, I want to challenge you. Before we look at these first verses, I want to challenge you with two sections from the Psalms. These ought to undergird your mentality if you, as individuals and as parents, are going to get the most out of these sessions you need to pray these two verses before you come into each session.

Psalm 26:2, 3

Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth.

Can you throw yourself open like that?

Say “Lord test me and try me. I’m open, I’m sensitive. I want Your Word to speak to me. I love you Lord and I walk before you in truth.”

Then:

Psalm 139:23, 24

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and then lead me in the way everlasting.

If you’ll do that it’ll make each one of these sessions very special.

Now we're asking the first question:

“Did You Make the Right Start?”

And the KEY VERSE in these first ten verses we're looking at here, is verse 5.

You know, it is so easy to get confused when it comes to the whole message of the Gospel, to confuse what I do, what God does, how I come to know God, how I experience peace, how I know I'm going to heaven, what church membership and fellowship has to do with it, what baptism has to do with it. On and on we go with all kinds of differences of opinions and ideas.

I was reading Barbara Johnson's little book *Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life*, she tells this little story:

(Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life by Barbara Johnson)

We've all seen typos in the newspaper, but here's an example of how an error got into the classified section of a small-town daily, and the more they tried to correct it, the more disastrous it became:

(Monday) FOR SALE—R.D. Jones has one sewing machine for sale. Phone 555-0707 after 7 P.M. and ask for Mrs. Kelly who lives with him cheap.

(Tuesday) NOTICE—we regret having erred in R.D. Jones' ad yesterday. It should have read: One sewing

machine for sale. Cheap: 555-0707 and ask for Mrs. Kelly who lives with him after 7 P.M.

(Wednesday) NOTICE—R.D. Jones has informed us that he has received several annoying telephone calls because of the error we made in his classified ad yesterday. His ad stands corrected as follows: FOR SALE—R.D. Jones has one sewing machine for sale. Cheap. Phone 555-0707 and ask for Mrs. Kelly who loves with him.

(Thursday) NOTICE—I, R.D. Jones, have NO sewing machine for sale. I SMASHED IT. Don't call 555-0707, as the telephone has been disconnected. I have NOT been carrying on with Mrs. Kelly. Until yesterday she was my housekeeper, but now she quit.

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Don't you feel that way sometimes? When people try to explain all of these different things to you in that what's involved in a relationship.

Now the reason part of the problem is so prevalent among us is we don't have anybody to look at, that's really serious. I mean, you stop and think about it, it'd be awful nice of we had a role model to just show us how to do it rather than keep telling us what they think we ought to do.

So what we're going to be looking at in this wonderful first chapter is some people who really got it and did it right.

These first ten verses are absolutely incredible. You play your own salvation experience against these ten verses, and if you come up short it's not the Thessalonians problems, it's not God's problem. Guess what? It's your problem.

And if you're going to do proper spiritual surgery and come out healthy when we get through at the end of the week, then you're going to have to be honest and say "Okay, I blew it. I'm wrong. I've got botched up priorities. I've got sin in my life. There's some things that I'm settling for that I shouldn't be settling for if I'm a child of God!" And I don't know what that is. You do!

But you've got to allow the Spirit of God the prerogative of making that clear.

These wonderful first 10 verses, I'm asking you two questions

1. Have you been born again?

I'm asking you:

2. Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

If you do, then you're going to say "Hey, this story of the Thessalonians is like mine! I look this way! I've got a story like theirs! Mine's similar!"

Let's get into it. This is going to be great.

v. 1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

Notice he doesn't use the word apostle. He doesn't have to. They haven't attacked his position as a teacher. He's sharing, he's coming up alongside, and he's sharing.

Now we know who Paul is. He's had a life-changing experience on the Damascus Road. He's the one who wrote in:

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he's a new creation. Old things have passed away. Behold all things become new.

We know him. Now the next term is "Silvanus." That's really the long Latinized for "Silas." So it is Paul, Silas and Timothy

All we know about Silas is he's showed up at the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 and was discharged with one other fellow by the name of Judas to go up to Antioch and report what the council had decided. And that's when Paul met him and got to know him, and invited him to take Barnabas' place on that second journey.

And then Timothy is one of the great guys in scripture. Timothy's a young understudy that Paul met in Lyrstra.

Actual Paul was stoned and they drug him out of the city for dead and Timothy watched all that.

Timothy never had a father image in his life. He was raised by Eunice and Lois, his mother and his grandmother. And evidently his daddy was a Greek who didn't have any time or place for religion in his life. And so Timothy had no male role in his life. When Paul came along Paul became like a dad to him. And as a result, Paul writes his last two letters to him—First and Second Timothy.

I always characterize Timothy in a couple of ways. He's an UNSELFISH SERVANT.

We read in Philippians chapter 2 verses 20-23, Paul says: "I don't have anybody like him who's as genuinely interested and concerned in the things about you."

Most people are concerned about their own things, but NOT Timothy.

And then the second thing I love about Timothy is that he is a man who's willing to go anywhere to do anything at any cost as long as it will glorify God.

So you're looking here at a great individual—three men—and they're writing to the church at Thessalonica. It is a church that is right in the heart of the Roman Empire. It is the chief city in Macedonia. Everybody goes through Thessalonica. That's an elongated term for "thermi" which means hot

springs. So it was a place, a resort area, where people went. And one of the conquering generals named it Thessalonica after his wife, Thessaloniki. And so that's how the city got its name.

And notice, these people are “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now I had some folks in our study last week wonder if we are in Jesus Christ if we can ever be taken out of Jesus Christ.

John 10:28 and 29 says:

John 10:28, 29

I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone take them out of My Father's hands. My Father is greater than all and no one is able to take them out of My Father's hand.

They are secure in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he just puts on the quick little greeting here. It's the shortest one of them all:

“Grace to you and peace.”

You find those greetings in all of Paul's epistles and basically they're always like that. They're never reversed. You must experience GRACE before you know PEACE.

And grace, an experience of God's unmerited favor toward you, turns around and gives you peace in your heart that you know Jesus Christ as Savior.

Move on with me to verse 2.

v. 2 We are always giving thanks to God for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;

Now Paul, first of all, talks about:

1. PRAISING

and then secondly, he's:

2. PETITIONING.

He's thankful for them. When he thinks about them, he's excited over what they have found in Jesus Christ and so he says we:

“make mention of you in our prayers.”

Now Paul is a man of prayer. He prays at the first of the letter, he's going to pray in the middle of the letter, and he's going to pray at the end of the letter. And we'll see it in the chapters as we progress through, that he is not only excited about them, he prays for them.

And he prays in verses 2-4 here with a **BACKWARD LOOK**

In chapter 3 verses 9-13 he's going to have a **PRESENT LOOK** in prayer—and we'll study that more in detail.

And then a **FORWARD LOOK** in chapter 5 verses 23 and 24.

So Paul is indeed a man of prayer and he is faithful to remember these Thessalonians in giving thanks for them and making mention of them in our prayers.

Verse 3—now here comes a critical verse.

v. 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and your labor of love and your perseverance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the presence of our God and Father;

“constantly bearing in mind”—this is something that goes on all the time—“your work of faith and your labor of love and your perseverance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the presence of our God and Father;”

Alright now let's break that apart for a minute.

He's “bearing in mind” as he gives thanks and makes mention, thirdly he “bears in mind” **THREE THINGS**:

1. “your work of faith,”
2. “your labor of love,” and

3. “your perseverance of hope.”

Now, when he is praising the Lord for them:

1. He’s concerned about their **CONVERSION**—which was the “work of faith.”
2. He’s concerned about their **SERVICE**—which is the “labor of love.”
3. And he is concerned about their **ENDURANCE**—which is the “perseverance of hope.”

Now if you want to just take those three things and also put the tenses on there:

1. “the work of faith” points to the **PAST**,
2. “the labor of love” points to the **PRESENT**, and
3. “the perseverance of hope” points to the **FUTURE**.

In other words, as Paul is praying, he’s praying for these three things about them.

I want to land on that a minute.

What does it mean when he says I am so thankful for:

1. “your work of faith?”

We don't think of those words together do we?

“work”

“faith”

We think of them as OPPOSITES.

How can you demonstrate your faith? You see by the fruit that comes forth from your life. That's James chapter 2.

“Faith without works is dead.” (James 2:17)

If you really know Christ, there are going to be evidences of your life that there is fruit being borne from you. And if you don't have any evidences, friend the work of faith is the very beginning. One must ever be confronted with the gospel of Jesus Christ and be converted.

Turn around, head a new direction. And James says it so strong.

“Faith without works is dead.” (James 2:17)

If there's no evidence there, we've got a problem.

Ephesians 2:8 and 9 says:

Ephesians 2:8

For by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

When you get to James 2:10 [actual Ephesians 2:10]:

Ephesians 2:10

We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.

It just starts to flow as an evidence that I have come to know Jesus Christ.

Now can I take that phrase and just shove it into John Calvin's institutes with a very simple statement?

John Calvin says:

A rare energy of faith has shown itself powerfully in you.
(source unknown)

In other words, you're changed. You're different. Something has happened.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation light.

Now can you go back in your spiritual history, as a believer, and can you say in your heart of hearts that you have been converted and your friends knew it? Or your wife knew it? Or your husband knew it? Or your family knew it?

You have indeed been confronted with the claims of Christ and you know that on that date, you came to know Christ.

And that's the foundational probing point that we're at today.

He moves from that to the:

2. "labor of love."

This could better be translated from the Greek text: "the toil of love."

It's like working and going further than you want to.

Some of you experienced that on the Pueny-Bueny Fun Run this morning. You went further than you wanted to but the air and the altitude was so exhilarating you went all the way and now you wish you hadn't. Because you're starting to get stove up inside.

You see, it's being so excited about knowing the Lord that you in your relationship with Him, toil to the point of exhaustion because of your love for Him.

I was teaching Romans 16 this last spring and I was showing how the women in Paul's life had an incredible ministry. He talks about Tryphaena and Tryphosa who labored to the point of exhaustion in service for the Lord. Then he turns right around and he mentions another one.

Why? Because Paul was like that.

Philippians 2:17

If my life is poured out upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all.

It's no big deal. I don't mind giving my life for you because you're worth it. You're a fellow believer.

Now are you ready to start talking that kind of language? You're putting your money where your mouth is?

If you know Christ and you're overwhelmed with what He's done, then you are going to be a person that is characterized by a "labor of love." You never get over what took place on Calvary's cross and you're involved in serving Him.

Now the third phrase I have translated:

3. "your perseverance of hope."

You stop and think about it. Our culture is saturated with conditions. It is saturated with excuses. And we're going to

recover manly integrity, if we're going to recover true manliness, there's one word that's got to be a part of it. I am so convinced of this that I spent about three weeks in research preparing a message for our board of directors in September. I'm forewarning those that are here of what you're going to get. But I've done a very detailed and deep study on the word "perseverance" and I am convinced that it is indeed the one answer.

Now if any of you men are aware of what's going on in the publication circles right now, we are being doused with books for men. You can go to the store and you can find *Men Who Win* and you find *Men Who* this and *Men Who* are that, and *Men Who are Leaders*, and *Point Man*, and this and that. And there are books that are telling men to get their act together. The whole publication market. And I can guarantee you men, you cannot go into a Christian bookstore and say you can't find a book to read. Because boy there is stuff for you.

And men are honing in on men. Why? Because we're sick and tired of being represented by these characters that are out here carrying off religious money and living selfishly and indulgently and saying that that's manhood. And that that's Christianity. It's a healthy move gentleman. But there's one word that ought to encompass it all and that is you're a man when you've got guts enough to say "NO" to sin and "YES" to your family, and "YES" to your wife, and "YES" to your profession, and you desire more than anything else to preserve and to persevere to the end!

You persevere in hope. You stay there.

And we are guilty men. We're supposed to be the ones who with credible and incredible staying power will finish what we started.

I love my dad at their 50th wedding anniversary, I said "Dad, how in the world did you make it?" He said "We didn't have an option."

You know, that's great! You know he's saying it! We've left that in our generation. And as a result of it, we're the losers.

You see the three things that really impress Paul about the Thessalonians is that a "work of faith" had taken place in their lives.

And they are sacrificially serving to the point of exhaustion in a "labor of love."

And third, they knew what it meant to stay by the stuff because of them who were dying in persecution. So he's tremendously impressed with them and so what I'm saying to you this morning is just keep staying in there because it's all going to be worth it.

I was reading Ben Carson's *Gifted Hands*. And if you haven't read that little book, you need to read it. And then when you finish that, read *Think Big*, which is Ben's other book.

Basically Ben is a neurosurgeon at John Hopkins University Hospital. He was involved in the successful separation of Siamese twins at the brain and did an incredible piece of work. He is a black man that grew up in the ghetto. He was in the bottom of his fifth grade class and then his momma got serious and said only three TV programs a week and two books. And that changed that kid's life and his brother's life. And as a result they've gone a long way.

He tells one story of dealing with a very traumatic brain tumor in this little girl and she was unconscious for several weeks. And her daddy just persevered. He just laid by the bed hour after hour at night, hoping that he would hear something. And he says this:

(Gifted Hands by Ben Carson, M.D. with Cecil Murphey)

After surgery, for quite a long time, Beth lay unconscious and there was no response.

One night her daddy was lying on a cot in the room, unable to sleep. It was nearly 2:00 in the morning.

“Daddy, my nose itches.”

“What?” he cried, jumping out of his cot.

“My nose itches.”

“Beth talked! Beth talked!” Brian Usher ran into the hallway, so excited that he didn't realize he was only wearing his shorts. I doubt that anyone cared anyway. “Her nose itches!” he yelled at the nurse.

The medical staff raced after him to the room. Beth lay quietly, a smile on her face. “It does itch a lot.”

Those words were the beginning of Beth's recovery. After that she started getting better every day.

(p. 172 paraphrased)

You know, sometimes life just called us to persevere and we just keep hanging in there. And you know the people that mean the most to you are the people that keep hanging in there. They're the ones that just bless your socks off because you know they've got every reason to quit. They've got every reason to throw in the towel but they don't.

I love Barbara Johnson. She says:

(Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life by Barbara Johnson)

“Don't lose your head in the battle . . . you won't have any place to put your helmet.”

p. 89

You know, stay with it. Be faithful. Persevere. Recognize the fact that God is faithful.

You know she says this too:

(Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life by Barbara Johnson)

A recurring theme in many of my letters I receive is **STRESS**, the daily wear and tear that comes from just being alive. I love the quip about the lady who goes for a drive whenever things are too stressful—she's now twenty-six hundred miles from

home.

(p. 89 paraphrased)

You know what I mean? We can all relate to that.

We can all relate to it well, can't we? You bet.

Let's get on with it here.

He's impressed with:

“[their] work of faith,”

“[their] labor of love,” and

“[their] perseverance of hope.”

Verse 4.

v. 4 knowing, brethren loved by God, His choice of you,

“knowing, brethren loved by God, His choice of you,”

Isn't that great? Because of their “work of faith,” their “labor of love,” and their “patient endurance of hope,” he is impressed. He knows something about them. He knows that they've been chosen by God.

Do you know something? If you've made the right start in your

life, it's because God chose you not because you chose Him. And you know, you're going to demonstrate to me this week whether you've been chosen by God or not. I'm going to be able to tell by your response to truth whether you've been chosen by God or not.

I know a lot of times we preach this message, you know, do God a favor—receive Him and come into His family. That's alright but God's got one up on you. He chose you before the foundation of the world and you're only verifying His choice by your response.

And you will make one of two responses. You'll make a choice to continue to stay with the status quo or you'll recognize the fact that you've never really made a right start and you're going to make it. You're going to take that step.

Well right now your heart is responding in truth that the “work of faith,” the “labor of love,” and the “patient perseverance of hope” is there. And so those ingredients verify in your heart and bear witness to the fact that a work has been done, and that you know Christ and He is your Savior.

And so Paul says “I know it, I saw your work of faith. I saw your labor of love. I saw your perseverance of hope so I know God chose you. I know that you're a part of His wonderful family.”

John 15:16

You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, [Jesus said] and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit.

So yes, he is excited about the fact that they have come to know Christ.

Now KEY VERSE—verse 5.

v. 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; even as you are knowing what sort of men we showed ourselves to be among you for your sakes.

“because”—here’s the REASON—“our gospel came to you”—NEGATIVELY—“not only in word but”—POSITIVELY—“in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; even as you are knowing what sort of men we showed ourselves to be among you for your sakes.”

Okay look at that for a second.

“because”—the reason we know you’re elected is when we ministered the word it— came to you not only in word but in power and the Holy Spirit.”

It did something in your heart with “full conviction; even as you are knowing what sort of persons we showed ourselves to be among you.”

Now can you tell me as you sit there and you're probing your spiritual heart, has the Word of God ever come to you in power and conviction? Has the Holy Spirit taken the Word of God and applied it to your heart and you made a decision and you received Christ, and you know that?

Ok, you say "Sure! Alright!"

I'm glad you're in the family! But you've still got eleven other questions in the diagnosis so don't get comfortable. We've got a ways to go. I'm just thrilled that your heart can respond to mine this morning in knowing that in power it took place, the Holy Spirit convicted you, and you felt like somebody was reading your mail. And with "full conviction" you turned and received Jesus Christ as your Savior.

If you haven't, it involves your intellect, your emotions, and your will.

Intellectually you say "I know it."

Emotionally you say "I want it."

And with your will you say "I choose to have Jesus Christ become my Savior."

Back a number of years ago when we were at The Firs and we're getting ready to go there this weekend. We're going to be up there for a family camp for a week. It's going to be like me

and old home week with all of our friends. I was working as a program director in the high school camp and I'm going to get to speak to about 250-300 kids every night, Sunday-Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday, and then to the families Thursday-Friday-Saturday. When we were up there on the lake, we had a skydiver on our staff one summer. He was a smoke jumper for the National Forrest Service. So we decided that one of the neat ways we could teach kids about faith is to send him up in a light plane over the lake and then let him jump out and then just float right into the water in camp and we'd pick him up in a boat and then we'd let him come into fireside and speak about faith.

And you know, some of those firesides were some of the most incredible ones. Of course I sure got a tight gut when you realize you've got a guy getting ready to jump out of an airplane and if he misses it you know they're going to say "Christian camp director destroys one of its counselors by splatting him in the water because his chute didn't open."

You know, you have all those kind of feelings but we decided to run the risk. And so Topper—he'd get up there in that airplane, and you could see that little plane start circling around. And pretty soon you could see a little black dot let go and then you could see a black sling come out of the chute pack and you knew that at least you were on the way. And then pretty soon the chute would pop and of course everybody down below would just get real excited. And then he'd come floating in just real close to camp before we could pick him up in the boat. And we never missed.

And he'd speak at fireside about how he had to let go of the airplane and by an act of his will he had to trust the chute. And then he had to energize his chute by pulling the latch. And he presented one of the most graphic gospel presentations to those kids so that they could realize that this is what God has provided in Jesus Christ. He has provided all that we need if we'll just take hold and grab hold of what He has done

Verse 6.

v. 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word while in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit,

Now that sure doesn't go together for twentieth century Christians, does it?

Look, he said "Y'all were so impressed with us that you started acting like us. You took on a family likeness."

"You became imitators of us and of the Lord."

You "received the word while in much affliction." You were really suffering "with joy of the Holy Spirit."

Now, when we have trouble in our lives, we don't have much joy do we?

It's probably because we don't have an understanding of the relationship of joy and suffering.

I mean how can you read in Acts chapter 5 the disciples had just gotten through being confronted by the Sanhedrin and all the Jewish leaders said “Don’t you talk anymore in the Lord” and they whipped them.

And it says they left there rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the Lord and they went on preaching and kept going.

You see, usually when things get bad in our lives, we think we’ve got a good excuse to throw in the towel and tell God to hang it. Because He can’t handle it.

And really all God is doing is just turning up the heat a little bit to see if you’re any good. And see if you can put your money where your mouth is and where you can really learn the lessons He’s trying to teach you, and where you can really trust His sovereignty that He’s in control and He knows what He’s doing.

So the “joy of the Holy Spirit” in the life is totally independent of the circumstances that surround the life of the believer. And that’s where we’re going to get into in one of these studies.

I loved Erma Bombeck when she said:

(The Grass is Always Greener Over the Septic Tank by Erma Bombeck)

It was either Thomas Jefferson—or maybe it was John Wayne—who once said, “Your foot will never get well as long as there is a horse standing on it.”

p. 19

I mean, you know, we suffer. But you put it on the other side and it says:

(Fire in Your Heart by Sammy Tippit)

Nothing fans the flame of the heart like [the] winds of adversity.

p. x

It intensifies and deepens our walk with the Lord. And the “joy of the Holy Spirit” is there. That’s the divine paradox, Christian experience.

Why did Jesus in John 15:11 in His farewell address say:

John 15:11

These things I’ve written unto you that My joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full.

And in less than 24 hours He’s hanging on the cross dead!

You see, joy has nothing to do with circumstance! It’s the evidence of the fact that the Lord has a relationship with you

and He's in your life, and He's working through you.

It's all an attitude and sometimes your greatest witness is the joy you have when you've got tears in your eyes, when you know that God's in control and He's working it all out.

Barbara also said "I ran into a guy the other day and said":

(Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life by Barbara Johnson)

Listen, Pal . . . I work two jobs, I got the shaft in the divorce, my car is making weird noises, my kid dyed his Mohawk pink, and my dog had a litter in the living room! So don't tell me I have one item too many, unless you have a death wish!

(p. 7 paraphrased)

You know, in essence, that's the kind of stuff people you tell about—why they've got a reason for just stringing everybody out.

But then she goes on to say:

(Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life by Barbara Johnson)

To be able to "smile at anything"—that's the key. Not only does smiling kill time between disasters, but it also helps your attitude, and we all have to work to avoid hardening of the attitudes!

(p. 19 paraphrased)

(Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life by Barbara Johnson)

Chuck Swindoll said—[he] is one of the most optimistic, “up” people I have ever met. He always has a smile and loves to laugh. He says:

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company . . . a church . . . a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past . . . we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that indeed is our attitude . . .

(p. 19 paraphrased)

“in much affliction” there is joy in the Holy Spirit.

Isn't verse 7 great?

v. 7 so that you became an example to all those who are believing in Macedonia and in Achaia.

“so that you became an example to all those who are believing in Macedonia and in Achaia.”

The fact that they've had a work of faith, the labor of love, patient endurance, perseverance of hope, and there is joy of the Spirit in the midst of their affliction, they're testifying to everybody around them.

People are witnessing the good example of their lives.

Verse 8.

v. 8 For from you the word of the Lord has been sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we are not finding it necessary to be saying a thing.

You see when you come to know Christ, and there is credibility about your life, there's going to be an echo that starts sounding forth to everybody else. And that echo is going to be heard.

That's what that word "sounded forth" means. It's echoing on—it's the after-shocks—it's the reverberations of a work of God being done in your life is going to be touching other people's lives and it's going to spread. And you can tell whether or not you've had any earth-shaking work going on in your life so that the after-shocks are still touching people around you. And you are thrilled with the fact that you know Christ and others are being influenced by that. Christianity was never meant to be a terminal experience.

Now see the progression?

In verse 5 the Word CAME to them.

In verse 6 the Word WAS RECEIVED by them.

And in verse 8 the Word WAS “SOUNDED FORTH” from them.

Is there anything coming out of your instrument? I mean, are you tuned up to sing His praise? And are you sounding forth the glories of the Savior to others around you just by who you are? And by the excitement and thrill of knowing Jesus Christ?

Now that word “sounded forth” is not found anywhere else in the New Testament. This is the only place. Paul chose a word—a very special word—to describe what was going on in this Thessalonican, political and commercial center as the Word was “sounded forth.”

Have you noticed that almost every Christian experience in the New Testament is marked by that characteristic? That people, once they come to know, sound forth.

Acts 1:8—that was Jesus’ mandate. Those were his last words. We always like to talk about people’s last words.

Acts 1:8

you shall receive power after the Holy Ghost has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses, sounders forth of Me, both in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth.

Are you involved in that? Does your heart beat for sharing Jesus Christ with others?

Indeed a vital entity and a part of the Christian life.

J. B. Phillips said:

(Young Churches in Action by J. B. Phillips)

In the pages of this unpretentious book written by an author of the third gospel [speaking of the book of Acts] the fresh air of heaven is plainly blowing. Many problems comparable to the modern complexities never arise here because the men and women concerned were of one heart and mind in the Spirit.

(page unknown)

You know, if you really got ahold of this, how long it would take us to reach the United States of America? You mathematicians listen to this. I found this the other day:

If two people, after hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ, each told the good news of the gospel to 2 more people within 15 minutes and then 4 people on hearing it would pass it on to 2

more within 15 minutes and this process kept on going, soon the number would reach that of the population of the United States. How long do you think it would take theoretically for that to happen? We might try to guess. We won't keep you in suspense. The answer is that in less than 6 hours and 45 minutes the gospel would be touching every life in the United States of America.

(source unknown)

You know, something's wrong. There's a skunk in the woodpile. There's something rotten in Denmark because we are not demonstrating the normal pattern of the Thessalonian saints, which is the pattern for New Testament Christianity.

It just spreads! There's just a concern. There's a moving out and we're sitting on our duff and not sharing this gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

Another writer said:

What are my thoughts on earth going to be when I get to heaven?

A car I drove, the home I owned, the clothes I wore?

The society clubs, and the lodges?

The education I received?

(source unknown, paraphrased)

No. What is it?

The people that are there who came to know Jesus Christ.

Remember the woman at the well? This outcast woman who had 5 husbands and the guy she was living with was not her husband. And after Jesus confronted her with the gospel, what'd she do? She left her water pot and ran to town and said "Come and see a man who told me all I ever did."

She immediately manifested new birth and they started coming out of the city in a steady stream. When they got out there to Jesus it said "Many of them believed on Him because of her words, but more believed because of His testimony when they heard." (John 4:39)

That's the way the gospel gets spread. It's not by just one person doing it. We're all infected with this natural desire to touch the world.

Now let me wrap it up in 9 and 10. You've been real good. Some of you are yawning. Some of you are asleep. I lost some of you 20 minutes ago. I'm aware of that but I'm still trying to plow on through and persevere in hope that maybe you'll wake up for one final shot! Alright!

v. 9 For they themselves are reporting about us what kind of an entrance we had to you, and how you turned to God from the idols to serving the living and true God,

“For they themselves are reporting about us what kind of an entrance we had to you,”—now look at this—“how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and the true God,”

v. 10 and to be waiting for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, the one who is rescuing us from the wrath which is coming.

Okay. Do you see something there? Verses 9 and 10 are exactly like verse 3.

Okay, let's put it together.

First of all you've got a “work of faith.”

1. They “turned to God from idols” and
2. they're “serving.”

The two KEY WORDS are “turning” and “serving”:

“serving the living and true God”—that's their “labor of love” and

they are “waiting”—their “perseverance of hope.”

“Turned” points to the PAST—the “work of faith.”

“Serving” to the PRESENT—their “labor of love.”

“Waiting” to the FUTURE—they are “persevering in hope” that the Lord Jesus is soon coming to take us to be with Himself.

And he ends this wonderful chapter like he does all five chapters with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is:

“the one who is rescuing us from the wrath which is coming.”

Now, just like Bible class, there are EIGHT LESSONS here on the sheet. You can just pick up one of these at the end. I am recording and because I am recording, it's going to be necessary for me just to repeat these 8 lessons but you don't have to copy them. You've got them on the sheets here. You can pick them up afterwards.

Lesson #1: Paul's prayers are filled with praise for his converts.

Lesson #2: His items of praise are:

“your work of faith,”

“your labor of love,”

“and your perseverance of hope.”

Lesson #3: The affirmative response of the Thessalonians to the gospel was evidence of the fact that they had been chosen

by God.

Lesson #4: An effective presentation of the gospel involves 4 things:

1. the preaching of the Word,
2. the power of the Holy Spirit,
3. the full conviction of the hearer or the listener, and
4. the impact of a life that has been changed.

Lesson #5: The “joy of the Holy Spirit” is not affected by affliction.

Lesson #6: It is the Lord’s intention that the gospel message be “sounded forth” from us after we have received it.

Lesson #7: In the PAST they turned to God from idols; in the PRESENT they’re serving God out of love; and looking to the FUTURE with hope, waiting for His Son from heaven.

Lesson #8: The certainty of God’s wrath is communicated in this passage.

Somebody wrote:

(Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life by Barbara Johnson)

Good morning, Humpty Dumpty, Sir,
How amazing, you're still here!
By legend you were shattered,
How cohesive you appear.

Humpty jumped, and said with a smile,
“The tale of horses and men
wasn't the end! The king himself
put me back together again!”

(pp. 120-21 paraphrased)

And the responsibility that we have before God is to be doers
of the Word and not just hearers only.

It's our responsibility to reach out to people who are lost.

Do you have that passion, that desire that others come to
know Christ?

I end with a little parable I think that will become very
convicting.

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur,
there was once a crude little lifesaving station. The building
was just a hut. There was only one boat, but the few devoted
members kept a constant watch over the sea and with no
thought for themselves went out day and night, tirelessly
searching for the lost.

Many lives were saved by this wonderful little life station
so it became famous. Some of those who were saved and

various others in the surrounding area wanted to become associated with the station and gave of their time and money and effort for the support of this work. New boats were bought and crews were trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

Some of the members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt a more comfortable place should be provided so they replaced the emergency cots and beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place. It was used as a sort of a club. Fewer members were now interested in going to the sea on life saving missions so they hired lifesaving crews to do their work. The lifesaving motifs still prevailed in the club's decorations and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where initiations were held.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast and the hired crews brought in loads of cold, wet, half drowned people. They were dirty and sick and some of them had black skin and some had yellow skin. The beautiful new club was considerably messed up so the property committee had a shower house built outside of the club where the victims of shipwrecks could be cleaned up before they came inside.

At the next meeting there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted that lifesaving was their primary purpose and pointed out they were still called a lifesaving station. They were finally voted down and told if they wanted to save the lives of various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters they could

begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. And so they did.

As the years went by the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club and yet another lifesaving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that coast today you will find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters but most of the people drown.
(source unknown)

Father, as we scrutinize our own lives against these Thessalonian Christians we come up short. Father and we know it's nothing wrong with You it's with us. I would pray, if it's going to mean going back and checking whether or not we ever have come to know You and had an experience of the power of the Holy Spirit convicting us of sin and bringing about a turning from the idols that we've accumulated to serving the living and true God and to be pointing our ship in the direction of eternity with priorities that are capable of persevering in hope for the glory of God. Father as we probe and discern and desire to help to spiritual health that each one of these studies as they build one upon the other, will accomplish that very purpose. For it's in Jesus' name we pray Amen.

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A Practical Study of 1 THESSALONIANS: Your Spiritual Checkup

“Victory in Areas of Vulnerability”

Key verse 3:10 — *“night and day praying as earnestly as possible that we might see your face and complete what is lacking in your faith”*

QUESTION NUMBER ONE – DID YOU MAKE THE RIGHT START? – 1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

KEY VERSE 1:5

v. 1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

v. 2 We are always giving thanks to God for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;

v. 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and your labor of love and your perseverance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the presence of our God and Father;

v. 4 knowing, brethren loved by God, His choice of you,

v. 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; even as you are knowing what sort of men we showed ourselves to be among you for your sakes.

v. 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word while in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit,

v. 7 so that you became an example to all those who are believing in Macedonia and in Achaia.

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v. 8 For from you the word of the Lord has been sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we are not finding it necessary to be saying a thing.

v. 9 For they themselves are reporting about us what kind of an entrance we had to you, and how you turned to God from the idols to serving the living and true God,

v. 10 and to be waiting for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, the one who is rescuing us from the wrath which is coming.

QUESTIONS:

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. What three things does Paul remember in verse 3?

3. How did the Gospel come to the Thessalonians, according to verse 5?

4. Who did the Christians in Thessalonica imitate, according to verse 6?

5. What happened to the Word of the Lord in verse 8?

6. What did the Thessalonians do in verse 9?

7. What are the idols in your life?

8. What were the Thessalonians doing, according to verse 10?

9. What verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Paul's prayers are filled with praise for his converts.

LESSON #2: His items of praise are: "your work of faith," "your labor of love," "and your perseverance of hope."

LESSON #3: The affirmative response of the Thessalonians to the Gospel was evidence of their election.

LESSON #4: An effective presentation of the Gospel involves four things: 1) the preaching of the Word; 2) the power of the Holy Spirit; 3) the full conviction of the hearer; and 4) the impact of a life that has been changed

LESSON #5: The “joy of the Holy Spirit” is not affected by affliction.

LESSON #6: It is the Lord’s intention that the Gospel message be “sounded forth” from us once we have received it.

LESSON #7: In the past they turned to God from idols; in the present serving God out of love; and looking to the future with hope, waiting for His Son from heaven.

LESSON #8: The certainty of God’s wrath is communicated in this passage.