



Women's R&R Bible Study 2024-2025

"YOUR WORDS WERE FOUND, AND I ATE THEM, AND YOUR WORD WAS TO ME THE JOY AND REJOICING OF MY HEART."

JEREMIAH 15:16

LIVING IN HOPE

LESSON 1

Welcome to our study of 1&2 Thessalonians. We're so excited to get started. Hopefully you read the introduction that's posted online and were able to read all 5 chapters of 1 Thessalonians. If not, there's still time! Before we get started, let's take a look at who wrote the book and a little bit about the city of Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians was written by our dear friend and apostle Paul. This letter is thought to be written somewhere between 48 AD and 53 AD, about 20 years after the resurrection of Christ. Paul was born around the same time of Christ and was converted on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19) in about AD 33. Approximately 15 years after his conversion, Paul left on his first missionary journey (AD 46-48) with Barnabas and Mark (Acts 13-14). Acts 14:26-28 tells us that when the trip was finished, they returned to Antioch and reported all that God had done with them, and how the door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles.

1. Read the following Scriptures to get some background on Saul/Paul. Write a brief character sketch of Paul, before and after conversion. Acts 7:58-59, 8:1-4, 9:1-31, 22:2-21.

Many scholars believe that 1 Thessalonians was perhaps the first Epistle Paul wrote. This book was written so long ago, yet still so relevant today.

There is much to say about the city of Thessalonica, which is called Thessaloniki today. It was the capital and largest city in Macedonia in the first century. Its geographic location made it an extremely important city. Located on the banks of the Thermaic Gulf near the NW corner of the Aegean Sea, it was a main seaport and a successful shipping and naval center. It was a busy place, a hubbub of activity. The Egnatian Way ran through the center of the city. This was the main Roman Road that ran from Rome to the Orient. It was the most widely used trade and military route between Rome and Asia Minor. (Certain sections of this paved highway still exist today. I saw it!)

The city of Thessalonica was founded in 315 BC by a Greek General by the name of Cassander, who served under Alexander the Great. He was married to Alexander's half sister, and named this new city after his wife, Thanica. This city was built atop the ancient city of Therma, which was named after the hot springs in the area.

Under the Romans, Thessalonica was made the capital in 148 BC and became a "free city" in 42 BC because they helped the Romans defeat Brutus and Cassius. They were given the privilege of appointing their own government officials, as well as ruling themselves.

At the time of Paul, Thessalonica had a population of about 200,000 people. The population consisted mainly of Greeks but had many Jewish sections. It was certainly a land of plenty, rich with fertile valleys, flourishing rivers, and great farmland. The busy streets were filled with Jewish merchants, sailors, Roman officials, and visitors from all parts of the world! It was called "Macedonia's most popular town and the metropolis of the entire province" by Greek geographers. It was into this hustle-and-bustle town that Paul and his team stepped.

Paul embarked on his second missionary journey with the purpose of visiting the churches that had been established on his first trip. Paul wanted to check on them and make sure they were standing strong in their faith (Acts 15:36). After a disagreement with Barnabas over whether or not to take Mark with them on their journey, they parted ways. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus, while Paul took Silas and set sail, beginning in Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:36-41). A young man named Timothy joined Paul's

team in Derbe and they continued on, strengthening the churches in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:1-5). Paul entered the city of Thessalonica in Acts 17:1-9. From there they went on to Berea, leaving Silas and Timothy there while he went on to Athens. But 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 tells us that he also sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the church. He was worried about them but was happy to hear glowing reports. This letter is Paul's response to the report that Timothy brought back from Thessalonica. In this letter we catch a vision of Paul's "pastor's heart." Paul shares his love, concern, and admiration for the Thessalonians very openly and honestly. Paul uses no Old Testament quotes, for he's writing mainly to Gentiles. Only one doctrine, the return of Jesus Christ, is actually addressed and emphasized (although many are referred to). We clearly see his heart of love and hear his exhortations for continued faithfulness.

As we now begin reading 1 Thessalonians, imagine that you are living at the time it was written. Imagine hearing these words read aloud in the church, knowing that they come from the apostle Paul himself. Listen to his heart. See his vision. And most importantly, open your heart to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to teach you great and wonderful things. Be a Berean and receive God's Word "with all readiness" (Acts 17:11).

Lastly, it's so important that we understand that the purpose of the letter is to encourage the Thessalonians to continue living lives that pleased the Lord, to encourage them to grow in their faith and persevere in trials, and how the hope in the Coming of Christ should motivate them to live Christ-centered lives. Keep these points in mind as you read the chapters. Knowing the main point of the letter helps us keep every passage within its correct context.

Memory Verse of the Week: "For our Gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake."

1 Thessalonians 1:5

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10. Write down any facts you find, repeated words or phrases, or interesting points. Remember to be a detective. This part is fun!

3. Who were Paul's companions according to verse 1?

We will look at Timothy more in depth when we study 1 Timothy, but it's important to know that he was probably the youngest of the three, and soon became Paul's traveling companion, never leaving his side for long. Timothy appears in ten of Paul's Epistles. Silas, on the other hand, is never mentioned again in any of Paul's writings.

4. Who was this letter addressed to? How does he greet them?

Paul is known for coining the phrase "grace and peace." Grace has been called the "watchword" of Paul. He uses it twice as often as all the other New Testament writers combined. He uses "grace" 100 times in his 13 Epistles and "peace" more than 40 times.

5. Why do you think this is significant, coming from what you know about Paul?

6. What do the following verses say about grace? Ephesians 2:8-10, Romans 3:21-24, John 1:14-18, 2 Corinthians 12:9, and 1 Timothy 1:12-16?

7. As believers, we are to:

_____ in grace (2 Peter 3:18)
 _____ in grace (2 Timothy 2:1)
 _____ in grace (Romans 5:2)

8. As believers, is it possible to take advantage of or abuse God's grace? How? (Romans 6:1-2)

9. Paul is so good about praying for his friends. As he does, what does he commend them for?
10. How diligent are you to pray for your family, friends, and co-laborers? How does Paul's example speak to your heart? Make a prayer list and decide to pray more diligently!

This is the first time Paul introduces the famous triad of "faith, hope, and love" which he later writes about often. These virtues were very evident in the lives of the Thessalonians. He saw them lived out as spiritual realities. I like what Charles Erdman said, "Faith rests on the past, love acts out in the present, and hope looks to the future."

11. The Thessalonians seemed to have an "active" faith. What does that mean? Read James 2:14-16, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and Ephesians 2:10. Would you say your own faith is "active"? What is the relationship between faith and works?
12. What do you think Paul meant by the phrase "labor of love"? What does that mean? What are some ways we can practically "labor in love"? Why is showing love sometimes laborious?

Paul commends them for their "patience of hope" in the Lord. The word in the Greek refers to an "active endurance" rather than a "passive waiting." This endurance is inspired by our hope in Christ!

13. What does it mean to "hope in Christ"? How does this enable us to endure? How should this hope affect how we respond to difficulties?

- 14.** Why was Paul so sure that the Thessalonians were “elect” or chosen? (verse 4) How did he know?

God’s election is sometimes difficult to understand. The official definition is “that sovereign act of God in grace whereby He chose in Christ Jesus for salvation all those whom He foreknew.” Scripture teaches that God chose His kids before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). We know our salvation begins with God, because John 15:16 tells us that “You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.” God’s love existed in the past and continues on to the present. God’s plan of salvation was born in His heart from before the beginning of time.

On the other hand, we also know that man is personally responsible for his decision to believe and trust in Jesus Christ (John 3, Romans 5). It is a hard doctrine to understand, but we know that Scripture teaches they are both true. Paul didn’t use this term to confuse or discourage them, but to encourage their hearts! (How do you know if you’re one of God’s elect? If you desire to respond to His invitation, then you are!) Paul saw so much evidence in their lives, he had no doubt they were born again. The fruit that he saw was definitely not a work of the flesh, but of the Holy Spirit. Their election was demonstrated by their actions.

- 15.** Is fruit evident in your life? If Paul was writing to you, would he be able to commend you in the same way he did the Thessalonians?

- 16.** According to verse 5, by what power and authority did Paul come to them?

- 17.** According to Paul, how were the Thessalonians proof of the power of the Gospel? How were they examples?

According to verse 6, they welcomed the Gospel with joy, even in the midst of persecution. As they accepted Christ, they were most certainly persecuted by the unbelieving, pagan worshipping Gentiles, as well as the never-ending idolatry that was so prevalent in Thessalonica. This joy was only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. And verse 7 lets us know that their example was far reaching.

The phrase “sounded forth” in verse 8 “commonly refers to the sounding of a herald’s trumpet.” (W.E. Vine) The Thessalonians were blasting forth, amplifying, or echoing, the message of the Gospel. They were like “human speakers.”

- 18.** The Thessalonians’ lives and words rang out loud and clear. What’s ringing out, or sounding forth, from your life? Describe the sound you think your life is making. (Be creative.)

- 19.** Why is it so important that our lives reflect Christ to both unbelievers and believers?

- 20.** Conversion always causes transformation and change. According to verses 9-10, the Thessalonians changed a lot. What change have you seen in your life since your conversion?

- 21.** According to verses 9-10, what were the Thessalonians waiting for? What were they doing in the meantime?

- 22.** What do you think it means to wait “in expectation”?

We will talk more about God's wrath and Christ's return in the upcoming lessons. For now, let's rejoice that we will be saved from His wrath by His return. Do note that this is not speaking about eternal judgment, but the wrath that will come upon the world. And what we're waiting for is actually a person, not an event. Jesus is the center of that **HOPE!**

Are you waiting expectantly for Christ's return? He can come back at any time. Are you ready?

23. Are you serving the true and living God while you wait? What does "serving God" mean to you?

24. The Thessalonians "turned from their idols" to serve God. Do you have any modern-day idols in your life that hinder your worship of the Lord? Read 1 John 5:21. Is any "thing" or any "one" more important in your life than God? Any changes you need to make for God to have supreme reign in your heart?

I have to end with this thought-provoking quote from W.E. Vines referring to the Thessalonians turning from their idols ... "The order is significant; the motive in this conversion was not that they were repelled by the grossness of their idols, but that they were attracted by the character of God." I pray that this will be our motivation to turn, serve, and wait! See you next week!