



**GROWING
IN LOVE**

1 THESSALONIANS | STUDY GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

As a resident of Thessalonica (present-day Thessaloniki, Greece), you are proud of your city. Situated on the main route between Rome and the East, Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. One day, the news hits the streets that a band of Jewish travelling 'rabbis' have managed to stir up the province of Macedonia. Rumour has it that they were behind the earthquake that shook the prison in Philippi and caused the prison doors to break open and the prisoner's chains undone (Acts 16:25-26). Now, they are actually heading your way. You are not sure whether they are sorcerers or magicians, but surely you are in anticipation of what they are going to do in your city.

Interestingly, they arrive not with pompous fanfare nor Gandalf-style fireworks. Instead, they settle in the city without making much fuss. Instead of performing magic on the streets as you have expected, they actually visit the synagogue of the Jews (Acts 17:2). Instead of some philosophical mumbo-jumbo, Paul - the leader of the so-called Jewish missionary band - actually talks quite rationally about this person named Jesus. He reasons from the Old Testament that the promised Messiah will suffer and die, and subsequently rise from the dead. He then argues that this promised Messiah is none other than Jesus who was crucified in Jerusalem a number of years ago (Acts 17:3). This is perhaps the first time you hear about this phenomenal person named Jesus - how he lived a perfect sinless life, how he died a horrible death on the cross, and how he rose again from the dead. Against all odds, together with many Jews and Gentiles in your city, you come to believe that this Jesus is the Saviour of the world and that he indeed died for your sins and rose to life again. You put your faith in Jesus, and for the first time in your life, you are sure of your eternal destiny.

You are excited to get to know more about Jesus. Together with a number of new believers in this newly formed Christian community, you are learning about how you should live now that you call yourselves followers of Christ. However, some of the Jews in your city become very unhappy with Paul and Silas. They are jealous that many people begin to follow Paul and Silas. They set the city in an uproar and they even attack Jason, who housed Paul and his friends, and drag him out to the governing authorities (Acts 17:5-9). Incredibly shocked over what is happening, you and some Christian brothers have no choice but to send Paul and friends away from Thessalonica for their safety.

Even after they leave, the pressure keeps coming from both the local residents and the city officials. There is the temptation to just forget about Jesus and go back to

your old life. Shortly after, however, Timothy returns to Thessalonica to encourage your church to persevere in faith despite the afflictions (1 Thess. 3:1-3) before he goes to join Paul again.

Here you are now, a member of a new church community in Thessalonica who are trying to figure out what it means to be followers of Christ in the midst of the city that is not so welcoming towards Jesus and Christianity. The only knowledge about Christianity that your community has is whatever Paul has managed to teach before he left and whatever Timothy has managed to instruct during his short visit. You are not even sure if you will ever see any of them again. Some of the people in your city begin to accuse Paul of being a 'money-grabbing self-promoter' who came to your city only to gain followers and quickly left when he did not find it convenient to stay. Furthermore, some have also begun to wonder what would happen if they died before Christ returned. Needless to say, the young church needs firm and fresh guidance.

Then, suddenly, a messenger arrives with a letter from Paul. You are so eager to read what Paul has to say to you, a fledgling church in a multicultural city of Thessalonica. What is in Paul's mind? What is he going to say to your church? What should your church give priority to? Interestingly, history attests that in the centuries that followed, Thessalonica remained as one of the major strongholds of Christianity. It even won the epithet, 'The Orthodox City.' Therefore, what Paul writes in his letters is very vital to the health of the Thessalonian church.

Over the next seven weeks, we invite you to dig into Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. Read and study this letter to see what Paul says to the young church in Thessalonica. Learn how we as a Christian community can thrive in the midst of our multicultural city of Melbourne.

GROWING IN GENUINE FAITH

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 2:13-16

Context

Paul named himself, Silas and Timothy as having preached the Gospel to the believers at Thessalonica. However, Paul was 'sent away' from the city of Thessalonica by the brothers to avoid riotous opposition from the Jews. Paul's anxiety for the young church was so great that he sent Timothy to find out the state of the believers. Timothy's return and report resulted in Paul writing this epistle to the church at Thessalonica.

Paul begins his letters by thanking God for the remembrance of the new (probably only a few months old) church in Thessalonica. Paul praises them for how they have lived out their faith practically to show that their faith is not fake. By looking at this portion of the letter, we can learn what genuine faith looks like in real life.

Observation

Paul commended the young church at Thessalonica for her faith, love and hope in 1 Thessalonians 1:3. Faith is directed towards God, love towards others and hope towards the future. The gospel was preached powerfully with the enabling of the Holy Spirit and received joyfully by the Thessalonians despite persecution.

- Twice in the letter (1:6-10 and 2:13-16), Paul remembers and thanks God for the Thessalonians. List the things Paul is thanking God for.
- Make some observations on the role of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in the birth and growth of believers according to 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

Meaning

Paul also commended the young Thessalonian church for her steadfastness in the midst of suffering and being a 'model' to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia (1:7).

- In Paul's prayer, he remembers the Thessalonians 'work of faith', 'labour of love', and 'steadfastness of hope' (1:2-3). Why do you think Paul uses the words 'work', 'labour', and 'steadfastness' to describe 'faith', 'love', and 'hope'?
- Read again 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10 and 2:13-16. What does Paul observe in the Thessalonians that gives him confidence that their faith is genuine?

Application

- In light of the signs of genuine faith that Paul observes in the Thessalonians, how can you encourage one another to live a life that exhibits the signs of genuine faith?
- In 1:9–10, we note that the Christian conversion involves (1) 'turn(ing) from idols', (2) 'to serve the living and true God' and (3) 'to wait for His Son from heaven'. What does this look like in practical terms in your life today? What do you have to stop doing, and what do you have to start doing to apply this?

Pray for One Another

- Pray for what you have decided to apply as a result of this study. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you the power to put them into practice.
- Pray that God will continue to grow you in your work of faith, labour of love, and steadfastness of hope in Jesus Christ as you wait for Him to return.
- Pray that the people whom you are ministering to will grow to have more genuine faith in Jesus Christ.
- Pray that many people will receive the word of the gospel and be saved.
- See also crossculture.net.au/prayer for more prayer points.

GROWING IN GENUINE MINISTRY

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Context

After giving thanks to God for the Thessalonians and remembering their steadfastness in their faith, Paul turns now to remind them of the way Paul conducted his ministry when he was in Thessalonica. After fleeing Thessalonica due to heavy opposition from the Jews and the governing authorities, some people in Thessalonica have begun to talk badly about him to the Thessalonians. We can trace the accusations made against Paul by the defences he makes in the following passage. As he defends himself and his ministry, Paul also lays out the model for what a good Christian minister (and ministry) is like.

Observation

- Looking at 2:3-6, what kind of accusations have possibly been made against Paul by some of his opponents in Thessalonica?
- How does Paul defend:
 - The truth of his message? (2:3-4)
 - The purity of his motives? (2:4-6)
- Paul uses two parental roles when describing his ministry attitude towards the Thessalonians. How does he describe:
 - His attitude and actions like that of a mother? (2:7-10)
 - His attitude and actions like that of a father? (2:11-12)

Meaning

- Paul is clear about his attitude towards transparency in ministry. Throughout this passage, Paul constantly calls out to the Thessalonians as witnesses of his behaviour among them:
 - 'For you yourselves know...' (2:1)
 - '... as you know...' (2:2)
 - '... as you know...' (2:5)
 - 'For you remember...' (2:9)
 - 'You are witnesses...' (2:10)
 - 'For you know...' (2:11)

Why is transparency so important for us in the way we conducted our ministry?

Application

- Think of either:
 - A Christian ministry that you know about or are serving in, or
 - A person/group of people you are ministering to at the moment, or
 - Your own life group.

How would you in practical terms apply in that context the parental attitudes that Paul describes?

- In recent years, Christian churches worldwide have been rocked by numerous sexual and financial scandals that have done great harm to their reputation. What safeguards can be put into your life, and the life of the church, that would allow for Christian ministry to be done without bringing shame to the Gospel?

Pray for One Another

- Pray for what you have decided to apply as a result of this study. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you the power to put them into practice.
- Pray that you will conduct your ministry following the examples given by Paul.
- Pray that the people you are ministering to will grow in faith as a result as your faithful and loving ministry.
- Pray that every Christian in ministry will conduct their ministry in a godly and loving manner.
- See also crossculture.net.au/prayer for more prayer points.

GROWING IN GENUINE CARE

1 Thessalonians 2:17 - 3:13

Context

Paul continues to dismiss the false accusations thrown at him. The Gentile leaders would have accused Paul of abandoning the Thessalonians because his 'cover' was blown. John Stott comments that 'The brief mission in Thessalonica had been brought to an ignominious end. The public riot and the legal charges against the missionaries were so serious that they were persuaded to make a humiliating night flight from the city.' Paul now writes to shed some light on his inability to return and how he continues to care for them through other means.

Observation

- Paul's intense longing to see the Thessalonians was expressed in various practical ways:
 - He made every effort to see them (2:17)
 - He prayed night and day (3:10)
 - He recruited the help of others when he couldn't do any more (3:1-2)

In what similar/other ways have you seen others express their intense commitment to their ministry? (To yourself, to a church, to a community, etc)

- Paul prayed that:
 - God will clear the way for him to go and supply what is lacking in their faith (3:10-11)
 - The Thessalonians will have the same love for each other and for everyone else as Paul has for them (3:12)
 - Their hearts may be strengthened so they will be holy and blameless for the day Jesus comes (3:13)

What does this say about Paul's desires for the Thessalonians? What aspects of their lives is he focusing on? What aspects did he not focus on?

Meaning

- The words used here by Paul are very honest and intimate, they are not empty generic words, but filled with passion, thought and love; he does not hide his feelings and struggles from the Thessalonians. They would have felt loved, cared for and encouraged to keep the faith. Have you experienced this kind of genuine pastoral care? What would it look like in your context?

- Paul writes that the Thessalonians are 'our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming' (2:19), and because of their faith, '... now we live...' (3:8). In light of this, what does Paul's ministry mean to him? (See also John 4:31-38)

Application

- Do you share Paul's intense longing to see disciples grow in Christ?
 - If you are currently ministering to or discipling someone, what steps have you taken/can you take to really invest in their lives?

 - If you are not currently ministering to or discipling someone, what practical steps can you take to begin investing in the lives of those God may have called you to care for?

- Think of one or two people who have cared for and/or ministered to you. What can you do this week to encourage them and to bring them hope and joy as they labour (or have laboured) for you?

Pray for One Another

- Pray for what you have decided to apply as a result of this study. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you the power to put them into practice.
- Pray for the people you are currently discipling. Pray that you will grow in the way you pastorally care for them.
- Pray for the people who have been caring for you. Pray that they will experience joy from God as they pour themselves out for your sake.
- If you are not in a discipleship relationship yet, pray that you will find someone that you can walk together closely to grow in faith.
- See also crossculture.net.au/prayer for more prayer points.

HOW TO PLEASE GOD WITH OUR SEXUALITY

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Context

In previous chapters, Paul has reassured the Thessalonians that he has not abandoned them and that they are very dear to him. Now, we have reached the 'How(s)' of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians.

The apostle Paul taught these new believers, many of whom were from pagan backgrounds, many things about Christian moral behaviour. He refers to how 'you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God' (4:1). He adds, 'For you know what commandments we gave you' (4:2).

Just like Corinth's Aphrodite (the Greek goddess of sex and beauty), Thessalonica had Cabiri who was widely worshipped which led to a promiscuous city filled with temple prostitution. Here in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, Paul addresses the issue of lust and sexual impurity which many of the Thessalonians were struggling with. He urges his fellow brothers and sisters to abstain from sexual impurity and obey Jesus' command.

Observation

- In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, Paul teaches the Thessalonians about abstaining from sexual immorality. Make some observations on the nature and implications of sexual immorality as Paul describes in 4:3-8 (see further also Genesis 2:24; Psalm 119:9; Mark 10:6-9; Romans 13:14; 1 Corinthians 6:5).

Meaning

- Sexuality is a very personal and private matter. However, in 4:6, Paul mentions that by engaging in sexual immorality, we actually 'transgress' and 'wrong' our brothers (a.k.a others). In what way does our sexual immorality affect our brothers and/or sisters in Christ?

- Read Matthew 5:27-29. Jesus gives a very stern command/teaching about how to deal with sexual impurity. As an Apostle of Christ, Paul echoes Jesus and warns the Thessalonians of the dire consequence of this sin. Why is Jesus (and Paul)'s teaching against sexual immorality so severe?
- Paul instructs the Thessalonians to control their own body in holiness, and **not** 'in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God' (4:5; *underline added*).

John Piper, in his sermon of *This is the Will of God for You*, says: *'Knowing God is the path to sexual purity. And if you are in bondage to pornography and fantasies or fornication or adultery the immediate and long-term strategy of this war is: Know God! Know God! Lustful passion is the mark of the Gentiles who do not know God.'*

How does knowing God help us maintain sexual purity? (See also 1 Peter 1:14-15; Romans 1:23-28; Psalm 16:11; Psalm 37:4; Psalm 119:9-10)

Application

We live in a society where (some level of) pornography and promiscuity is tolerated, accepted and even welcomed. We are constantly under the temptation of sexual impurity, but we are not left in this world defenceless or without a solution.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Paul talks about how one must 'flee' from sexual immorality.

- What does it mean to 'flee from sexual immorality'? Why do you think Paul instructs us to 'flee' instead of to 'fight'?
- How do we apply this to our personal life?

Paul boldly wrote that 'whoever disregards this (sexual purity), disregards not man but God...' We must treat sexual purity with utmost severity and sincerity. This week, seek help if you are struggling with sexual immorality. If you know a friend who is struggling with this sin, reach out to him/her.

Pray for One Another

- Pray for what you have decided to apply as a result of this study. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you the power to put them into practice.
- Pray that you may grow in your knowledge of and relationship with God.
- Pray that you will experience victory over any sexual temptation in your life as you follow the leading of the Holy Spirit instead of your flesh.
- See also crossculture.net.au/prayer for more prayer points.

HOW TO WALK BEFORE OUTSIDERS

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

Context

After instructing and reminding Thessalonians to abstain from sexual immorality, Paul goes on to talk about how they should conduct themselves before each other and before outsiders. This is a further outworking of their relationship with God

Observation

- In 4:10, Paul commends the Thessalonians for their love for each other: 'For that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.' He then urges the brothers to do this '...more and more'.

Why do you think Paul encourages and commends them before exhorting them to do it more?

- Paul then instructs the Thessalonians to do three things in order to walk properly before outsiders:
 - a. aspire to live quietly,
 - b. mind your own affairs, and
 - c. work with your hands.

Why do you think Paul listed those things as ways to 'walk properly before outsiders'? (See also 1 John 3:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12; Ephesians 4:28)

Meaning

- Paul's instruction to walk properly before outsiders is by no means an end in itself. What impacts can Christians have in this world as they live in the ways that Paul exhorted? (See also 1 Peter 2:9-12; 1 Thessalonians 2:9-10; Matthew 5:13-16)

- The Bible commands Christians to make disciples and to preach the good news of Jesus (e.g., Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 10:15). In Acts 4:19, for example, Peter and John insisted that they would not be silenced but 'speak of what they have seen and heard.' Is the command to preach the good news in contradiction to Paul's instructions in 1 Thessalonians 4:11? Discuss.

Application

- John Stott writes in his commentary:

'One of the great weaknesses of contemporary evangelical Christianity is our comparative neglect of Christian ethics in both our teaching and our practice. In consequence, we have become known as people who preach the gospel than as those who live and adorn it. We are not always conspicuous in the community, as we should be, for...our personal honesty...,our simplicity of lifestyle and happy contentment in contrast to the greed of the consumer society, or for the stability in our homes in which unfaithfulness and divorce are practically unknown, and children grow up in the secure love of their parents.'

How true do you think this statement is of your church family?

- Based on your discussion, what changes do you need to implement in your life or what practices will you continue in order to walk properly before others in this world?

Pray for One Another

- Pray for what you have decided to apply as a result of this study. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you the power to put them into practice.
- Pray for wisdom for you to live well before your friends, colleagues, and family members.
- Pray that as a group, you will be known as those who love people both in deeds and in truth.
- See also crossculture.net.au/prayer for more prayer points.

HOW TO LIVE IN LIGHT OF THE RETURN OF JESUS

1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:11

Context

In the early parts of chapter 4, Paul instructed the Thessalonians how to live in order to please God (4:1). He now writes to give assurance concerning (1) the future of believers who die before Christ returns and (2) the subsequent judgement and/or blessing upon Christ's second coming.

The Thessalonians were wondering why many of their fellow believers had fallen asleep (died) and what would happen to them when Christ returns. Will they see each other again? What will happen on the day of the Lord (5:2)? The prophet Joel calls it 'the great and dreadful day of the Lord' (Joel 2:31).

Observation

- In 4:14-15, Paul encourages the Thessalonians regarding the Christians who have died ('asleep'). What do these verses tell us about the basis of a Christian's hope and assurance after death? (See also 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10, 1 Corinthians 15:14, 17-22, 6:14, and 2 Corinthians 4:14)
- In 4:16-17, Paul describes what will happen at the second coming of Christ. Read also 1 Corinthians 15:51-53. How would Paul's description of these end-time events/second coming of Christ help those who suffer from the loss of close relatives or friends?

Meaning

- The apostle tells the Thessalonians it was needless or useless to enquire about the particular time of Christ's coming. It is certain that he will come again, and there is a certain time appointed for his coming. Paul uses two

analogies to teach about the timing of Christ's return (5:1-3). What do these two analogies tell us about how the coming of Christ would be like? (See also Matthew 24:44, Mark 13:35-36, Revelation 16:15)

- In 5:6, Paul instructs Thessalonians to 'be sober,' and in 5:8, Paul likens Christians to soldiers and instructs them to 'be sober' by putting on the necessary armour for spiritual battle, particularly 'the breastplate of faith and love' and 'the helmet of the hope of salvation.' Why do you think Paul chooses these two? (Read also 5:9-11, Romans 13:12, Ephesians 6:13-17)

Application

- How would putting on 'the breastplate of faith and love' and 'the helmet of the hope of salvation' look like in our life?
- Both sections (4:13-18 and 5:1-5:11) of the Bible passage end with the practical exhortation to 'encourage one another' (4:18 and 5:11). What practical ways can you and your life group do to encourage one another to live in light of the return of Jesus?

Pray for One Another

- Pray for what you have decided to apply as a result of this study. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you the power to put them into practice.
- Pray that you will continue to be firm in your faith in Christ' death and resurrection.
- Pray that you will continue to be steadfast in your hope that Jesus will one day return to bring us to him.
- See also crossculture.net.au/prayer for more prayer points.

HOW TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER IN COMMUNITY

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Context

John Stott writes this in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28:

'The apostle Paul cherished high ideals for the Christian church. According to his characterization of it at the beginning of his letter (1:1-4), it is a community loved and chosen by God, drawing its life from him, and manifesting this divine life in the basic Christian graces of faith, love and hope. Such a community could justly be called a 'gospel church', both because it has been brought into being by the gospel and because it is continuously shaped by the gospel.'

In the beginning of the letter, Paul spends some time affirming their faith and reminding them of his love and care for them. Paul then reminds them that Jesus will return. This reality must inform the way they live. They ought to dwell *not* in fear nor in frivolous living. Rather, they can live in confidence and, at the same time, purposeful life. In verse 11, Paul says, 'Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.' What follows is Paul's elaboration on how Christians should encourage and build up one another in community.

Although the instructions that follow look like a random collection of moral exhortations to us, there is actually a very close parallel between 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22 and Paul's various instructions in Romans and Peter's instructions in 1 Peter. Therefore, G. L. Green suggests that 'Such parallels signal that Paul and others considered this teaching to be fundamental for new Christians in any church as they sought to define their lives and conduct vis-à-vis the moral currents that surrounded them. What seems, then, to be simply a random collection of moral exhortations fired in a shotgun pattern is really part of a set outline of teaching'

Observation

- Paul has littered this particular letter with the word 'brothers.' In this section alone, how many times does Paul use the word 'brothers'? What does it tell us about how we should consider and treat and interact with our fellow Christians in our community?

Meaning

- The first practical way to encourage one another in community is by considering how we should treat our leaders. Paul describes the leaders as those who 'labour among you,' 'are over you,' and 'admonish you.' These are not easy roles/tasks. How do 'respecting those who labour among you' (5:12) and 'esteeming them very highly in love' (5:13) look like in real life?
- Paul then gives instruction on how we are to respond to various persons in the community. It shows that pastoral responsibility is not placed solely in the hands of the church leadership. All members of the church have a loving duty towards one another.

Paul uses three different terms and instructions on how to encourage one another: the idle must be admonished, the fainthearted must be encouraged, and the weak must be helped. However, one instruction applies to all three of them: *be patient with them all*. How does each of them differ from (or be similar to) one another in practice?

- Paul gives many further instructions in the rest of the letter:
 - Do not repay evil with evil (5:15)
 - Rejoice always (5:16)
 - Pray without ceasing (5:17)
 - Give thanks in all circumstances (5:18)
 - Do not quench the Spirit (5:19)
 - Do not despise prophecies (5:20)
 - Hold fast what is good (5:21)

Then Paul closes it by simply saying, 'Abstain from every form of evil' (5:22).

Take time to discuss one or two instructions from the list, and talk about how it looks in your own personal and group life AND how the gospel and your identity in Christ may help you in fulfilling the commandment?

Application

- You have discussed Paul's various instructions in the way we relate to different individuals in our community: your leaders, those who are idle, the fainthearted, the weak, those who have done evil to you, and more.

Let's be very practical now.

Think of one or two individuals (or groups of individuals) in your community (it can be your life group or your ministry team or your church). What one or two concrete and practical things that you *will* start doing, starting from now, in order to encourage and build them up?

- Paul ends the letter by wishing them that God of peace himself may sanctify them completely. He also assures them that God who has called them is faithful, and he will surely do it (5:23-24).

How will this assurance affect the manner you carry out Paul's instructions?

Pray for One Another

- Pray for what you have decided to apply as a result of this study (or this series). Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you the power to put them into practice.
- Thank God for your leaders (group, church or community) who have laboured for you.
- Thank God for his love and grace in Jesus Christ that he has poured out for your salvation.
- Thank God for his faithfulness in making sure that your sanctification will be complete.
- See also crossculture.net.au/prayer for more prayer points.