

A Study of Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians
Week One
1 Thessalonians 1 & 2

Day One

1:1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. 2 We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

v. 1 – Paul almost always traveled with a ministry team. Here Paul wrote with the support and fellowship of Silas and Timothy. You can read how these men came to be part of the team by reading Acts 15:39-40 (Silas) and Acts 16:1-5 (Timothy). You can then read how this team came to Thessalonica in the first place in Acts 17:1-15.

Paul wished this city church grace and peace. Those are always good things to wish on anyone. **Do people encounter grace and peace when they encounter you?**

v. 2 – Paul was thankful for the Thessalonian believers and thanked God for them when he prayed. This is a good thing, for the writer of Hebrews instructed us in the following manner:

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:17).

Do your spiritual leaders thank God for you? Do you obey and submit to them?

v. 3 – Paul mentioned the special “trinity” of traits that should be the hallmark of each believer: faith, hope and love. He remembered their work, labor and endurance prompted by these three characteristics. Notice that the Thessalonians worked hard to produce tangible, practical evidence of their faith, hope and love. Theirs was not a doctrinal work, but a practical work. It doesn't matter what you believe until you do something with what you believe. **What are you doing to prove that you have faith, hope or love? If a trial were held today, would there be enough evidence to convict you of having these three traits?**

vs. 4&5 – Paul knew that the Thessalonians were chosen by God because of the power that was released to them when he first preached the gospel to them. God used signs and wonders to prove and confirm that He sent Paul to preach the gospel. It wasn't just preaching, but preaching with power, miracles and conviction as was Paul's custom:

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (1 Corinthians 2:3-5).

The Spirit was present not just in power but also in the power to convict, as Jesus promised He would be:

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned (John 16:7-11).

There must be Holy Spirit power related to whatever we do, and that only comes when we do the will of God. **Are you functioning in your purpose? Does God help you do what you do? If not, how can you get “connected” that kind of power?**

Day Two

6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you 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—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

v. 6 – I think there is human joy, which is natural and dependent on circumstances. Then there is Holy Ghost joy, which is supernatural and not dependent on the circumstances. Only the Spirit can give you joy in the midst of severe suffering, which is what the Thessalonian church was encountering. The believers there imitated Paul and his team, but they also imitated Jesus, which is even more important. While I want people to imitate me, it must be because they see Jesus in me. I can never allow “me” to be the focus for others; Jesus must always be the focus.

Are you suffering? If you are, do you have joy? If not, then perhaps you need to stop focusing on the situation and focus on God's will for you in the situation. What is God trying to establish in you? What is the suffering working in you?

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope

does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (Romans 5:2-5).

You can see from Paul's letter to the Romans that suffering produces many good things.

v. 7 – Their suffering made them a model for the other churches in the region. Don't underestimate the power of a good report about you to encourage other people. And that may be why God is allowing your suffering—to provide an example to others of how to suffer with dignity and godly purpose. **Did you ever think that what you are going through, at least in part, is to encourage others? Will you allow God to do that and make you an example worth emulating?**

v. 8 – The report of the Thessalonian faith had become known everywhere. Paul did not have to report about their faith; the report of their faith preceded Paul! God had done a special work in Thessalonica and it brought God glory! Thessalonica was located on a major highway and God used that highway to spread the news about His gospel. Paul's strategy was to work the major centers of the Roman Empire and to allow those centers to spread the gospel through their already existing network of trade and commerce. You would have to say that Paul's strategy was a good one.

Do you have a strategy for what God wants you to do? I am using the Internet to spread my Bible studies and other teachings and it is having some success. Why not ask the Lord today to give you a strategy or sharpen the one you have. God wants you to succeed more than you do as you fulfill the purpose He assigned. Seek Him for the strategy that will bring you God's success. Write it down when you "see" it.

v. 9 – Obviously most of the converts there were not Jewish, for they turned from idols. Paul first went to the synagogue, but the prominent Jews were jealous and uncooperative. So he turned to the Gentiles—which was his purpose—and God granted Him favor and success.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me'" (Acts 26:15-18).

You cannot enjoy success outside fulfilling your purpose. **What is your purpose? What were you created to do?** If you need help finding it, then go to my website, www.purposequest.com, where you find a lot of material that you will help you define your purpose.

v. 10 – Paul mentioned Jesus' name three times in the first 10 verses, and mentioned "the Lord" two times. Paul understood that it was all about Jesus and not about Paul, the

messenger. I have been convicted as we've studied the epistles that Jesus was clearly and repeatedly the focus for all that Paul did. I came to realize that there were times that I preached and never mentioned Jesus' name and never helped the people focus on Him. Since I saw that, I have tried to adjust my style to be less about my insight and more about Jesus and His will. I cannot rescue anyone but, as Paul wrote, Jesus has rescued us from the coming wrath of God. Thank you, Jesus! You are worthy of all my attention, work and praise! **Do you agree? What can you do today and this week to exalt Jesus, to help people see Him more clearly and imitate His life?**

Day Three

2:1 You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. 2 We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.

2:1 – This is an interesting comment. Paul reminded them that his mission to them wasn't a failure. That would seem to be obvious, but I am sure that there were some who deemed it a failure because Paul was able to stay for such a short time—probably only about 8 months:

When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go. As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea (Acts 17:1-10).

This wouldn't appear to have been a successful trip, but obviously enough heard the gospel and repented for there to be a church to which Paul was now writing. There are times when you may feel like a failure and you just have to trust God for the results—that you did what you could do. Don't judge things from the perspective of your enemies or your own sense of failure. Give it time and let God show you the fruit of your labor.

v. 2 – Paul was referring to his treatment in Philippi, where he was beaten without a trial (see Acts 16:35-40). This was unlawful treatment of a Roman citizen and Paul considered it an “insult.” Paul had been beaten, came to Thessalonica and still had the courage, while his wounds were probably still healing, to preach the gospel again! What faith! How did he know that he would not be beaten again? Could his body have endured another beating like he got in Philippi? Yet this man Paul was courageous and willing to give everything, even his life, for the sake of the gospel. This is why that, in spite of his imperfections, God has honored him with a significant position in the history of the church. Paul was a great man and we are called to be like him. **What price are you willing to pay for the sake of the gospel being spread?**

v. 3 – There were some who were preaching the gospel from error, impure motives, or a desire to trick people, usually for financial gain. I am sure Paul was accused of all this as well. Very often the real is subjected to doubt and scrutiny because of the counterfeit. In fact, Paul had a group of people who were dedicated to his demise, taking every opportunity they could to undermine his work. This group was called the Judaizers and they followed Paul’s itinerary. They went to where he had preached and declared that the believers had to follow the Mosaic Law. **How would you like to have group so dedicated to undermining your work?** So Paul didn’t only suffer when he was ministering; he suffered when he left, not knowing what would happen to his work. The only thing he could do was trust the results to the Lord. We know that God was faithful to preserve what Paul had done for Him. He will do the same for you.

v. 4 – God tests hearts and He had tested Paul’s. Paul wasn’t doing what he did for money or glory; he was doing it for the Lord. Therefore God had approved Paul and had entrusted him with the message of the gospel to the Gentiles. God just doesn’t entrust His treasures to anyone, but only to the faithful. I feel to some extent that this is what God has done by giving me the purpose message that I teach and preach. **Has God entrusted anything to you? A message? A ministry opportunity? Other people? Are you doing all that you can with it?**

Paul could not do what he did trying to please men. It was too difficult. Rather Paul was working to please God. I hope it can be said that you and I have done the same. But many do not today, just as they didn’t in Paul’s day, and that is why we must trust God to overcome our opposition to make our results meaningful and lasting.

Day Four

5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed- God is our witness. 6 We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, 7 but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. 9 Surely you

remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

v. 5 – Paul was reviewing his motives when he first ministered to the Thessalonians, which reveals to us the motives and tactics of some of his contemporaries—greed, hypocrisy and flattery. Some still see the ministry as a source of financial income and they know how to “work” people and pastors to make money for speaking and ministry. I have seen some so-called prophetic ministries do this, working the leadership, giving them “positive” prophecies of prosperity and blessing. I have seen these prophets walk out of churches with large honorarium checks for their “services.” It’s interesting that human nature hasn’t changed in the last 2,000 years and it won’t in the next 2,000—sin is the same yesterday, today and forever! And ministry is a source of financial gain for unscrupulous men and women who use the Bible and God to justify their greed.

vs. 6&7 – Paul refused as a matter of principle to take any money from the churches he was planting. Even though it was his “right” to receive his living from those who were the beneficiaries of his ministry, he refused to do so. He likened his ministry style to that of a mother caring for her children, not taking but rather giving and meeting needs.

Paul’s values were well spelled out and he followed those values everywhere he ministered. He traveled with a team, did not go where anyone else had already ministered, always went to the Jew first and took no money from his church plants.

What are your life’s governing values? If you need help identifying and writing them, go to <http://www.purposequest.com/articles.htm> where you will find a document that will help you clarify your values.

vs. 8&9 – Paul is often portrayed as a task-oriented man, who could be very intense and fiery, and I’m sure he had that side of him. But here he portrayed himself as a gentle, caring pastor, who was among the people because he loved them. I think Paul was doing some “damage control” here, for he was probably criticized and painted by his enemies as a harsh task-master who was doing what he did in part for the money. Paul was concerned for his image among his flock, so he stirred up by way of reminder the picture of how he was among the people. Oh that more leaders would follow Paul’s example. Where was the prosperity gospel message with Paul? It was never about Paul; it was always about Jesus and the people. Paul was a servant leader, who worked hard, influenced people and built churches in the power of his purpose and the Holy Spirit.

Day Five

10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

v. 10 – Paul wasn’t hesitant to talk about his ministry record or to answer his opponents, who accused him of all kinds of misbehavior and wrong motives. He appealed to his

readers to remember how he had been, or rather how his ministry team had behaved (notice the use of “we”). Paul was committed to travel with a team, and usually listed a number of men who traveled with him—Timothy, Silas, Barnabas, Titus, and Luke to name a few. Ministry teams are somehow lacking the body of Christ today. People travel in groups, but seldom do they minister in groups. A conference will have a team of speakers, but usually each one proceeds to the microphone, delivers his or her message, and then sits down. There is little interaction or cooperation. I’ve taught with a pastor from Zimbabwe on several occasions and we have “team taught” very effectively. But it isn’t easy to do and requires sensitivity to the Lord and one another.

Are you involved in your local church? Business? A ministry team? How effective is the team that you are a member of? How can you improve it concerning what you contribute?

v. 11 – So Paul had worked with the new believers as both a mother (see verse 7 above) and a father. Paul saw his work in part as a family affair. I am currently doing a study of Proverbs and I am underlining how many times the writer said, “my son” or “my sons” (28 times to be exact, almost one for every chapter). The point is that wisdom is exchanged through some kind of close relationship, whether from parents, pastors, mentors or teachers. With whom do you have a wisdom relationship? To whom are you imparting your learning? From whom are you receiving care?

v. 12 – Paul encouraged, comforted and urged the believers. He never ordered them or lorded his knowledge, experience or apostleship over them. I have studied servant leadership over the last few years and that study has changed my life. One of the characteristics of a servant leader is his or her ability to persuade and not just command. Servant leaders are also good listeners. If you would like to read more about servant leadership, please go to [and](#) read the articles that I have posted on my website.

Day Six

13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. 14 For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, 15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men 16 in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

v. 13 – The Thessalonians received the word of God and their faith activated that Word so it could work in them. The Greek word for “work” in this verse is *energeita*, the word from which we get our word “energy.” God’s word, when we receive it in faith, energizes us, enabling us to do God’s will in the power and strength of God. You must know how to activate that energy or else it lies dormant in you. The key to activation is

faith—taking God at His word, speaking the Word, claiming the Word, and standing on the Word when everything else seems to be contradicting what God’s word said and promised.

Today or tomorrow, choose a verse of Scripture, write it down on a card and carry it with you all day. Read it, meditate on it and speak it out loud. Commit it to memory if possible. Then look for a chance to apply in some situation you will face. That is how the Word can energize you by faith.

v. 14 – Paul reminded the Thessalonians that they had suffered just as the Jews who began the first churches. He did this to point out that what they had experienced wasn’t unique to Gentile believers; it was common to all believers. It sometimes helps to know that you aren’t in something alone, but others are there with you, sharing the same experience. Paul was encouraging them with a theme that he shared with all the churches:

They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said (Acts 14:21-22).

Are you encountering or enduring a hardship? Then take heart. You are going through what everyone in the history of the church has gone through and it is through this that you become more sensitive to God’s will—the kingdom of God. So your suffering is your door or entrance to God’s will and kingdom.

v. 15 – When Paul was in Thessalonica, the local Jews opposed him and drove him out of the city. Paul saw them as a continuation of the wicked Jews who killed Jesus and tried to drive the believers from Judea. Those Jews assumed they were serving God, doing Him a favor by opposing Paul and the believers. They were not, but made themselves hostile to God and man. Lord, don’t let me think I am serving You when I’m not. Don’t let me be deluded or deceived. I want to promote your cause, not oppose or harm it. Amen.

v. 16 – Instead of being pleased that the Gentiles would hear about and turn to God, the Jews were displeased. They did everything they could to oppose God and Paul. Even though they were fellow Jews, Paul had harsh things to say about them and he was glad that God’s wrath rested upon them. Paul wasn’t romantic where his people the Jews were concerned. He realized that some of them were ethnic Jews but they weren’t spiritual Jews. And ethnic Jews were not what God wanted; God wanted spiritual Jews.

For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children (Romans 9:6-7).

Those who opposed Paul were descendants of Abraham, but they were not his children.

Day Seven

17 But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. 18 For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us. 19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? 20 Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

v. 17 – Paul had to leave Thessalonica after a riot broke out: “As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue” (Acts 17:10-11). Poor Paul! He couldn’t stay in an area even when he wanted to do so. God had him move on to keep proclaiming the good news to as many Gentiles as possible. **Do you “see” God in your situation? Or are you fretting over circumstances that God is using to make you more effective and more like Him? Rest today in God’s goodness and in the knowledge that He is in control.**

v. 18 – Wow! That is a powerful statement—“Satan stopped us.” First of all, Paul was dealing with Satan. Most of us only deal with Satan’s subordinates. Second, Paul was not able to overcome Satan to get where he thought he wanted and needed to go. Our adversary is strong and the demonic world is not easily overcome, even through prayer and purpose. Finally, Paul was persistent. He tried again and again. I like that. You cannot deal with the devil or spiritual things and be passive. You must press on, through, around and over to do God’s will. **Are you tired and about to give up?** Maybe it’s time to try again, just like our brother Paul did.

v. 19 – Paul knew that the crowning glory of his work wasn’t just where he’d been, but the people whom he reached where he had been. Paul understood that good intentions weren’t enough—he had to have some results. And God wants you to have results, for God wants you to fulfill your purpose more than you do. **If you aren’t getting results, why not? Is this just a season when you are planting and sowing? Or is it time to face reality, stop trying again and again, and move on to other fields, where the fruit can grow and be harvested?** Only you can make that decision, and I pray that today God will show you whether it’s time to continue pressing on or time for moving on.