

*Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Studies*

# **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians**

"The Birth of a Church"



Bible Studies  
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# 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians

## "The Birth of a Church"

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**“The Birth of a Church”**  
**A Chapter-by-Chapter Study of 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians**

**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians**  
**The Birth of a Church**  
**Introduction – “A Reason to Smile”**

Have you ever been a part of the birth of a church? It is way more fun than about anything else in the world.

My husband, Ken and I have had the privilege of being part of 5 such births in our lives – and we can’t think of anything we would rather do than do it again and again and again.

We started a church in Morris, Illinois when we were in our 20’s. Then one in Tucson, Arizona, in our early 30’s. Then we worked very hard on one in Ft. Morgan, Colorado in our late 30’s, and, no matter what we did, it failed completely. Our finances and our health were pretty much shot as we limped away from Colorado. A few years later, after getting back on our feet financially and physically, we started another one in Greenwood, Indiana – in our late 40’s. And now, as we are entering our “golden years”, we have had the fun of starting another church, also in Greenwood, Indiana. The “hard” parts of church planting are nothing compared to the joys. We have said often that If we were given the opportunity from the Lord, we would do it all again, in a nano-second.

We are praying that the Lord will give us the energy and the ability to either start yet another church someday, or ease the way for many other Pastors and their wives to start their own churches.

As we study 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, a letter written to a newly planted church in the city of Thessalonica, I’d like to share some of our “church-planting” stories with you. I think you’ll see that church “births” are pretty much the same today as they were 2,000 years ago.

Churches are started by missionaries. Simple as that. Every believer in Jesus is a missionary, and when that missionary shares the Gospel message with someone, and that someone comes to wholehearted belief in Jesus Christ, that new believer needs a church. Churches are simply gatherings of believers in Jesus Christ. Every church is started by a missionary. And every believer in Jesus needs a church.

The Apostle Paul, the writer of this letter was exactly such a missionary. He took the Good News he knew about Jesus and spread it around. When people came to believe in Jesus, he helped them start churches. After that, he continued to love, encourage, Pastor and help those churches grow and prosper.

Here are 3 things that are true of missionaries:

1. A missionary is a person who takes the message of Jesus to people who don't know Him. The end result of a missionary's work is a group of people who have put their faith in Jesus – and are a church.
2. The message of the missionary is Jesus. His life, death, resurrection, return to heaven, and soon return to earth. After people believe in Jesus, then the message of the missionary is “learn more about Jesus”.
3. Missionaries suffer persecution and hardship because they have a message unpopular with the world. It's normal to suffer. It's to be expected.

The Apostle Paul traveled to Thessalonica. His whole reason for making this trip was to tell people that Jesus had come, lived a sinless and miraculous life, died for the sins of all people, been raised from the dead, and that He now sits at the right hand of the Father, waiting for the time when He will come back to rule on planet earth.

That was Paul's message. Let's look at it one more time:

- Jesus of Nazareth was born into this world
- He lived a perfectly sinless life, and did many miracles
- He was the Messiah of the world – promised over and over in the Hebrew scriptures/Old Testament
- He died on a Roman cross because Jewish leaders did not believe His message that He was the Son of God...God Himself
- But He didn't stay dead. He came back to life.
- And after He showed many people that He was, indeed, alive again
- He went back up to heaven, sat down at the right hand of God the Father,
- He comes to live within those who believe in Him,
- And He waits to come back...this time to rule the whole earth.

What would Paul have used to teach and prove all of these things? He used the stories of Jesus and the writings of over 25 Old Testament prophets, who, in over 300 prophecies, covering a period of 1,500 years, predicted the Jewish Messiah in the Jewish scriptures (Old Testament). Here are a few:

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<b>Prophecy</b>	<b>Where is it in the Old Testament?</b>	<b>Where is it fulfilled in the New Testament?</b>
He would be a man	Genesis 3:15	Galatians 4:4
He would be a Jew	Genesis 12:3 Genesis 18:18	Luke 3:34 Matt. 1:2 Acts 3:25 Galatians 3:16
He would be of the the tribe of Judah	Genesis 49:10	Luke 3:33 Matthew 1:2
He would be a King (of the seed of David)	Psalms 132:11,12 Jeremiah 23:5,6 Psalms 2:6-9	Matthew 1:6 Romans 1:3 Acts 2:30
He would be a prophet like Moses	Deuteronomy 18:15, 19	Matt. 21:11 John 1:45 John 6:14 Acts 3:22-23
He would be the Son of God	Psalms 2:7 Proverbs 30:4	Luke 1:32 Matthew 3:17
He would be God	Jeremiah 23:5,6	Acts 2:36
Homage would be given Him by great Kings	Psalms 72:10,11	Matt. 2:1-11
He would be born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:18-25 Luke 1:26-35
He would be born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:1	Matt 2:1, 5, 6 Luke 2:4-6
He would perform miracles	Isaiah 35:5,6	John 11:47 Matthew 11:3-6
He would come before the 2 <sup>nd</sup> temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (70 A.D.)	Daniel 9:24-26	Historical fact
He would be betrayed by a friend	Psalms 41:9	John 13:18,21
He would be rejected	Psalms 118:22,23 Isaiah 8:14, 15 Isaiah 28:16	Matt 21:42,43 Acts 4:11 Romans 9:32,33 Ephesians 2:20 I Peter 2:6-8
He would be meek & mild	Isaiah 42:2,3 Isaiah 53:7	Matt. 12:18-20 Matt 26:62,63
He would minister to Gentiles	Isaiah 42:1 Isaiah 49:1,8	Matt. 12:21
He would be smitten	Isaiah 50:6	Matt. 26:67 Matt 27:26,30
He would suffer & bring salvation	Isaiah 53	The 4 Gospels
He would be pierced	Zechariah 12:10 Psalm 22:16	John 19:34,37
He would be forsaken by His disciples	Zechariah 13:7	Matthew 26:31,56
He would be crucified	Psalm 22 Psalm 69:21	Matthew 27:34-50 John 19:28-30

Prophecy	Where is it found in the Old Testament?	Where is it fulfilled in the New Testamen?
He would have his garments parted & cast lots for	Psalm 22:19	Luke 23:34
He would ascend to heaven	Psalm 68:18	Luke 24:51 Acts 1:9
He would have victory over death	Isaiah 25:8	John 20:1-10, 19-25
Gentiles shall seek the Messiah of Israel	Isaiah 11:10	Romans 11:25
Died for the sins of the Jewish people and the whole world	Isaiah 53:8	John 3:16

We find the record of this trip to Thessalonica in the book of Acts, chapter 17. When Paul was through in Thessalonica, he left to go on to another city...and he left behind a church. A group of believers in Jesus. The church of Thessalonica. And they had trouble. Let's see what happened in Acts 17:

*(Acts 17:1-10) "When they (Paul and Silas and Timothy) 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 (Old Testament), explaining and proving that the Christ (Messiah) 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."*

You can learn some interesting things about Paul's ministry from this little passage. What do you see?

- Paul traveled with companions
- Paul went to cities of size, (there were 200,000 in Thessalonica) so that people from those cities could then travel to the smaller ones, spreading the Gospel message
- Paul went to Jewish synagogues first in every city he went to - He was committed to preach the news of Jesus to the Jews first. After that, he was committed to preaching that message to gentiles.

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- As some people believed in Jesus, there were other people who did not, and they quite often got mad at Paul
- Paul had to run away from many cities because of the enemies of his message
- And quite often the people Paul left behind would face persecution.

And such was case in Thessalonica. Paul ran, and the believers left behind found themselves with a life-saving belief in Jesus the Messiah, and a life-threatening question. How to meet as a church and keep telling the message when all around them were people who wanted to kill them?

So, later, when Paul had some time while he was in Corinth, he wrote a letter of encouragement back to the new believers in Thessalonica. He had heard they were struggling with some basic issues of the Christian life, so he wanted to instruct them. While with them he had taught them that Jesus was returning, but they were a little confused about it, so he wanted to give them some course-correction so they would be thinking right.

Why did Paul spend his life being a missionary, starting churches, and then doing everything he could to strengthen their faith? Why was it worth it? What motivated him?

In 1997, our church plant in Greenwood met in three different locations...in each place setting up and tearing down chairs, tables, nursery equipment and audio-visual equipment every Sunday. We grew to about 50 people that year...and with so few people we all had to work. Bring it in, set it up, use it, tear it down, pack it up again and drive away. We did it because we knew there were people in our lives who would come to our new little church...they would come, if for no other reason, to satisfy a curiosity about what starting a church was all about.

We knew they would come, so we set up chairs for us and them. We knew some of them would bring their children, so we put up tables in little classrooms and taught Bible lessons. We knew some of them would be uncomfortable going to “church” in a cafeteria or a place where you play basketball, so we made our worship area as “church-y” as possible, with a podium for the speaker, microphones, speakers, music, and refreshments. We put bouquets of flowers on the refreshment table and offered both “caf” and “de-caf”. We bought toys for our nursery, and figured out how to safely cordon off an area to keep the little guys safe and happy while their moms and dads were in church.

We did all that for really only one reason: we wanted to get the chance to tell our friends and neighbors about Jesus. We wanted them to get a chance to hear the Bible taught, and then to have the chance to think about it, come back the next week, think some more about it, and, hopefully, end up with a walk with Jesus for the rest of their lives.

No, we didn't face the kind of persecution the Thessalonians did – we just had to work a little harder than we would have if we had been comfortably sitting in an established church somewhere. We had to get up earlier on Sunday morning, put up with the discomfort of folding chairs, stay later to put it all away, and get out of our little comfort zones to invite people to come to church. We did all of this for the same reason Paul was suffering cold, distress, hatred, trials and troubles. We were doing it because people needed to hear about Jesus....and we thought we could make a difference.

What I remember of that first year of set-up, tear-down is a lot of smiling faces. We were really having fun starting something new...learning how to reach out to the world around us. I am guessing Paul, in Thessalonica, did a lot of smiling, too.

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**I Thessalonians**  
**Chapter 1**  
**“Raising Your Flag”**

Let's start with the basics: Who is this letter from?

*Verse 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.”*

The answer is in verse 1...Paul, Silas, & Timothy. And who were they?

- Paul – an intentional missionary. I say intentional because many, many believers were missionaries before him – but not on purpose. Remember the book of Acts...Day of Pentecost? How many Jews came to faith in Jesus Christ on that day? 3,000. And most of them had traveled to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, so they were from somewhere else. Where did they go after Pentecost was over? Back to their homes... in Parthia, Media, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and Libya, Rome, Cretans and Arabs. New believers in Jesus Christ...back to their hometowns...to spread the word about Jesus...missionaries. (Acts 2) The original followers of Jesus, the 12 apostles, and others, were intentional missionaries, too. But Paul was the first on-purpose missionary to the Gentiles. One who left his home and occupation to devote his life to spreading the word about Jesus to people who were not Jews.
- Silas – The second choice and faithful support staff. Paul wanted to take Barnabas on his second missionary journey, but they had a disagreement on something vital to the job Paul had been given, so he chose Silas to go, instead. (Acts 15:40)
- Timothy – Paul met him in Lystra, where Timothy was a young man who came to faith in Jesus. Timothy became Paul's “son in the LORD” (Philippians 2:19-21). The one Paul seemed to trust and lean on the most to accomplish the work.

All three men visited Thessalonica with Paul on this 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey. When they were run out of the city it looks like Silas went with Paul, but Timothy either stayed behind, joining Paul later, or he ran in another direction, joining Paul later.

Now they are all three together again, in Corinth. And they, together, are writing back to their friends in Thessalonica – new believers in Jesus Christ.

Paul begins by remembering. And being filled with thankfulness at those memories. Gratitude for the privilege of serving God is probably one of the best proofs that your service for God is His idea...not just yours.

*Verses 2&3: “We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 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.”*

What is Paul remembering that he is so thankful for?

- a. Their work produced by faith
- b. Their labor prompted by love
- c. Their endurance inspired by hope

In order to have a better mental picture of what exactly they were doing, I'll tie these three things back in to a very dear friend whom we met in one of our church plants - for a practical example.

*Work produced by faith:* Let's see...faith is something a person does because they have believed something God says. A young public school teacher saw in the Word that she had a responsibility to reach out to those around her with the Gospel. She was working a part-time job at a local restaurant, and got to know many other employees there. She wanted to find a way to let them know their questions about God could be answered. So she planned a brunch at her home, and asked Ken to be there, so that he could answer any questions anyone might have. It was a nice, comfortable setting, and questions did get asked & answered.

*Labor prompted by love:* But then the hard work set in. Not only did people want and need answers to questions, but they had tangled and messed up lives, too – and in order to reach them for Christ she had to become not just a source of information, but a friend for times of need. She helped some of her new friends find maternity clothes when they were faced with unexpected pregnancies...and then she threw baby showers for them. She worked double shifts for them. She gave them rides when their cars broke down. She visited them in their homes, even when the neighborhoods they lived in were just downright scary. And she prayed and prayed and prayed. Much hard labor.

*Endurance inspired by hope:* And that hard labor was not always rewarded with satisfying results. People who said they would come to visit church never showed. People who had questions about God

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never responded to the answers. People who placed their faith in Christ turned around and went right back to the sinful lifestyles they had always had. But the Holy Spirit living in this young school teacher kept urging her to keep keeping on. To forge ahead. To not give up. To love people and wait to see what God was doing...even when it was not at all evident that God was doing anything at all.

Are there any success stories here? Yes! One of the girls she worked with committed her life to Christ and eventually, in front of many friends and relatives, was baptized to let them know she wanted to live for Christ. She got rid of many things in her home which were part of Satan worship. And she left a really bad relationship. But she struggled with her walk with Christ for many years. Her moments of faith were sometimes few and far between.

Another gal who worked with her started attending church pretty regularly. She was already a believer and she began to slowly grow and choose a walk of faith more and more often. Life hasn't been perfect, but she is still thriving - living for Christ today.

That's what the work of the LORD is all about Paul said the Thessalonians *worked, labored, and endured*. You wouldn't have to *work, labor and endure* if every story had a quick and easy happy ending.

As Paul remembered these types of stories about the Thessalonians, he was filled with thankfulness. Just writing these words has done the same thing for me.

And he mentioned them often in his prayers.

*Verses 4 thru 7: “For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you, 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. 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.*

How does Paul know that God has loved and chosen these people? Because Paul's message came so powerfully...because the Thessalonians began to imitate Paul...because the message was received with joy...Because the Thessalonians became a model to other believers.

The response of the Thessalonians left no doubt in anyone's mind that it was God doing this work in their midst. This wasn't Paul's success, it was God's.

Think for a minute of your own time of salvation. Who brought the message to you? Why did you respond? Was it a “powerful” response? Who did you begin to imitate? Was there joy in your reception of the message? Did you become a model for others to follow...in other words, did you “raise your flag” for all the world to watch you as you walked with Christ? If you remember your time of salvation, and you remember your response, but you didn’t go on to imitate a more mature Christian, didn’t experience joy in your new relationship with Christ, or didn’t become a model to anyone else of life in Christ, then your growth was stunted somewhere along the way.

However, don’t despair. Stunted growth is fixable. Put yourself directly in the path of great Bible teaching and pray for the Holy Spirit to begin to grow you once more. Ask Him to show you if you have let some sin separate you from growth in Christ...if he does, then confess it, turn away from it...and begin again. Pray for a mentor – a strong Christian whom you can imitate. In power, imitation, joy, and “raising your flag”, you will be the model God intended you to be.

What kind of reputation did the Thessalonians have? Did they raise their flag?

*Verses 8 thru 10: “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, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned from God to idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”*

Their turning to Christ is so well known throughout the world that Paul doesn’t even need to tell their story. He begins to tell it, but then the listeners will say: “Oh yes, the Thessalonians...here’s what we’ve heard about them...”

What two things especially stand out about them?

1. Their reputation has spread far and wide. They have “raised their flag”, and all they have to do now is live up to their reputation.

When Ken and I were first in our church-planting ministry, in Morris, Illinois, Ken decided one way to reach people for the LORD would be to visit people in the hospital. Not people from our church who were sick, but just anybody in little Morris hospital. Anyone who wanted someone to pray with...or who wanted to talk about the LORD.

He was pretty nervous about just walking into the hospital and talking to complete strangers, but he figured there was no better way to do it than just doing it...so on that first day, he walked into the hospital and started telling people he was a Pastor and was there to talk to people about God.

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He told the receptionists, nurses, aides, doctors, janitors. Everyone he saw.

I think on that first day he found a couple of patients who said yes, they would like someone to pray with.

As he entered the hospital on his second day he was approached by a nurse who asked him if he was the Pastor who had been there yesterday wanting to talk to people about God. He said yes. She gave him the name of a patient of hers who wanted to talk to someone about the LORD. After that, he hardly ever again had to tell anyone what he was up to. He had “raised his flag”, established his reputation, and now all he had to do was walk into that hospital every day and live up to it. Other people had begun to tell his story – because he had “raised his flag”.

2. They were waiting for God’s Son to return again, to rescue them from the wrath which would come.

Here they were, living in the middle of persecution. Remember the story of Paul leaving the city in a hurry because so many people were upset at the message he was preaching? Well, the ones who were left behind to face the continued anger of the crowds are the ones Paul is talking to. Their lives had been disrupted forever. Things would never be the same again. But it was OK – because just look at what they had to look forward to! Jesus was going to return to earth – this life of persecution wasn’t going to last. It was only a short time and they would see His face, and begin living the way He had always intended. Only a very short time.

Let’s ask ourselves a few questions as we wrap up this chapter:

- What two things would you say especially stand out about you as a Christian in the eyes of the watching world?
- If you can’t think of anything, what should you do?
- If you can think of something...but you don’t like what you see...what should you do?
- What two things would you say especially stand out about your church in the eyes of the watching world?
- What is the very first opportunity a new believer gets to “raise his flag” ?

For most people the answer to this question is “baptism”. It’s our chance to invite our friends and family to see us demonstrate with a small “drama” what has happened to us. The drama of baptism shows that our old, sinful self was washed clean and buried with Christ, and then we were raised to new life in Him. So we are saying to those who are observing our baptism: “I’m a new person. I

expect to be living differently. Watch me. Call me on the carpet when I don't. Model me. "

If you are a believer in Christ but have not been baptized since your time of belief, then I challenge you to make arrangements to do so at the earliest possible time. Invite everyone you know to come and see this happen. It will be your unequalled opportunity to "Raise Your Flag".

*The following questions are for applying the scripture to our every-day lives. Remember – God's Words to us are never just about head knowledge. They are always about heart knowledge. They are about faith. And faith is more than learning new facts. It is also "doing" what you have learned. (James 1:22). Ask yourself these questions...come up with answers....and then step out in faith to "do" what you have understood.*

## **I Thessalonians**

### **Chapter 1 – Questions for Personal Study or Discussion**

1. (:1) Who is this letter from?
2. (:2-3) What three things do these men remember most about the Thessalonians?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
3. (:4-7) How does Paul know that God has loved and chosen these people?

Because Paul's message came so \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Because the Thessalonians began to \_\_\_\_\_ Paul.

Because the message was \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_.

Because the Thessalonians became a \_\_\_\_\_ to other believers.
4. (:8-10) What kind of reputation do the Thessalonians have everywhere? What two things especially stand out about them?
  - a.
  - b.
5. What two things would you say especially stand out about you in the eyes of the watching world?

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6. If you can't think of anything, what should you do?
7. If you can think of something...but you don't like what you see...what should you do?
8. What two things would you say especially stand out about your church in the eyes of the watching world?
9. What is the very first opportunity a new believer gets to "raise his flag"?

# I Thessalonians

## Chapter 2: 1-16

### “It’s a Hard-Knock-Life”

It's the hard-knock life for us!  
It's the hard-knock life for us!

'Steady treated, We get tricked!  
'Steady kisses, We get kicked!

.....  
Cotton blankets, 'Steady of wool!  
Empty Bellies 'Steady of full!  
It's the hard-knock life!

Don't if feel like the wind is always howl'n?  
Don't it seem like there's never any light!  
Once a day, don't you wanna throw the towel in?  
It's easier than puttin' up a fight....

The orphans in “Annie” are our inspiration for the title of this chapter, because, like Paul, Silas & Timothy, they had a “hard-knock-life”. But it wasn’t only the words of the song which caught my attention...it was the contrast. The difference between the orphans and our three missionaries is glaring – Paul, Silas and Timothy had a bright and glorious future to look forward to, and they knew it. The “hard-knock-life” for them had much hope and joy at the end. The orphans, as they sing this song, are wondering if there was ever going to be any happiness for them.

Let’s take a look at this “hard-knock-life” belonging to our three missionaries:

*Verses 1&2: “You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. 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.”*

Just in these 2 verses look at what Paul, Silas and Timothy had to suffer through:

- a. insults
- b. strong opposition

And then in the rest of our 16 verses for today, Paul also mentions:

- c. toil
- d. hardship
- e. working night and day
- f. being driven out of places

Then read through II Corinthians 11:23-33 and see some more of the hardships suffered by Paul.

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- a. Hard work
- b. Prison
- c. Flogging
- d. Exposed to death
- e. 39 lashes
- f. beaten with rods
- g. stoned
- h. shipwrecked
- i. constantly on the move
- j. in danger from rivers
- k. in danger from bandits
- l. in danger from Jews
- m. in danger from Gentiles
- n. lack of sleep
- o. hunger and thirst
- p. cold and nakedness
- q. pressure of concern for the churches
- r. lowered in a basket from a window in Damascus

And if that’s not enough, read through Hebrews 11:32-40 and note some of the hardships suffered by those Old Testament saints who had gone before Paul.

- s. Flames
- t. Sword
- u. Weakness
- v. Battle
- w. Torture
- x. Jeers
- y. Flogging
- z. Chained in prison
- aa. Stoned
- bb. Sawn in half
- cc. Poverty
- dd. Wanderers

Oh yes....walking by faith in Jesus Christ can be a hard-knock-life! I am hard-pressed to find examples anywhere close to these!

But here’s a simple little Southside Bible story of persecution:

We’ll call this woman Sue (that’s not her name). When Sue’s mom was growing up in the south, they had a neighbor lady who knew the Lord. Sue’s family didn’t. The neighbor lady had a pretty unsympathetic husband when it came to things like leaving home to attend functions - like church. So, she decided that if she was going to have to stay at home on Sundays she would start a little Sunday

school class for the neighboring farm families – mostly children. Apparently that was OK with her husband.

She taught them about Jesus. The kids loved it. But Sue’s grandmother, who lived with them, was a little skeptical. She thought: “OK – I’ll just watch this lady. I’ll see if she is living what she is teaching.”

One day Sue’s family’s hogs somehow got loose, and completely trampled the neighbor-lady’s garden. The neighbor-lady apparently came unglued, and, over the fence, gave the father a tongue-lashing for letting this happen to her garden.

When the father shared this news with Sue’s grandmother, she said to herself: “I guess I see now how real this woman’s message was. I’m through listening to her stories about Jesus.”

Later that day, the neighbor lady, again across the fence, in tears, approached the father again and begged him to forgive her for the way she had acted. She told him how much she loved Jesus, and that she was ashamed of the things she had said.

When news of this got to Sue’s grandmother, her heart melted, and she willingly listened again to the Good News about Jesus.

Sue told us that thanks to this nameless neighbor-lady of many years ago, who suffered the persecution of not being able to attend a church, all of her family eventually came to know the LORD.

This little neighbor lady of many years ago had something pretty wonderful in common with Paul, Silas & Timothy...hope. Hope in the return of the LORD Jesus someday. They knew that this world would not always be a messed-up place. They knew that someday their beloved Jesus would be here again, and would all would be right. It was a light at the end of the tunnel. Something to head for. Something to make any suffering pale in comparison

Now, in the next few verses, Paul takes a few minutes to defend his motives. What were Paul’s motives?

*Verses 3-6a: “For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 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. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed – God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.*

They weren’t out to make a profit. They weren’t doing a little “bait-and-switch”. They weren’t trying to please people. They had simply been given a job to do by

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the creator of the universe – and they were doing it. Wholeheartedly. And doing it in His ways, not in the ways of the world.

You see, all the ways the world gets things done are pretty well not applicable when a person is working for God.

The purpose is not to make money, so motivations like – do this and you’ll get your paycheck, or...do this and you’ll get to retire early – are null and void.

The message is honest and straightforward, so the worldly way of tricking...flattering.... or not telling the whole truth is totally useless.

And there are tons of people who do not want to hear the truth, indeed, who absolutely hate the truth...so trying to please people is out the window.

Paul was motivated by the Holy Spirit. Period. And step-by-step obedience to His commands was the plan. And it had to be genuine, because it was God they would stand before at the end of the day – and He knew everything that was in their hearts.

*Verses 6b thru 12: “As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 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. 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. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”*

How did the three missionaries feel about the Thessalonians?

- “like a mother caring for her little children”
- “you were so dear to us”
- “as a father deals with his children”

These are some very tender words. How can a person feel that way about practically perfect strangers? Paul, Silas & Timothy didn’t even know the Thessalonians before they arrived in their city....and then they weren’t there very long at all before they were run out....so how could they have developed such a love for these people in such a short amount of time?

The love that one believer feels for another is not possible to explain in the words of the world. It is because the Holy Spirit lives within us, and it is a miracle. Here is the ultimate proof of the fact that Christ lives in us: “A new command I give

you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34,35

*Verses 13-16: “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. 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, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men 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 limits. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.”*

What does Paul know is coming for the enemies of the Gospel? He knows their sins are “heaped up”. And that a day of judgment is coming. That day will be a relief and a joy to those who are persecuted in this world....but a horrible nightmare which never ends for those doing the persecuting.

If we have a “hard-knock-life” as we try to spread the Gospel, what is our hope? The Second Coming of our LORD, Jesus Christ. Knowing that we do have that hope...how should we think? How should we act?

Not as orphans caught in the hard-knock-life, but as beloved children with a guaranteed future.

**I Thessalonians  
Chapter 2: 1-16  
Questions for Personal Study or Discussion**

1. (:1-16) Read through these verses and list the hardships Paul, Silas and Timothy had to suffer through.
2. (II Corinthians 11:23-33) Read through these verses and list some more of the hardships suffered by Paul.
3. (Hebrews 11:32-40) Read through these verses and list some of the hardships suffered by those Old Testament saints who had gone before Paul.

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4. What was the hope held on to by Paul, Silas & Timothy? (1:10)
5. (:3-6a) What were Paul's motives?
6. (:6b – 12) What descriptive phrases does Paul use to help us see how the three missionaries felt about the Thessalonians?
7. How can a person feel that way about perfect strangers? Paul, Silas & Timothy didn't even know the Thessalonians before they arrived in their city....and then they weren't there very long at all before they were run out....so how could they have developed such a love for these people in such a short amount of time?
8. (:13-16) What does Paul know is coming for the enemies of the Gospel?
9. If we have a "hard-knock-life" as we try to spread the Gospel, what is our hope? Knowing that we do have that hope...how should we think? How should we act? Not as orphans, but as \_\_\_\_\_
10. (:17-20) What was the thing that motivated Paul the most in his ministry for the LORD?

# I Thessalonians

## Chapter 2:17-20

### “Piano Girl”

It turned out to be what started it all. Pam and Nate wanted to get married. They arranged to use a church building in Greenwood, and asked Ken to perform the ceremony. We knew Pam & Nate because Ken had been the interim pastor at their church for a couple of years. The rehearsal the night before had been like so many other rehearsals...bridesmaids & groomsmen in shorts & t-shirts, walking down the aisle to the music they would hear the next day. Then staying after to decorate the sanctuary – purple and silver, as I remember.

Pam’s parents had been divorced when she was younger...and life had not been easy for her. She would tell you herself that she was a rebellious and angry young girl. And she very much wanted to not repeat the mistakes she had made...and the mistakes her parents had made.

Pam’s a poem-writer. During the rehearsal Pam had asked Ken if she could, during the ceremony, take a minute to read to the audience a poem she had written. She wasn’t sure she would actually have the nerve to do it, but she wanted to try....so they worked out a plan where Ken would let her know when the time was right in the ceremony, and then she could decide if she wanted to do it.

They had the “who-gives-the-bride-away”, walked up on the platform together, joined hands, prayed, laughed a little as Ken spoke to them from his heart about their future together, and then it was time. Did she still want to read the poem?

If you know Pam, you will know what I mean when I say she got a firm look of determination in her eyes...pulled out from somewhere a folded up piece of paper with writing on it...and walked resolutely to a microphone at the edge of the platform, unfolded that piece of paper, and began to read.

Her Mom and her Dad were out in that audience, not sitting together, because they were divorced. But there. For her.

The poem asked them for forgiveness. For all the rebellion and all the stormy nights and all the heartache of the last few years. And the poem also offered forgiveness...for the promises not kept, the disappointment of the child who longed for normal and could not find it. And the poem said why the poem had been written. Because, before Pam entered a marriage she knew would last for life, she wanted to give herself and Nate every chance of succeeding. And one of the things which would do that, she knew, was forgiveness...a clean slate.

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I have no idea how Pam’s Mom and Dad reacted to the reading of the poem. I wasn’t watching them. I was crying...and watching Pam. And thinking ...yes...this is the right way to begin.

Later, at the reception, several of Pam’s bridesmaids and groomsmen gathered around Ken and asked him where his church was...they thought it was time for them to get back to God. His answer was: “Right now I’m not Pastoring a church....would you be interested in a Sunday morning Bible study?”

And that was how Southside Bible began.

*“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? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.” (1 Thess. 2: 19 & 20)*

We will finish up chapter 2 of Thessalonians this week by looking at the passage above. Just two verses which show a great deal about what the Missionary Paul valued above all else.

First of all, he valued Jesus. In the letter to Philippi he said “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Phil. 1:21).

Second....we see the next-most-important thing to Paul in these last two verses of chapter 2.... It was the people he had led to Christ and then tried to strengthen and educate before he was chased on to his next stop. He loved those people. In fact, when Paul thought of a church, he didn’t talk about the building they met in. Paul talked about the people. Church is the people.

It’s never about buildings, or pews, or land or programs or supplies or activities or numbers or who wears what clothes or what kind of music do we sing. It’s always, simply, about people. Church is people.

Name a church. Any church. What do you picture when you think of that church? If you picture a building you’ve missed the boat. But if you picture people...know a few of their stories....understand where they’ve come from, or when they came to know Christ...then you are seeing that church with God’s eyes. God sees the people. Church is people.

One of the places we have met as we started churches is in community rooms of apartment complexes. When we wanted to let the residents of the apartment complex know that we were there – and that we cared about them, we threw parties. Really fun parties. In October we would have a Halloween Party....or Fall Party (as we called it because we weren’t so sure we wanted to promote Hollween). We set up games for people to play, like “drop-the-clothespin-in-the-

bottle”, and “bean-bag toss”, “balloon-pop!”, “basketball shoot”, “darts”, and “face-painting”. And we all wore costumes, brought our own kids (most of them were in strollers), and invited the apartment community to join us.

And then there were others we met in the corridors of hospitals. A young couple we met had found that their newborn baby was born with a serious medical condition, and had been rushed to the hospital for emergency heart surgery. We introduced ourselves to this scared and confused young couple and offered to pray with them, and stay and see how the surgery went.

That was the first of many hospital waiting rooms we shared with them as their little boy grew and had more surgeries. This couple became part of the church we were starting over the next few months...I remember a VBS program one summer which was late in starting because we were waiting for this young Mom to show up to play a part in a drama – not knowing that she was on the way to the hospital because her toddler had begun to turn blue as they drove to church.

And then there was a little girl whom I will have to call “piano girl”, because I have forgotten her name. This happened as Ken and I first started out in the church-planting ministry....but I tell the story because from piano girl I learned the lesson of valuing people, not activities.

I was a young Pastor’s wife with 2 toddlers attached to me – and I simply loved the life the Lord had given me. I loved the meetings. I loved the church services. I played the piano. I sang. I gave little talks at women’s groups. I prayed with people. I went door-to-door to meet new people. I was very busy. And very happy.

One morning at church a little girl in our church approached me with a request. She wanted to learn how to play the piano. I had played piano for a few years, but never actually tried to teach anyone – and I was just so busy – so needed for so many activities – so I very gently told her I was sorry, but I just didn’t have the time.

I never gave that moment another thought until 15 years later. We had since moved on to work in other churches, but had gone back to visit this first ministry of ours. We attended a church service, said hi to many people whom we still recognized, and had a very nice time re-connecting and re-introducing our now nearly-grown family.

After the church service the young woman who had played the piano during the service came shyly up to me and introduced herself. She said she remembered us from when she was a little girl. As I smiled and talked and made conversation with her, the memory returned. This was the little girl who had wanted to learn to play the piano. The one I didn’t have time for.

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I can still remember that the world kind of stood still for me for a moment or two. The Lord zeroed me in on this lovely young lady, and I realized that I had given up a chance to spend time with her years ago – choosing instead to be busy with activities. She had turned out to be a strong, supporting pillar for that little church – and I grieved that I had made the wrong choice. I would have had more joy in knowing her better than in adding to my growing list of important things I had done.

All these people who make up my memories of church planting...They are “our hope, our joy, and the crown in which we will glory in the presence of the Lord Jesus when He comes.”

*“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. For we wanted to come to you – certainly I, Paul, did, again and again – but Satan stopped us. 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? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.” (1 Thessalonians 2:17-20)*

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Chapter 2:17-20  
Questions for Personal Study or Discussion

Our questions for these 4 short verses at the end of Chapter 2 all center on the same thing: **It’s the people who are the focus of the work of the Lord.**

1. What are some good illustrations from your own experience of “the people” being the most important thing in the work of the Lord?
2. What are some good illustrations of that from the Old Testament?
3. What are some good illustrations of that from other places in the New Testament?
4. What happens when the focus of God’s work becomes programs, and organizations?
5. Spend some time memorizing verses 19&20 together in your group.

# I Thessalonians

## Chapter 3

### “Am I Standing Firm?”

As Paul continues his thoughts from Chapter 2, let's remember what he was saying. He was describing his intense love for the Thessalonians. He was saying that the true joy he had in life, and the ultimate joy he would experience some day, was all wrapped up in them – because they loved Jesus and wanted to live for Him.

As you may recall, Paul, Silas and Timothy had to flee Thessalonica because of persecution. They eventually made it to Athens. They found great opportunities to minister to people in Athens (Acts 17: 16-34), but they also spent time wondering and thinking about and grieving for the little band of believers they had left in Thessalonica. They knew that these brand new believers were suffering persecution at the hands of their townsmen...and they were praying and praying that they were standing firm in their faith in Jesus.

With no mature Christian there to help them and guide them, they were in a precarious position. I'm sure Paul wondered if they were being swept into false teachings from evil people...or if they were terribly discouraged and afraid...or if they had just given up on walking by faith, and decided they would rather be out of fellowship with God than endure suffering.

So...after much wondering, praying and longing to know how the Thessalonians were faring.....

*“So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the Gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. ” (I Thess. 3:1-3a)*

Paul and Silas sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on them. And to strengthen and encourage them.

So I asked myself...what did strengthening and encouraging probably look like? I'm sure Timothy arrived in Thessalonica, found a few of the original believers, sent out the word for all to assemble at a certain time and place, and then had a joyous reunion party with them. Then what? Here's what I pictured:

Timothy sits down with the group and asks them to tell him what they have been going through. What hardships? What persecutions from their neighbors? What

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opportunities to give answers to people who wanted to know what this new found faith in Jesus was all about? What family members have come to faith in Christ? Has anyone else had to also run away from Thessalonica? Do they have enough food to eat? Has anyone lost their job? Are all their children OK? What happened right after Paul and Timothy and Silas ran away? Have things settled back down?

They talk all at once, and then settle down and take turns sharing their stories. They laugh together, cry together, break for prayer every once in a while...on into the night.

When they have gone on so long that everyone is having a hard time keeping their eyes open, Timothy suggests that they all get some sleep and then meet again on the next night. He has some things to share with them.

The next day Timothy spends some time alone. What do the Thessalonians need to hear? What scriptures will encourage them? He searches through his memory for Old Testament passages which will give them strength. He refreshes himself with stories he remembers of Jesus and all He endured for believers. He prays all day – asking His LORD to give him words to say.

He comes up with a list of things.

- First, he wants them to know that what they have been going through is common and normal for believers in Jesus Christ. They are not being punished by God. They are not doing anything wrong...in fact, they are doing things right. The suffering they are enduring is the same suffering Jesus endured...and the same suffering believers in Jesus would endure always. Timothy knows that Paul, in his dealings with new churches, tells them all the same thing. *“...You know quite well that we were destined for them (sufferings). In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.” (1 Thess. 3:3b-4)*
- Second: Satan is out to destroy them. This is not a passive sort of life they have stepped in to. they have very active enemies who are intent on keeping them from having a vibrant relationship with the LORD. Timothy knows they just need to be aware of the fact that the hardship they are going through can be used by God to increase faith...to draw them closer to Him...but they have an enemy who intends the very opposite. *“For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.” (1 Thess. 3:5)*
- Third: The Thessalonians might be saying to themselves...” If we run away from suffering and are so weak that we deny Christ in front of our

enemies, then will we lose Jesus?” In other words, they may be afraid that they will not hold out – that they will lose their salvation because they lost their nerve. So Timothy will assure them: When you placed your faith in Jesus Christ you received eternal life. Eternal life is forever. It never stops. It began at the moment you believed in Jesus. He will remind them of something Jesus said when he was on earth: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” (John 10: 27-29) You Thessalonians have come to know Christ. You are going to heaven when you die. And you have living in you the Holy Spirit – Jesus Himself. He will pick you up if you fall down. He will give you courage when you are afraid. Keep your focus on Him and you will do just fine. Take your eyes off of Him and you will fail...but then He will give you chance after chance after chance to get back up and do it right the next time. You are His. That will never change.

- Fourth: Now they may have a legitimate question: “Well, then, if Christ will stay with us and give us chances, and never let us go...why did Paul seem so intent about the fact that his efforts would simply be useless if we would let suffering make us run away from living for Jesus?” Good question, Thessalonians. The answer? Being a believer in Christ is not just about you. Your faith in Jesus...your active, vibrant, voice for Christ in this world...is about those people who have not yet come to know Jesus. When Paul preached to you, and rejoiced in your belief in Christ, part of his rejoicing was in the fact that now there were believers in Thessalonica who could carry the message of Jesus where Paul could never go. Paul desired and longed for your salvation, but Paul’s heart is one with the heart of Jesus. (“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” John 10:16) He knows that there are many, many, yet to come into the family of Jesus – and that you are a very important part of the whole picture. Without your willing suffering and obedience to Christ, the spreading of the message will take much, much longer. And the suffering of all believers will be extended because of your lack of faith. You do not stand alone.
- Fifth: Timothy will remind the Thessalonians to look in the mirror. If they get to feeling weak and stumbling and not at all sure of whether or not they are even believers in Jesus, look in the mirror. Look at their own actions. Here’s what a Christian looks like:

he loves and is loved by other Christians...  
and....  
he is hated by the world.

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Remember what Jesus said? “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” (John 15:12). And....”If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” (John 15:18,19)

So, Thessalonians, when you are feeling weak....if you doubt your own salvation...look in the mirror and ask yourself:

1. Do I love other Christians?
2. Am I loved by them?
3. And...Am I hated by the world?

If the answer to all three is yes – you have sweet assurance that you are Christ’s – no matter how weak you have acted...no matter how weak you feel.

Timothy gathers the believers together that night and talks them through these encouraging and strengthening words. They again pray, weep, laugh and talk together late into the night. And then Timothy must be on his way. He leaves behind a group of Christians huddled together in their weakness – but strengthened to draw their courage from Jesus. To live for Him in the midst of a mean and ugly world.

When Timothy brings back his encouraging report to Paul and Silas, they rejoice together – and soon after Paul sits down to write his first letter to the Thessalonians – reminding them of the things Timothy has said, and giving them even more to grow on:

*“But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the LORD. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.” (1 Thess. 3:6-10)*

Paul knows they need so much more. They need to know about how to do church. How to live. How to understand the relationship of Jews and Christians. How to not give up on each other. How to educate their children. How to send out missionaries of their own. How to lead and yet serve. How to be believers in Jesus who are good husbands, wives, and submissive children. How to love

each other more and more. How to understand all the Old testament promises of Jesus – and how to understand the soon return of Christ. There is so much more they need to learn...and Paul knows the LORD has given him the job of teaching them many of those things. His heart yearns to grow them – support them – challenge them – teach them.  
So he prays.

*“Now may our God and Father himself and our LORD Jesus Christ clear the way for us to come to you. May the LORD make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.” (I Thess. 3:11-12)*

And the reason Paul desires to go see them himself and teach them? The reason he wants them to grow in love for one another? The King James says it best:

*“To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our LORD Jesus Christ will all his saints.” (Thess. 3:13 KJV)*

Paul knows the end of the story. He is living in the story – but he has been given a preview of the final chapter. The apostle John has not yet written the book of Revelation, so Paul doesn't know all the scenes in detail, but he does know the end. The LORD Jesus is returning. And Paul sees those Thessalonians, along with all other saints, gathered around the LORD Jesus Christ, with clean, established hearts, unblameable in the presence of God because of the blood of Jesus Christ. He knows that that is where they are going to end up – and he knows he has a part in getting them there.

Can't you just see a believer from the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century walking up to one of those original Thessalonian believers, and gratefully embracing him, knowing that he endured persecution and suffering and stood firm in the LORD, thus opening the door for the Gospel to travel down through the centuries?

When I think of people who have stood firm in the LORD, a particular young couple comes to mind. She heard the gospel for the first time at a wedding Ken was conducting, and soon after made a commitment of her life to Jesus Christ. Then she and her husband met at our church, fell in love, and Ken had the privilege of marrying them. Neither of their families were very supportive of their new faith in Christ. They were families who had lived as good people, some of them church-goers, some of them not – but no one in either family had ever done such a drastic thing as making a lifelong commitment to believe in Jesus Christ to the point of actually talking about Him, wanting to obey Him in everything, and being willing to even suffer for Him, if called to do it.

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They invited their families to church, but for the most part were turned down again and again. They told their families of their decisions for Christ, but their words seemed to fall on deaf ears.

Then they found out they were going to have a baby. We all joined them in the excitement of bringing a new life into the world. But about half-way into her pregnancy, the baby decided to be born...much too early. He was tiny enough to fit into the palm of your hand – and did not survive. His lungs simply were not developed enough to have even had a fighting chance.

We gathered around a tiny coffin, in a lovely little cemetery, and cried together. Our church grieved together with them and their families for the incredible loss. Their families wondered why God, if there was a God, would have allowed such a painful and seemingly useless thing to happen to this couple who had committed their lives to living for Him?

But they stood firm in the LORD. They prayed for wisdom. They asked “why?”. They grieved. But they knew that the LORD who had died for them had a bigger plan in mind than they could understand, and they continued to trust Him – through the hardship – through the pain.

Now, I would like to tell you that because of their chance to stand firm their families came joyously to the LORD. But we haven’t seen that happen yet. We still don’t know all of God’s plan for these two wonderful families – but we have no doubt but that standing firm in the LORD during a dark, confusing time is exactly what the LORD wanted – and exactly what He can and will use in His time.

Here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we really don’t think it will be that long before the LORD returns, and all of us believers are gathered together in Him. But what if it is another 50 years? Or 100 years? Or 200? Will there be believers from the 22<sup>nd</sup> century thanking us for enduring hardship and standing firm...so that they could have their chance to have Jesus “stablish their hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our LORD Jesus Christ with all his saints.” ?

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**Chapter 3**  
**Questions for Personal Study or Discussion**

1. (:1:5) Why did Paul & Silas send Timothy back to Thessalonica?

2. What do you suppose Timothy said to the Thessalonians in order to encourage and strengthen them?
3. (:6) Why was Paul so encouraged to hear that the Thessalonians were still strong in faith and love? What was so important about each of those 2 things?
4. (:7-8) Even though Paul and his fellow-laborers were still enduring persecution themselves, what made them feel like it was worth it to go on living and serving Christ?
5. (:9, 10) With such a good report from Timothy, why did Paul still think he needed to do more to “perfect that which was lacking in their faith”? What could have been still lacking?
6. (:11&12) What is Paul praying for the Thessalonians?
7. (:13) When the LORD Jesus returns, what are some of the things which He will do for us?
8. (:13) Who returns with Jesus?

**“The Birth of a Church”**  
**A Chapter-by-Chapter Study of 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians**

**I Thessalonians**  
**Chapter 4:1-12**  
**“How to Live in order to Please God”**

We have had so many new babies born at our churches that I have lost count. In the first few years of each ministry, Ken and I were able to be at the hospital for nearly every one of them....praying with the new Mom & Dad as labor began... laughing, talking, playing games & eating pizza with the families as they waited...and praying again with the whole family as each new baby was welcomed into the world. These births, and the children we have watched grow from infants to toddlers to school-age kids, are the absolute highlights of church-planting for us.

We have looked at each new, squalling infant and felt anew the challenge to reach each one with the Good News of Jesus Christ – at their earliest possible age – so that they could someday be the ones who carried on the work of the LORD. We have prayed for them for their first few years, and then had the privilege of praying with them...and in many cases now we have been amazed as we have listened to them praying for their friends to know Jesus also. I have to tell you again....there is absolutely, hands-down, no more rewarding job in the world than that of Pastoring a church (or being the Pastor’s wife).

Isn’t it true that every one of us looks at a new baby and asks...OK, what needs to change? (Get it? Change...babies....dirty diapers...). But, seriously, not only do diapers need to change, but just about everything about that little needy person needs to change. They need to learn to drink & eat, smile, and then they need to learn to sleep when people sleep. They need to learn to roll over, sit up, chew with their teeth, crawl, walk, talk. They arrive in our lives pretty useless and helpless, and wow! Do they ever need to change!

Let’s let that be our illustration for today’s passage.

When Paul, Silas & Timothy were in Thessalonica they birthed some new believers in Jesus Christ. And wow! Did they ever need to change! The new life on the inside of them now needed to affect and change the old life on the outside of them. So they taught them a few things. And now Paul is reminding them of what they said when they were with them & what needs to change. He is pushing them forward....”don’t be complacent, new believers....things need to change.” You can’t remain a baby and be cute – you have to grow and change.

*“Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the LORD Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the LORD Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 4:1 & 2)*

From the sound of verse 2, they had spent a good portion of time making sure the Thessalonians knew there was supposed to be a difference between their old life and the life they were now called to live. As Paul goes on to remind them of:

- sexual impurity,
- brotherly love,
- and not being dependent on others for daily needs,

we can assume that those were three areas of weakness in the Thessalonian culture. These new believers had been living lives of sin, of course, before their salvation, and they needed to continue to make the changes necessary to live life in Jesus' way.

**First up on Paul's reminder list of “How to Live in order to Please God”:**

*“It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.” (:3)*

Ummmm.....Don't beat around the bush, Paul. I guess you just want to let them have it up front and right between the eyes, right? God does not want any Christian anywhere, at any time, to be involved in sexual immorality. This crosses time barriers and cultural barriers and age barriers and geographical barriers. Every single believer in Christ needs to know this, be taught this, grapple with this. No sexual immorality. Period.

But Paul isn't just going to point a finger. He's going to help. Look at the following verses (:4-8) and see some practical things he offers to aid his readers to follow God's direction:

- a. *“that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable..” (:4)*

Learn to control your own body. In other words, don't think this is someone else's responsibility...or fault. We may live in a very sinful and tempting culture, but there is great power in realizing we do have the ability to control our own bodies. We don't have to give in to sin.

- b. *“...not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God;”( :5)*

If your life is characterized by passionate lust, you are acting just like the heathen...just like those who do not have the slightest idea what God is all about. You know God. You have options.

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c. *“...and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.”(:6a)*

When you get involved in sexual sin, you are very seldom hurting only yourself. You are almost always hurting someone else, too. Even private, secret sexual sin is taking advantage of someone else, whether by pornography, actual acts of sin, degrading comments about others, or simply fantasizing about sinful acts. Impurity in sex will hurt you, and hurt others, and will leave your friendships with other Christians in a terrible condition.

d. *“The LORD will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.”(:6b)*

God indeed does punish sin. If a person is not a believer in Christ, that punishment could very well be eternal damnation. If a person is a believer in Christ he or she will not lose their salvation over sexual sin, but they will lose their fellowship with God, they will have little impact on their world for Christ, they will have hurting consciences, and they will bear the scars of playing with fire.

e. *“For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.”(:7)*

God actually has a plan in mind for our lives. One which involves purity and sweet peace of mind, free from sin. We have been set apart from sin – so that we can serve Christ without hindrance. That is God’s plan for you...please don’t mess it up with sexual sin.

How can we help ourselves stay pure? Run from tempting situations. Like Joseph in the Old Testament (Genesis 39). Run. Don’t worry about looking stupid. Don’t worry about what everyone will say. Don’t worry about hurting people’s feelings. Run. If you are in any way at all tempted with a friendship, or with a TV Show, or with a clothing choice, or with a movie, or with a book, or with an activity....run. Immediately. Explain later. It isn’t worth it to wait and hope you’ll make the right choice. Run.

f. *“Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man, but God, who gives you His Holy Spirit.”(:8)*

This is strong language – Paul wasn’t going to stand for any weak-minded people here. If you don’t believe what Paul is saying, it’s not him you take issue with, it’s God. And you are not just disagreeing with God but you are out and out rejecting Him – and rejecting the very One Who could actually give you the power to overcome the sin.

This was no little issue then. It’s no little issue now. If we have been just recently saved we need this advice. If we have been believers in Christ for years

and years we need this advice. If we are 15 we need this advice. If we are 60 we need this advice. No one is exempt from temptation to sexual sin. It is staring us in the face every single day of our lives.

In Every Young Woman's Battle, Shannon Ethridge says: "The world you live in promotes sex as the answer to just about everything. The pressure to go along with the crowd is greater than ever before, and it's easy to compromise in little ways that are a lot more harmful than they seem. You and your friends may become caught up in destructive relationships or sexual activities without even knowing how you got there. You just want to fit in, to be liked, to look attractive to the opposite sex. But are you paying too high a price?"

How does this sin often attack women – even Christian women?

- Using sexual attraction to exert power.
- Hunger for attention which steps over the line.
- Beauty obsessions which influence sexual choices
- Looking for intimacy in all the wrong places
- Fantasies which "aren't hurting anyone"
- Confusing love with being used

Can we help each other stay pure? Yes -

- Accountability. Say something in love to your friend, knowing that you, too, could easily be tempted in this area, so you are not looking down on someone, but reaching across to help.
- Make yourself a third party to any situation which could even just look bad.
- Be prepared to give the hard answers.
- Never excuse sinful behavior by feeling sorry for a friend in a difficult situation. Paul doesn't. There is never a good reason for sin. Loneliness is never a good reason for sin. Abuse is never a good reason for sin. Striking back at someone who hurt you is never a good reason for sin.
- Have the courage to be a person who lives, talks & dresses differently...it will help someone else live differently, too – trying, perhaps, to be the same as you, instead of the same as those who have no hope.
- Don't fall into the trap of saying: "Dressing modestly (or talking modestly, etc.), is just legalism. God loves me just the way I am, and I don't need to keep a whole bunch of rules to please Him." Those words are a trap because they overlook the obvious...there are rules to be kept. There are things God doesn't want us to do. When we see what those things are, then we are sinning if we go ahead and do them in the name of not being legalistic.

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- If you have fallen into sexual sin, you don't have to stay there. Ask the LORD for forgiveness and then leave it, change it, be a different person. Jesus is the God of the second chance. And Third...and Fourth...

#### **And now Paul goes on to mention two more things he especially wants the Thessalonian Christians to be working on:**

*“Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you brothers, to do so more and more.” (:9&10)*

Paul directs the Thessalonians to love each other more and more even though they already do a really great job in this area. Are you asking yourself here what you could do which would show more love to a Christian friend?

This is a good thing to think through with a group of acquaintances. You will get some pretty good ideas for loving other people as you bounce thoughts off of one another. I was part of a Bible Study once which was studying the book of John. When we came to John chapter 13, where Jesus washes the disciples' feet, we had a great discussion of practical ways we could “wash each other's feet” – in other words, ways we could take the attitude of a servant towards one another. Of course we thought of giving each other pedicures, but we also thought of cleaning each other's bathrooms.

There are practical things we can do to show our love for one another, and maybe we sometimes just get a little too used to each other, so we forget to show love. Think of just one way to do something loving for a fellow Christian...and do it...this week. Next week, too. That way you will always be following Paul's advice here: *“do so more and more.”*

#### **And the third thing on Paul's list....something Paul recommends for winning the respect of non-Christians:**

*“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.” (:11&12)*

Mind your own business and pay your own bills.

I think this is especially true in our “entitlement” society. When I can take care of myself, then I am mature enough to take care of a spouse. And when we can take care of ourselves, then we are mature enough to take care of our children. And when we can take care of ourselves and our children, then we are mature

enough to reach out to our friends and neighbors when they truly have a need they cannot meet.

Ephesians 4:28 speaks to this same idea: “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.” If you are a healthy, able person who has been letting others get you through life, you are stealing. Stop it. If you are the person who is getting someone else through life...someone who could get themselves through if they would only make the effort, stop it. Learn to work hard. Make it your goal that no one else will have to take care of you. Do that, and someday you will have something to give to someone else who really does need the help for awhile.

God doesn't baby us. He has standards and it's up to us to live up to them.

1. No sexual immorality
2. Love each other more and more
3. Work hard at being responsible for yourself.

There is a right way to live in order to please God. I challenge you to re-read this passage and dare to take a fresh look at your life and, if necessary, begin to make some changes.

**I Thessalonians  
Chapter 4:1-12  
Questions for Personal Study or Discussion**

1. (:1&2) What had Paul, Silas and Timothy already instructed the Thessalonian believers about?
2. (:3) What should Christians avoid?
3. (:4-8) What practical help does Paul give to aid his readers in following his advice?
  - a. (:4)
  - b. (:5)
  - c. (:6a)
  - d. (:6b)
  - e. (:7)
  - f. (:8)
4. Is this admonishment needed for Christians today?
5. How would Christian women be tempted in this area?
6. What are some ways we can help one another stay pure?
7. What are some ways each of us can help ourselves stay pure?

**"The Birth of a Church"**  
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8. (:9-10) Paul directs the Thessalonians to love each other more and more even though they already do a really great job in this area. What are some practical ways we can give ourselves opportunity to love each other more and more?
9. (:11-12) What does Paul recommend for winning the respect of non-Christians?
10. Put verse 11 into your own words.
11. What have you learned about God in this passage?
12. What have you learned about yourself in this passage?
13. What can you put in place today to make necessary changes?

1.

2.

3.

# I Thessalonians

## Chapter 4:13-18

### “The Most Comforting Thought in the World”

***I Thessalonians 4:13-18:** But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.*

It was the littlest coffin I had ever seen. The toddler in it had been caught in a house fire which cruelly claimed his life, but left his parents behind to arrange a funeral and grieve for months and years to come.

Ken and I had just started our church in Illinois – we were just in our 20's, with a toddler of our own, and the job of performing that funeral was excruciating. I sang at the funeral, and I vividly remember wanting to stop singing as soon as I started. I had thought that even though singing would be hard, at least what I was singing about might bring some relief to their grief, or might comfort them for a few minutes. But instead, the longer I sang, the more they cried. Their grief was overwhelming them. Of course. And there was no reason to try to say anything or do anything to make it better. It wasn't going to get better for a long time.

But there was comfort waiting for them when they finally got to the point that they could think and feel again – probably months later. And that comfort is what these few verses are about at the end of chapter 4.

The church at Thessalonica was new, remember. It was one of the first churches Paul started as he set out to tell the known world the story of Jesus. So it probably was birthed about 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. If you do the math, you can see that all the new Christians in that church were basically in the same generation as Jesus. They came to faith in Jesus, and heard that he was going to be returning someday soon, and they just naturally assumed that all of them would still be alive at the time of His return. All of the church, as friends and maybe family, expected to see Him return together.

But then that first coffin had to be used. One of their number would not be there to welcome Him as He returned! What would happen to that one? And then another coffin was brought out. Where would these sweet fellow-believers be when the Lord returned? What would happen to them?

## **"The Birth of a Church"**

### **A Chapter-by-Chapter Study of 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians**

Paul had told them, before he left, to expect the return of Jesus. But Jesus didn't return right away. What did that mean for the ones who didn't live until His return? Would they be left out of the great gathering to Jesus? And it sounds like there were some in their church, or some in their lives outside of church, "others", who were telling them that maybe the Lord wasn't going to return after all. That the whole thing of believing in Jesus was just a hoax.

Paul writes to them, then, and mentions this great confusion and sorrow they are going through. He knows that some of them have "fallen asleep" – or, died. He knows the ones who have died were believers in Jesus. So he knows their spirits are safely in the presence of the Lord. But the Thessalonians need to know: what, exactly happens to them after they die as believers? And what, exactly happens to them when the Lord returns?

So the first thing Paul says is: I'll tell you everything you need to know so that you won't have to sorrow. Don't worry - You have hope. Your friends who have passed are safe, and have something wonderful to look forward to, the same as you do. Everything is OK.

And here's why everything is OK:

*<sup>14</sup> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.*

Jesus died and rose from the dead, remember? His body was totally dead, and then it came alive again, remember? So...you can count on the fact that Jesus can safely bring your dead loved ones back to life again, too! Their spirits are with Him right now, but when He returns, He will make sure they get their new bodies...their new, eternal bodies that will never die...just like you, too are going to get your new bodies at His return. They died and are safely with Him. They will be given new bodies, just like Him.

When Paul says "sleep in Jesus", he's not saying that these dead believers are actually asleep – or – unaware of what's going on around them. He's just using that term "sleep" to speak sweetly and gently about the rest they are experiencing right now in His presence as they wait for Him to decide to return.

Ever since the time of Genesis, when a person who believed in Jesus (believed their Messiah was coming someday) died, their body went into the grave, and their soul was taken safely into the presence of the LORD. Every one of them is even now looking forward to the time when their body will be resurrected and re-united with their soul.

In those Old Testament times, before Jesus paid the price for our sins on the cross, when people who believed in Jesus died, their souls went to a safe, wonderful place called "Abraham's bosom", where they waited until Jesus came to die and be raised again, and the price was paid for their sins. The presence of God was there (Psalms 16:8-11), but it wasn't the same place believers after Jesus have gone when they die.

Those Old Testament believers had lived their lives looking forward to the fact that the Savior would come some day and pay the price for their sin. And when Jesus died, in 33AD, he went to them where they were safely waiting, told them what He had done, and then took those souls with Him to Heaven/"The Place God Lives". (Ephesians 4:8-10). That is where their souls are right now - their bodies are still in the grave.

Now...ever since Jesus' resurrection, every single person who has died believing in Jesus goes immediately to be with the LORD in Heaven forever. (II Corinthians 5:8). Their spirits are with the LORD. Their bodies are still in the grave.

But, when Jesus returns, He will resurrect all bodies of believers from their graves (all believers from before the resurrection, and all believers from after the resurrection), combine them with their souls which are already in heaven, and each person will get their new, resurrected body which will live forever in the New Heaven and the New Earth. I Thessalonians 4:16&17, I Corinthians 15:20-23, I Corinthians 15:52-54, Revelation 7:9-17.

Yahoo!!!

So, Thessalonians, rejoice! Jesus has it all taken care of!

*<sup>15</sup> For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*

**"The Birth of a Church"**  
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Therefore:

1. When Jesus decides it is time to return, all those who have gone before will actually get the jump on us. ☺ It will all happen quickly, but, truth is, those who have died believing in Jesus will go first. ☺
2. Jesus will descend from heaven.
3. There will be a shout.
4. We will all hear the voice of the archangel.
5. And we'll hear the trumpet of God.
6. Then those who have been sleeping in Jesus will be snatched up into His presence – their new, never-to-die bodies miraculously re-united with their spirits.
7. And then, the rest of us who are alive will also get our new, never-to-die bodies, and we'll join them....
8. We'll all meet in the air....where we will begin to ready ourselves for coming back with Him. What will we do once we get there? We don't have a whole lot of details on that, but we do know that at some point we'll have white horses to mount, and we'll follow Him back down to earth and watch Him decimate the forces of evil. (Revelation 19:11-21)
9. And we will never ever leave Him again. From that point on, we will always be with the Lord.

Yahoo!!!

*<sup>18</sup> Therefore comfort one another with these words."*

I'm comforted. Are you?

**I Thessalonians**  
**Chapter 4:13-18**  
**Questions for Personal Study or Discussion**

1. :13 The church at Thessalonica needs to be informed about something...maybe something they had gotten confused about. What do they seem to be confused about?
2. :13 What does "fallen asleep" mean?
3. :13 Why would some "others" be sorrowing about someone "falling asleep"?
4. :13 Who might these "others" be?
5. :14 What does it mean to "sleep in Jesus"?
6. :14 Why does the resurrection of Jesus, 2000 years ago, give us hope about people who have died believing in Jesus?
7. :15 Now we are getting a better idea of what the Thessalonians were upset and confused about. What was it?
8. :16&17 What is the order of events which will take place when Jesus decides to come get His church?
9. :18 Why is this such good news to the Thessalonians?
10. Why is it such good news to us?

**APPLICATION:**

11. Have you experienced the death of a fellow-believer in Jesus Christ?
12. Did you think much about the hope of Jesus' return during the time you grieved for that loss?
13. Did the hope of His return comfort you? Why? Or Why not?

**“The Birth of a Church”**  
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**I Thessalonians**  
**Chapter 5: 1-11**  
**“One More Sunday”**

When Ken and I decided to commit ourselves to the start of a new church in Greenwood, Indiana, we were both about 50 years old. We'd been married for 30 years. Our kids were grown and gone from our house. We had grandchildren. We had cared for and then said good-bye to Ken's parents as they went home to be with the Lord, having lived near us for their last few years. We had walked through many of life's blessings together, and a few of life's sorrows. We had started other churches together. We had run a business together. We had succeeded and failed together...many times.

We knew we were on the “finishing” side of our life. We didn't have all the energy we once had....and we didn't have the blindness of youth. We had no doubt but that we would make mistakes. We had no guarantees that a new church would be a success. But we were absolutely sure of one thing: we wanted to finish strong.

Every Sunday morning we would load up my little red truck with nursery equipment and other supplies, and before we headed out to begin the set-up for our new little church, we would say the same thing to each other. “We get one more Sunday to teach God's Word to someone...one more Sunday to tell someone about Jesus.” For us, finishing strong meant only that – one more Sunday. We didn't want to be big or powerful or noticed by the world. We just wanted one more Sunday. Every Sunday morning was a gift from God.

Why do I tell you this? I'd like for you to have the joy of finishing strong. This is how I want you to feel about whatever job the LORD is giving you in these last days: “Thank you, Father, for just one more Sunday.” I don't have to tell you Jesus is returning soon – you already know it. I don't have to tell you how important the work of the Lord is – you already know that, too. All I want is for you to take the strength and courage you have right now, and lay them in the hands of Jesus – and commit yourself to your task for as many Sundays as are left before we see His sweet face.

*“Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” (1 Thessalonians 5:1&2)*

Apparently the Thessalonians had already been taught a few things by Paul about the LORD’s return, and they knew that there was no time or date.

What did Paul mean when he said the coming of Jesus would be “like a thief in the night.”? What does a thief in the night have in common with the return of Jesus Christ?

- a. A thief in the night comes when no one is expecting him. If people had been expecting him, they would have locked doors, shut the windows, put in burglar alarms.
- b. A thief in the night comes silently, no warnings.
- c. A thief in the night startles us. Frightens us.
- d. A thief in the night comes to take from us what we have every reason to think is ours.
- e. A thief in the night comes when we are asleep
- f. A thief in the night is an unpleasant surprise.
- g. A thief in the night comes, quietly, making no noise

All of the above are things a thief in the night has in common with the return of the LORD. You may be thinking....”but...didn’t we just learn in chapter 4 that the coming of the LORD is something encouraging? Comforting? The thought of a thief in the night doesn’t exactly bring me comfort or make me feel encouraged.

Good observation. Keep reading...

*“While people are saying, “Peace and safety”, destruction will come one them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” (1 Thessalonians 5:3)*

We’ve seen before that it helps to make sure we know what all the words or phrases in a passage mean...so that we can truly understand what the Lord is saying in that passage....so.....What is the Day of the LORD?

It’s a phrase used often in both the Old and New Testaments. The way we all use this term can cause confusion because

- a. sometimes it seems to refer to the very day (24-hour period) the LORD returns on His white horse (at the end of the 7 years).
- b. And then sometimes we talk about the rapture event as the Day of the LORD.
- c. And sometimes we talk about the whole last 7 year period as the Day of the LORD.

## **"The Birth of a Church"**

### **A Chapter-by-Chapter Study of 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians**

- d. And then sometimes the last 7 years **and** the 1,000 years which follow are collectively referred to as the Day of the LORD
- e. And also, some people talk about the Day of the Lord as specifically that time, contained within the last 7 years, when the Lord pours out His wrath upon the world. Whew!

Here are some places in scripture where the term is used. You can see many different nuances of the term in each of these passages:

1. Malachi 4:5 (Elijah comes first before the Day, and there is repentance)
2. I Corinthians 5:5 (End of time)
3. II Corinthians 1:14 (A time when good things happen)
4. I Thessalonians 5:2 (people are saying 'Peace & safety', and then destruction comes)
5. II Peter 3:10-13 (A time of destruction by fire – judgment)

So here's my suggestion: It will help, as you read scripture, to assume that when the phrase "the Day of the Lord" is used, it means the whole 7-year period before Jesus' actual return on the white horse. All of the events which make up that 7-year period are included in the "Day of the LORD". Some of those events are wonderful...some are horrible.

How does that help us understand verses 1 and 2? Read it this way: "Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the last 7 years comes (or arrives) like a thief in the night."

It's possible that when the LORD clicks that big stopwatch in the sky, beginning the Day of the Lord, people will not know the 7 years has begun until they are already well into the 7 years.

Now that we have a good understanding of the meaning of the "Day of the Lord", then we can look at verse 3 and ask: "What will life be like for most people on earth in the time before the Day of the LORD"?

People will be saying "Everything is going great! Our world is finally at peace. We are all feeling so safe. This is the best time ever."

The prophet Zechariah, in the Old Testament, saw this same attitude prevalent in the world in his day...and he has some light to shed on how God reacted to it. Zechariah is having a dream from God, and in that dream he sees four powerful horses going out into the world to check and see how the world is doing. Zechariah 1:11 :

*"And they reported to the angel of the LORD (Jesus), who was standing among the myrtle trees (waiting for their report), 'We have gone throughout the earth and*

*found the whole world at rest and in peace.*' (you'd think this would be a good thing, right?) *Then the angel of the LORD said, 'LORD Almighty (Jesus is addressing the Father), how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?'*" This gives us a couple more pertinent facts about this time of great "rest" which prevailed in the world in Zechariah's time. Most of the world was at rest... comfortable... happy... peaceful. But God's own city was downtrodden, forgotten. God's plan for the world was ignored. God's people were mistreated.

God's answer to this despicable situation was quite clear: *Zechariah 1:14, 15 "Then the angel who was speaking to me said, 'Proclaim this word: This is what the LORD Almighty says: "I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, but I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity."'*"

The nations that were out there in the world were quite willing for Jerusalem to be in ruins, even though Jerusalem was where God's heart was. They were quite willing to be in peace and have all this wonderful life around without having God's desires at the center of their lives. This did not make God happy then...and it won't be making God happy just before the last 7 years begins, either.

The world at the beginning of the last 7 years will be happy, at rest, safe, comfortable, peaceful...but they will not care at all that God's people are suffering...or that God's plan is more important than anything else in the world. They will be blind as bats: they will have no idea what is approaching them – the Day of the Lord.

*"But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness."* (1 Thessalonians 5:4&5)

What does Paul mean when he says the Thessalonians are "sons of the day"?....and What does Paul mean when he says they do not "belong to the night"? The following verses will make it clear:

John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 9:4-5 "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

When we decide to follow Jesus we change worlds. We are no longer residents of this dark world that loves sin and hates God. We are residents of God's world. We can see clearly what God is doing. We want God's plan to succeed. We have a huge desire to work hard for the completion of that plan.

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Therefore, here is the crux of this whole passage. Remember we asked earlier.....”but...didn’t we just learn in chapter 4 that the coming of the LORD is something encouraging? Comforting? The thought of a thief in the night doesn’t exactly bring me comfort or make me feel encouraged.” ? Here’s the answer to that question: Not everyone on earth will be taken off-guard by the Day of the Lord. Not everyone on earth will be saying “peace and safety”. Not everyone will be caught with their mouth hanging open when the anti-christ rises to power...the church is raptured away... and when judgment begins.

Those of us who are living in the light of Jesus...not slumbering in the darkness of this world...will be very much aware of what God is doing in the world. We will see it coming. We will not be surprised.

*“So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.” (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8)*

Those who “belong to the night”...what do they do...what are they like? They are sleeping. – not paying attention to God. They are getting drunk. – living only for the pleasures of the moment.

But since the Thessalonians do not belong to the night, what should they be doing? How should they be acting? Self-controlled. – not giving in to the lure of “do what I want when I want because I want”. Full of faith – in the Word constantly. Exercizing love – intentionally loving each other. Living with hope – eyes on the future

*“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our LORD, Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.” (1 Thessalonians 5:9:10)*

God’s wrath is not coming for the people of God. But that doesn’t mean they won’t go through suffering as the time for His wrath approaches. The passage in Zechariah which shows the LORD angry with the nations for letting His people suffer...plus the events I see in Revelation chapter 6, leading up to the Rapture (in chapter 7) (including persecution of believers) leads me to realize that the approach and beginning of the Day of the Lord will mean hard times for believers, but will also focus them on Him, drawing them away from the addictive pleasures of this world. The world will be saying “peace and safety”...but the believers will know what is coming – and will be looking forward to it.

Application time. What was true for the Thessalonian believers is even more true, and more urgent for us. Are we living like “sons of light”?

- Are we sleeping?
- Are we being lazy?
- Are we focusing on our own pleasures?
- Or....
- Are we awake?
- Are we working hard?
- Are we focused on God's work in our world, putting self aside?

*"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." (1 Thessalonians 5:11)*

This verse winds up this passage the same way verse 18 of chapter 4 wound up last week's passage:

Encourage each other with these words. Keep talking about Jesus' return. Especially as you see other believers suffering. Live every day for just "one more Sunday". One more chance to tell people about Jesus.

## I Thessalonians Chapter 5: 1-11 Questions for Personal Study and Discussion

So....When will Jesus return?

1. (:1-2) Why did Paul not need to write to the Thessalonians about time and dates of Jesus' return?
2. What, then, does that phrase mean..."Like a thief in the night."? What does a thief in the night have in common with the return of Jesus Christ?
3. (:3) What is the Day of the LORD?
4. (:3) What will life be like for most people on earth when the Day of the LORD begins?
5. (:4&5) What does Paul mean when he says they are "sons of the day"?....and What does Paul mean when he says they do not "belong to the night"? (Look up John 8:12 and John 9:4-5 and see if this helps you answer this question.)
6. (:4) Will everyone on earth taken off-guard by the Day of the LORD?
7. (:4-6) Who will not? And why not?
8. (:4-8) Those who "belong to the night"...what do they do...what are they like?
9. (:4-8) Since the Thessalonians do not belong to the night, what should they be doing? How should they be acting?
10. (:9-10) What promise do you see in these verses for the Thessalonians?

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11. Now...How do these verses apply to us?
12. Are we living like "sons of light"?
  - Are we sleeping?
  - Are we being lazy?
  - Are we focusing on our own pleasures?
  - Or....
  - Are we awake?
  - Are we working hard?
  - Are we focused on God's work in our world, putting selfishness aside?
13. (:11) This verse winds up this passage the same way verse 18 of chapter 4 wound up last week's passage. What is it?

# I Thessalonians

## Chapter 5:12-28

### “Take Good Care of Your Pastor”

I'm writing this with a smile on my face, because maybe the Pastor's wife is not the best person in the world to teach on how to take care of the Pastor...but...here we are in I Thessalonians with some very good verses to teach us how to take care of our Pastors...so...with your indulgence, I will plunge right in....

Did you know that everyone needs a Pastor? In this age of “I don't answer to anyone.”... “I am my own boss”...“I don't need anyone leaning over my shoulder telling me what to do”...“I don't trust anyone with power”...“I want someone to meet my needs, but I don't intend to do anything in return.”...in this age of entitlement on the one hand and fear of control on the other... It may be a hard fact to put your arms around, but the truth is...everyone needs a Pastor.

Everyone needs a group of friends who are committed to the God of the Universe – Jesus Christ. And that group of friends needs to meet together weekly to worship and learn and fellowship with each other. That group of friends needs to give to one another when they have needs, baptize one another when they come to a saving knowledge of Jesus, take communion together every so often to remember what Jesus did for them, surround one another's families with respect and love and education about the things of God. That group of friends needs to reach out to the world around them with the message of Jesus, and then welcome new believers into their midst.

That group of friends is a church...and every church needs a Pastor.

Look at the description Peter, a Pastor, gives us of churches and Pastors: *“To the elders (Pastors) among you, I appeal as a fellow elder (Pastor), a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the Crown of Glory that will never fade away.” (I Peter 5:1-4)*

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Everyone needs one of these. Someone who knows your name and prays for you out of a heart filled with tender compassion. Someone who will confront you when you are making stupid decisions – not as one who can force you to do anything, but as one who knows his own weakness as well as yours, and does not want to see you suffer. Someone who will laugh at your jokes. Someone who will ask how your grandchildren are doing. Someone who will kneel by your bed in the hospital and plead for your healing. Someone who will fight for your right to make your own decisions. Someone who will baptize you when you know it is time to raise your flag. Someone who will at your funeral speak kind and true words about you. Someone who will teach you the truth about God, and teach you to use your Bible well, so that you can find out God’s truths for yourself. Everyone needs one.

I challenge you that if you don’t have a Pastor...ask God to give you one. Be willing to go find one. Be willing to lay aside your independence long enough to find a man who will honorably lead you, walk beside you, cry with you...as you seek to live for Christ in a dark, dark world.

*“Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. “ (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13a)*

What are we supposed to do with these who minister to us?

They don’t come free. You must hold them in high regard. Sometimes that costs. You can’t mock them when you are with friends who have no respect for them. You can’t ignore them when you are being confronted with truth about yourself. You can’t be mean to them or their families even though sometimes they may hurt your feelings. You can’t be unforgiving when you have been misunderstood. You can’t lash out in anger at them – you can’t gossip about them – you can’t try to hurt them. You must hold them in high regard.

Sure there are Pastors out there who don’t deserve the title. Sure there are Pastors who don’t work hard, who don’t really like the people they are pasturing, whom you really shouldn’t be trusting. But you don’t choose a Pastor with your eyes closed. Choose carefully. Compare the man to what the LORD has said he should be like. (see Paul’s description of a good Pastor as he writes to Timothy: II Timothy 2:1-7)

And when you find him, hold him in high regard. And when you have opportunity, take good care of him.

As the wife of a Pastor, I can tell you some of the things people have done for us as they have taken care of us:

- We have been given the joy of feeling like “just one of the family” in many of our people’s homes.
- We receive innumerable thank-you’s – in the form of kind words, cards, little presents, phone messages, e-mails, letters.
- Quite often people invite us to their home for a meal.
- And then some people invite us out to eat with them at a restaurant.
- Many of our people make a special point to come, get on their knees with us, and pray with us when we are up against difficult times.
- As church planters, as soon as our new congregations can afford to, they pay us, knowing that this is how we make our living.
- We are invited to special events in our church families’ lives.
- We are invited to meet family members who don’t live locally...grandchildren, aunts, uncles, parents...when they are visiting.
- We are introduced to friends of our church families – with a tone of loving care and respect
- Many people tell us that they also pray for our children and their families.
- We are invited to join the waiting game at the hospital as babies are arriving
- We are often the first ones to hear the first memorized verse
- And the last ones to say good-bye when the LORD calls someone home.

*“...live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:13b-22)*

Now Paul has these few parting words... 14 pieces of advice:

1. Live in peace with each other
2. Warn those who are idle
3. Encourage the timid
4. Help the weak
5. Be patient with everyone
6. Make sure no one pays back wrong for wrong
7. Be kind to each other – and to everyone else
8. Be joyful always
9. Pray continually
10. Give thanks in all circumstances
11. Do not put out the Spirit’s fire
12. Do not treat prophecies with contempt

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13. Test everything...and hold on to the good
14. Avoid every kind of evil

I read this list and realized that if every believer at our church would follow all of this advice consistently, that would be the very nicest gift they could ever give to their Pastor. Simply living for Christ is the highest means of taking good care of your Pastor.

*“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23 & 24)*

Paul prays for them a lot like we pray for each of the people in our congregation...

**First**, that they would be sanctified...or, set apart. That means he wants each believer to know that his/her place in the world is not just for living like everybody else. It is for service to God. New believers need to learn that this world is no longer their home. Now they are different.

**Second**, for each one of them....that each one’s whole spirit, soul and body will be brought blameless into the presence of Jesus at His coming. I’m assuming that Paul has a picture in his mind of that day when we all are standing before Jesus Christ, and He is handing out rewards for a job well done. The Apostle is seeing each of his “people” stepping up to the throne...and he is so proud of them, as he sees them clean, pure and blameless – facing the LORD –

Are these things Paul “hopes” happens for them? Or are they things Paul knows without a doubt will happen for them? At that moment of standing in the presence of the LORD, Paul also knows that he will gratefully fall to his own knees, acknowledging that Jesus is the One Who brought each one safely to that moment. Paul is praying for something that will happen – without a doubt. Because Jesus will be the One to bring it to completion.

*“Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.” (1 Thessalonians 5:25-27)*

What 3 things does Paul ask them to do now that they have his letter?

- Pray for Paul and his helpers – Pastors all of them. (Look at what a Pastor is faced with in II Timothy chapter 3...and know that every Pastor desperately needs your prayers)

- Greet everyone with a holy kiss (greet each other like family members)
- Read the letter to everyone ( Paul knew his letters would be important food for hungry hearts far and wide)

*“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:28)*

We are where we are because of God’s grace. This is a long-distance prayer of a loving Pastor....one who knows the work of Christ gets done through local churches...and that because of that it is a simple miracle and a gift of God’s grace that the job gets done at all.

Pastors don’t take time off from being Pastors. Take good care of your Pastor.

## **I Thessalonians Chapter 5:12-28 Questions for Personal Study and Discussion**

1. (:12) A little “Jeopardy”.....Here’s the answer:
  - Those who work hard among you
  - Who are over you in the Lord
  - Who admonish you
 What’s the question? \_\_\_\_\_
2. (:13a) What are we supposed to do with these who minister to us?
3. Do you do that? What are some suggestions of things you could do to “hold your Pastor in high regard”?
4. (:13b – 22) What are Paul’s parting words...14 pieces of advice?
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  - 5.
  - 6.
  - 7.
  - 8.
  - 9.
  - 10.
  - 11.
  - 12.

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- 13.
- 14.
5. (:23) What 2 things does Paul pray for them?
6. (:24) Are these things Paul "hopes" happens for them? Or are they things Paul knows without a doubt will happen for them?
7. (:25-27) What 3 things does Paul ask them to do now that they have his letter?
8. (:28) Why does Paul end his letter in this way?

