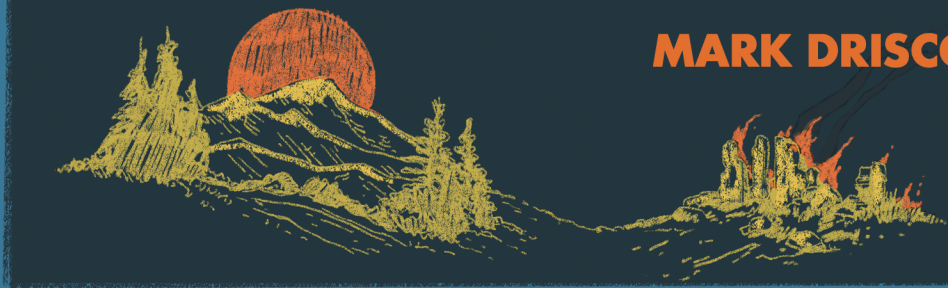
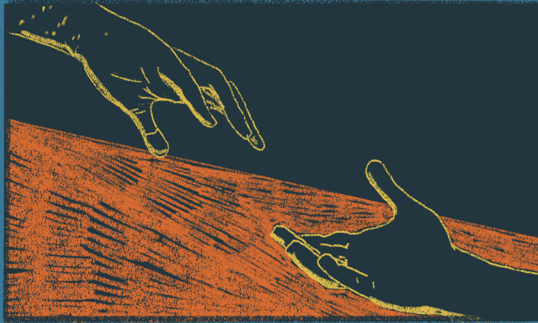


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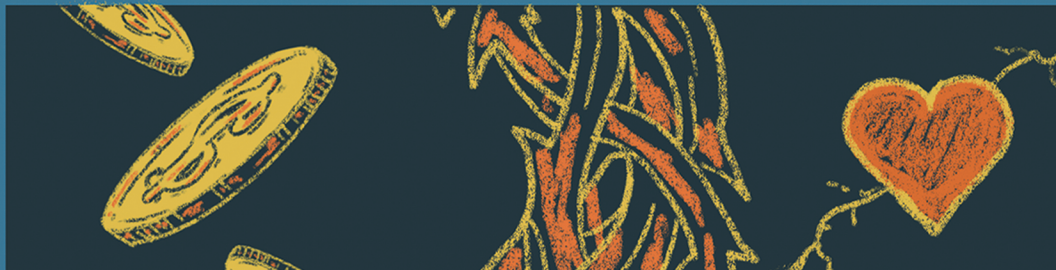
**MORE
HEAVEN**



**LESS
HELL**



**AN END TIMES
SURVIVAL GUIDE
FROM 1 THESSALONIANS**



More Heaven. Less Hell.

**An End Times Survival Guide
from 1 Thessalonians**

REALFAITH.COM

By Mark Driscoll

More Heaven. Less Hell: An End Times Survival Guide from
1 Thessalonians

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REAL GROUPS WITH REALFAITH

Faith that does not result in good deeds is not real faith.
James 2:20, TLB

At RealFaith, we believe that the Word of God isn't just for us to read, it's to be obeyed. And living in community with fellow believers is one of the ways God the Father allows us to learn and grow to become more like His Son Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. We do this through something called Real Groups. Here are a few tips to start your own.

1. Invite

Invite your friends, neighbors, family, coworkers, and enemies, because they all need Jesus whether they know Him or not! Whether it's a group of men, women, families, students, or singles, explain that you'd like to start a weekly sermon-based small group based on Pastor Mark Driscoll's sermons.

2. Listen to the sermon on realfaith.com or on the RealFaith app

You can host a viewing party to watch RealFaith Live and discuss it all at once, or you can watch it separately and gather to discuss it at another time that works for the group.

3. Get into God's Word

In addition to watching the sermon, make sure you and all group members have a study guide from realfaith.com for the current sermon series. There are questions for personal reflection as well as for groups that can guide your devotional times throughout the week. You can also sign up for Daily Devos at realfaith.com.

4. Gather together

Whether at someone's house, a public place, or through something like Zoom, meet weekly to discuss the sermon and what God has taught you through it. The great thing about Real Groups is that you don't all have to be in the same location. You can talk about sermon takeaways, what stood out to you in the study guide, or what God taught you in His Word that week. Focus on personal application as much as possible.

5. Pray

When you gather, feel free to share prayer requests, pray for each other on the spot, and continue praying throughout the week. Prayer is a great unifying force that God gives us to strengthen His family.

6. Share

Send us photos, videos, testimonies, and updates of how your group is doing to hello@realfaith.com. You might even be featured on our RealFaith Live show!

We will be praying for you and your group and look forward to hearing what God does through it.

CHAPTER 1

We Are Living in the Last Days

We are living in the last days.

If you have the Holy Spirit and have walked with Jesus, you can see it in the world and sense it in your soul. Younger believers may not fully understand how dark our world has become, because it was the world they were born into. However, if you ask any older saint who has been walking with the Lord for many decades, they will tell you that what is celebrated in the world, and tolerated in the church, are so obviously dark, diabolical, and demonic that they are shocked and appalled. Older saints could have never fathomed such things as the denial of men and women and ensuing craziness that includes boys in girls' locker rooms after competing in female sports, genital mutilation of children in the name of "care", sexualization of minors, hatred of the Bible, eroding of freedom due to the encroaching of government in seemingly every corner of culture, legalization of even hard drugs, dishonor of marriage, and celebration of abortion.

Even non-Christians can sense that we are living in the end times of the last days. A recent Pew Research Center survey says, "In the United States, 39% of adults say they believe 'we are living in the end times'...Christians are divided on this question, with 47% saying we are living in the end times, including majorities in the historically Black (76%) and

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evangelical (63%) Protestant traditions. Viewed more broadly, the share of Protestants who say we are living in the end times is greater than the corresponding share among Catholics (55% vs. 27%) ...The survey also explored Americans' views about a core tenet of Christianity: the belief that Jesus will eventually return to Earth, in what is often called the 'second coming.' When asked if Jesus 'will return to Earth someday,' more than half of all U.S. adults (55%), including three-quarters of Christians, say this will happen. Protestants in the evangelical (92%) and historically Black (86%) traditions are more likely than other Christians to say there will eventually be a second coming of Jesus. Respondents who said they believe Jesus will return to Earth were also asked how certain they are that this will happen during their lifetime. One-in-ten Americans say they believe the second coming of Jesus will definitely or probably occur during their lifetime, 27% are not sure if Jesus will return in their lifetime..."¹

In the Bible, the end times or "Last Days"^a are also referred to as the "last time"^b, and "last hour".^c The "last days" refers to the period of time between Jesus' First Coming to save sinners and His Second Coming to join Heaven and Earth into the eternal Kingdom of God with people sentenced to Heaven and Hell forever. The Bible refers to Jesus' Second Coming which brings the "last days" to a close and ushers in the resurrection of the dead and eternal state as the "Day of the Lord", or simply "the Day".^d

Thus far, the "last days" have been roughly two thousand years. We are living in the time between the

^a Joel 2:28; John 6:39-40; Acts 2:17-18; Hebrews 1:1-2 ^b 1 Peter 1:5, 1:20; Jude 18 ^c 1 John 2:18 ^d see, e.g., Isaiah 2:12-22; Ezekiel 13:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; Amos 5:18-24; Zephaniah 1:7, 14

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times, in the middle of history. Looking back, we can see God's prophecies regarding the First Coming of our Lord having been fulfilled, and we can look forward to God fulfilling the remaining prophecies about the Second and Final Coming of our Lord.

The Satanic Six

The Bible is clear that these "last days" would be marked by six increased evil and demonic activities:

1. An increase in stress, anxiety, and mental illness.^a
2. An increase in scoffers who mock the Bible and those who believe it.^b
3. An increase in mockers of Christian morality who encourage pleasure, especially sexual sin.^c
4. An increasing love for false teachers and corresponding hatred for Bible preachers.^d
5. An increase in people who are anti-Christ, leading a massive counterfeit "Christian" apostasy, which paves the way for the Antichrist.^e
6. An increase in wealth, comfort, and a sense that God is not needed for a successful life or concern for eternity.^f

When Jesus died on a Friday, it seemed like all hope was lost. Then, everything turned around quickly and miraculously when Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday. Like Christ, at a time when it seems like the Christian Church is basically dead, gone, irrelevant, outdated, and defeated, the Lord Jesus Christ will return suddenly and unexpectedly. This will bring about the resurrection of the dead, final judgment, and

^a 2 Timothy 3:1 ^b 2 Peter 3:3 ^c Jude 18 ^d 2 Timothy 4:1-4 ^e 1 John 2:18-19
^f James 5:3

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sentencing to Heaven or Hell for everyone.^o

This is the theme and encouragement of Paul's letter to a local church called 1 Thessalonians and all believers who have also read these words:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 – Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Longing for Home

For those who know the Lord Jesus and believe in His coming Kingdom, living on this fallen cursed planet can be very dark, discouraging, and disorienting. This longing for Home causes Christians to ask numerous

^o John 6:39-40, 6:44, 6:54, 11:24, 12:48

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questions. In the New Testament, there are parts of the Bible where the author is answering questions that were sent to him by local church leaders on behalf of people in the church. One example is 1 Corinthians. Throughout the letter, Paul frequently quotes directly from the letter he received from the Corinthians.^a He also notifies the reader of when he is transitioning from one topic to another with the simple phrase “now” to answer specific questions they sent him in their letter that he is answering in his letter.^b This is precisely what is also happening in 1 Thessalonians as Paul is also answering questions the leaders in the local church were asking him. One Bible commentator says, “The apostle’s use of ‘now about’ (4:9, 13; 5:1), which is like the way he introduces answers to points in a letter the Corinthians wrote to him (1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1, etc.)”²

Since we don’t have the letter that the Thessalonians sent to Paul, we can only try to determine their questions based upon his answers. Here are some of the likely questions that they had, and that many – if not most – Christians still have:

1. How long do we need to wait for Jesus’ Second Coming?
2. How will we know when human history is coming to an end?
3. What will Satan, demons, and the wicked be doing before the return of Jesus?
4. What should we do while we wait for Jesus’ return?
5. What happens to people who die before Jesus returns?
6. How do we discern who is telling the truth and who is lying to us?

^a e.g. 6:12, 6:13, 8:5, 10:23 ^b e.g. 1 Corinthians 7:1, 7:8, 7:25, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1, 16:12

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When presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is common for the Christian to tell the non-Christian that if you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you go to Heaven when you die. That is true, but not complete. Jesus is not just for dying, but also for living. Eternal life does not begin the day you die, but rather the day you are saved by Jesus. Before you go to Heaven, Heaven comes to you. This is why Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”.^o This is the big idea behind the main message of 1 Thessalonians: “How do we invite Heaven down while we are surrounded by Hell?” This is also why I chose the title for this series, “More Heaven. Less Hell: An End Times Survival Guide from 1 Thessalonians.” We will get to know this church in the next chapter.

^o Matthew 6:9-10

CHAPTER 2

Getting to Know the Thessalonians

In the good old days when I was growing up, we rode dinosaurs to school and had a telephone that plugged into a wall with a cord. Trying to get more than two people on a telephone conversation was impossible because only one person could hear what the other person on the line was saying. Thankfully, our new smart phones have a few helpful features that our old dumb phones lacked. Today, we can add people to the conversation if they are not present through a conference call, or we can turn on the speaker phone feature so that more than one person can listen to the entire conversation.

Reading and studying books of the Bible can be a bit like listening in to a conversation on an old phone. There is a conversation between the author and the audience, but we only eavesdrop on half of the conversation and what the author says. For this reason, the more we can know about the audience receiving and reading the letter, the better perspective and deeper insight we have on what exactly is meant by the words on the pages of our Bible.

Getting to know 1 Thessalonians

First, the book is written in the form of an ancient letter. A Bible commentary says, “First Thessalonians belongs to the genre of the ancient letter and includes

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all the major sections of this genre—an initial greeting (1 Thess 1:1), a thanksgiving (1 Thess 1:2–10; possibly 1 Thess 2:13–16), a main body (1 Thess 2:1–3:13), exhortations (1 Thess 4:1–5:22), and a closing (1 Thess 5:23–28).”³

Second, 1 Thessalonians 1:1 opens by saying it is written, “To the church of the Thessalonians...” The letter was written to a local church speaking to timeless issues that were also timely in their day.

Third, 1 Thessalonians was supposed to be read aloud to the entire church. 1 Thessalonians 5:27 says, “I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.”

Fourth, Paul is the primary author, along with others who are traveling with him and contributing to this book of the Bible. A Bible commentary says, “Many believe that the Thessalonian letters are the earliest written by Paul. Though the apostle and his team had little time in Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17:2), the church he founded there grew rapidly, and reached out to promote the Gospel in the surrounding province.”⁴

Another Bible commentary says, “The letter claims to have been written by Paul and his associates, Silvanus (or Silas) and Timothy (1:1). Paul’s name appears again in 2:18 without mention of Silvanus or Timothy. Evidence from the early church unanimously supports Paul as the writer of 1 Thessalonians, and scholars have generally accepted Pauline authorship since the early 20th century, in part because the letter’s style and vocabulary match other Pauline texts... Unlike Paul’s other letters, there are no further titles attached to the senders, such as ‘apostle’... (compare Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Tit 1:1) or ‘servant/slave’... (compare Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:1)...This absence

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might indicate group authorship, as Paul does not appeal to apostolic authority but to the collective authority of the senders as founders of the church in Thessalonica. In addition, the letter uses 'we' instead of 'I' 96.7 percent of the time, in stark contrast to Paul's other letters (with the exception of 2 Thessalonians; for example, the ratio in Philippians is 8.7 percent)...Given the likelihood of group authorship, the few 'I' references (e.g., 1 Thess 2:18; 3:5; 5:27) suggest that Paul led the composition of the letter..."⁵

Fifth, regarding when the book was written, a Bible commentator says, "First Thessalonians appears to have been written from Corinth between AD 49 and 52, shortly after the establishment of the Thessalonian church. This can be surmised from Paul's mention of Timothy rejoining him at Corinth from Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1–2, 6; compare Acts 17:13–15; 18:1, 5). During Paul's time in Corinth, he appeared before the proconsul Gallio (Acts 18:1–17), whose tenure is dated to AD 51–52 or 52–53..."⁶

Getting to Know the Thessalonian Church

The ancient city of Thessalonica, which I visited with our family some years ago, is a well-established historical site. Founded in 315 BC, and later overtaken by the Romans in 167 BC, it became the capital city of the Roman province of Macedonia. Because the city was at the intersection of two major highways (the Via Egnatia), as well as deep port harbors on the Aegean Sea, it was a strategic location for commerce, travel, and church planting.

A Bible commentary says, "Ancient Thessalonica's population included native Macedonians, Greek immigrants, Latin-speaking people, and likely a

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significant number of Jews. The city's religions included the cults of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and joy, and of Cabirus, a Thracian god believed to protect sailors and aid fertility...Worship of Greek deities such as Zeus, Aphrodite, and Demeter also was common, and, as loyal citizens of the Roman Empire, the inhabitants of Thessalonica would have worshiped the emperor, as well... This prevalence of religious cults meant that Thessalonica was 'replete with sexually suggestive activity and imagery'...a factor that sheds light on the letter's call for holiness in 4:3-7."⁷

Paul arrived at Thessalonica with Timothy and Silas, preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, and many people were saved, but a riot of opposition arose in response, forcing him to leave the city or face death.

Acts 17:1-10 reports:

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they

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are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea...

The mention of a synagogue indicates that there were at least ten Jewish men, along with their families, who were regularly meeting to worship the God of the Old Testament and await the coming of the Messiah. The fact that Paul preached there for three successive sabbaths, teaching that Jesus was God who died for our sin and rose for our salvation in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, resulted in some becoming worshippers of Jesus Christ who served as the founding families of the new church. The presence of God-fearing Greeks who converted to Christianity also indicates that there were non-Jews who had begun to believe the Old Testament. God was preparing both Jew and Gentile in Thessalonica to be saved and for Thessalonica to be an outpost for missions and church planting throughout the entire region.

When the Holy Spirit and God’s servants do ministry, unholy demonic spirits and evildoers do anti-ministry. This is precisely what happened as a revival was followed by a riot forcing Paul to flee for his life, leaving the new church and new Christians confused, scared, lacking leadership, and needing love and leadership. Paul’s absence from the new Christians and new church caused confusion and a leadership vacuum. A Bible commentary explains, “Paul wanted to go back to Thessalonica, but his failed attempts to return resulted in his sending Timothy in his place (1 Thess

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2:17–3:5). Timothy’s report of the Thessalonians’ faith then prompted Paul to write to the fledgling church while he was still in Corinth.¹⁸

Lastly, it is entirely probable that after the riotous mob cooled down, Paul could have returned to the church at Thessalonica. On other occasions, Paul and Timothy did in fact travel through that same region of Macedonia.⁹

⁹ Acts 19:21-22; 20:1-3

CHAPTER 3

Themes in 1 Thessalonians

The good old days.

There is a powerful myth that the days before us were better and easier than the days we are in. This causes people to long for yesterday, idealizing the past without realizing that yesterday had its' own problems as well. Solomon, in all wisdom, warns of this “good old days syndrome” saying in Ecclesiastes 7:10 (NLT), “Don’t long for ‘the good old days.’ This is not wise.”

It is not uncommon for well-meaning but not the best-read Christians with “good old days syndrome” to opine about the first Christians in idyllic terms saying something like, “I wish we could be like the early Church”. There is a powerful myth that Christianity started pure and has gone downhill since. When it comes to the early Christian Church that rose on the earth following Jesus’ resurrection from death and ascension into Heaven, their local churches were, just like ours, ranging from awesome to awful.

For example, Revelation 2-3 records a series of messages from Jesus in Heaven to seven different local churches scattered in what is modern day Turkey. First, the church at Ephesus is encouraged for having good doctrine and suffering persecution, but rebuked for being unloving, non-relational, and caring more about winning arguments than loving people (2:1-7). Second, the local church at Smyrna was a persecuted

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church that remained faithful, and Jesus had only good things to say about them (2:8-11). Three, the woke local church at Pergamum was heretical with tolerance of false teaching that encouraged sexual sin, so they were rebuked and called to repentance (2:12-17). Four, the local church at Thyatira was a classic “progressive” church much like mainstream liberal denominations that had some ministry success despite opposition but tolerated the Jezebel spirit with false prophecies and seduction to sexual sin (2:18-29). Five, the local church at Sardis was a dead church devoid of life in the Spirit – the kind you drive by, and no one seems to ever enter, and nothing seems to ever happen, which is why Jesus had nothing good to say about them (3:1-6). Six, the local church in Philadelphia was loving, healthy, resilient, and faithful, which is why Jesus only had good things to say about them (3:7-13). Seven, the local church in Laodicea was lukewarm – a country club kind of church where people with money and power did not want to be inconvenienced for their faith – something Jesus has nothing nice to say about (3:14-22).

Church Challenges

Like the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia, the church at Thessalonica had endured persecution but remained faithful and loving. The Thessalonians were a godly, healthy, loving church, suffered through hardship and opposition as new Christians (including a riot), and much like a child that needs to be raised, needing to have their fears calmed and questions answered. Like many Christians, they became very interested in the end times and asked the same sorts of questions that new Christians have every day since (e.g. what happens when we die, when is Jesus Coming back, and how do

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we live in the meantime?).

With Paul absent from Thessalonica, the enemies of the gospel of Jesus Christ immediately began a slander campaign against Paul. The same demonic tactic is used today. If you cannot defeat the message, then defame the messenger. The fake news of the day against Paul was that he only wanted their money and was a greedy huckster who rolled into town to con them, steal from them, and abandon them because he did not love them. Sadly, this was a common occurrence in the first century as religious and philosophical teachers were guilty of these very charges. Paul, however, was completely innocent.

The new Christians and their church were facing some difficult challenges:

- Pagans in the world outside the church were persecuting the new believers (2:14).
- The godless, worldly culture was constantly pressuring new believers to the same kind of prideful tolerance of sexual sin that continues in our day (4:4-8).
- Some people in the church were taking advantage of kind believers, mooching off their generosity instead of getting a job and earning their own living (4:11-12).
- Some new Christians were confused and thought Paul had guaranteed that Jesus would return before they died, which did not happen (4:13-18).
- Some were also worried about how and when Jesus would return and had lots of anxiety and questions (5:1-11).
- There may have been some sort of growing conflict between some church leaders and church members that needed to be mediated (5:12-13).
- Like most new Christians, they were trying to

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figure out how the Holy Spirit works and how the more supernatural spiritual gifts should operate in the church (5:19-20).

Like a loving father patiently instructing a young child, Paul's tone throughout the letter is very kind and encouraging. These people are not rebellious or religious, they respect his God-given authority, believe the Bible, and have a lot to learn as new Christians.

Making matters worse, the young Christians who were saved under Paul's preaching would have held him in high trust. Knowing this, some deceivers did the most despicable thing – writing a letter of false doctrines and pretending it was from Paul. In his following letter, Paul addresses this forgery and lies saying in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, “Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way...” What God creates, Satan counterfeits. Paul wrote a genuine book of the Bible, and Satan wrote a counterfeit pretending to be a book of the Bible. The new Christians were in the difficult position of having to decide which was true and which was false. A Bible commentary says, “He writes in turn about the revelation of Christ (chapter 1), the rebellion of Antichrist (chapter 2), and, in the light of these, the responsibility of Christians meanwhile (chapter 3).”⁹

Here are some examples of the lovingkindness throughout the letter:

- The letter opens in 1:2 with “Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”

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- Throughout the book, Paul notes their vibrant prayer life (1:11–12; 2:16–17; 3:16–18) as well as how much he appreciated them praying for him (3:1–3).
- The new Christians are honored for the hardship they have suffered for Jesus (1:5–10, 2:14, 3:3–4).
- Paul thanked them for being a comfort to him during his sufferings (3:7).
- They are noted as being good at loving one another (4:9–10).
- The theme of encouragement appears throughout the letter (2:12, 3:2, 4:18, 5:11, 5:14).
- The theme of “hope” appears throughout the book, often in connection to the Lordship of Jesus presently, and His Second Coming (1:3, 2:19, 4:13, 5:8).

Who is God & Who are You?

There are perhaps two foundational things that every Christian needs to learn early in their faith walk. One, who is the God they believe in? Two, who are they as a believer? Paul threads these two themes throughout 1 Thessalonians as nearly the entire church were new Christians.

Who is God?

One, the letter opens by commending the believers for “how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1:9). This one true God is contrasted with demonic false gods, and the entire Trinity is spoken of repeatedly.

God the Father is clearly mentioned at least four times (1:1; 1:3, 3:11, 3:13). He is affectionately referred

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to in relationship to the church family as “our God and Father” (1:3, 3:11, 3:13). God the Father and God the Son are also mentioned together at least four times (1:1, 1:3, 3:11, 3:13), including as the source of “grace to you and peace” (1:1).

God the Son, Jesus, is clearly mentioned by His name at least 15 times (1:1, 1:3, 1:10, 2:14, 2:15, 2:19, 3:11, 3:13, 4:1, 4:2, 4:14, 5:9, 5:18, 5:23, 5:28). Like the Father, Jesus Christ is referred to affectionately in relation to the church family as “our Lord Jesus Christ” at least 7 times (1:3, 2:19, 3:11, 3:13, 5:9, 5:23, 5:28). Jesus is clearly mentioned by His title “Christ” or anointed by the Holy Spirit, at least 10 times (1:1, 1:3, 2:6, 2:14, 3:2, 4:16, 5:9, 5:18, 5:23, 5:28). Jesus Christ is said to be the source of “grace to you and peace” (1:1), object of our “hope in our Lord Jesus Christ”, the “Son from heaven... raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1:10), “killed” for us (2:15), “coming” for eternal victory “with all his saints” (2:19, 3:13), source of direction for finding God’s will (3:11), person we follow in our “walk...to please God” (4:1), teacher of God’s people through godly leaders (4:2), because “we believe that Jesus died and rose again...through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep” (4:14), this will happen because, “the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (4:16), because, “God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:9), which allows us to “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (5:18), and lastly, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord

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Jesus Christ”, because “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (5:23,28).

God the Holy Spirit is mentioned at least three times (1:5, 1:6, 4:8). The Holy Spirit is the one who brought the “gospel...not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1:5), to empower believers to become “imitators...of the Lord” despite “much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit” (1:6), and to give them discernment to know what is true and of God versus false and not from God because it is “God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you” (4:8).

Who are You?

As brand-new believers in Jesus Christ, Paul was keen to establish their identity in Christ throughout the letter. Here are some of the warm and encouraging identities that he says the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon them:

- Members of God’s family “the church” (1:1)
- Recipients of “grace...and peace” (1:1)
- Adopted into God’s family as “brothers loved by God...he has chosen you” (1:4)
- Relationally treasured as “very dear” (2:8)
- People who have “received the word of God” (2:13)
- People who for their faith in Christ have “suffered” (2:14)
- Beloved by church leaders as “our glory and joy” (2:20)
- Unlike the world, people “taught by God to love one another” (4:9)
- Taken by God into the light so they are “not in darkness” (5:4)
- Eternally “not destined...for wrath, but to obtain

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salvation” (5:9)

The new Christians and church were separated from Jesus, who had returned to Heaven, separated from Paul the Bible preaching leader who God used to save them and plant their church, and deceased relatives who had gone to Heaven with Jesus. Paul assures these dear people that they would be reunited with him and Timothy, along with the deceased believers who were “asleep” as their bodies lie in the ground awaiting resurrection, and Jesus Christ, who would return when the time was right to raise the dead, judge their enemies, reward the saints, and establish the Kingdom of God forever!

CHAPTER 4

1 Thessalonians Personal and Group Study Guide

Week 1: More Thanking. Less Griping.

Scripture to Read: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 – We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Commentary:

When I held our first child, a beautiful little brunette girl, it dawned on me that I really had no idea what I was doing. Sure, I'd read books on parenting, done Bible studies on parenting, interviewed good parents, and even had my own parents to glean from. Reading about parenting or watching someone else parent is completely different, however, than actually raising another human being. By the time we had our second child, an active blonde boy, I assumed that I knew a lot more about parenting the time around. This illusion was quickly vanquished, however, because our second child was literally nothing like our first child. What worked in raising one child did not work for the other. This pattern continued through the process of parenting our five

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children, who are now getting married and having their own children.

Pastoring a church is like raising a child – every one is different, has their own unique personality, and no two are exactly the same. This truth explains the difference in tone and messaging between various books of the New Testament. Each is written by a leader filled with the Holy Spirit to a local church family dealing with real issues that varied.

On the far right, there were highly religious law-based, non-relational legalistic churches that were heavy on rules and light on relationships. Entire books of the Bible, like Galatians, were written to rebuke these churches and their leaders for putting burdens on people instead of blessings.

On the far left, there were highly rebellious, arrogant, worldly churches marked by sin of every sort and kind, especially sexual. The books of 1-2 Corinthians were written as a series of stinging rebukes to the local churches in the city of Corinth, as they acted like Pride month and Mardi Gras should be combined into a constant lifestyle as an abuse of God's grace.

In the middle, there were all kinds of local churches with their unique strengths and weaknesses, just like in every day since, including today. Among the healthiest churches in the New Testament is the church at Thessalonica to which 1-2 Thessalonians is written. Paul's tone is very loving and encouraging, noting that the "gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction".

Importantly, Paul's first line reveals he is writing to, "the church". The original Greek word "ekklēsia" is the most common word used to refer to the Christian community of believers. A Bible commentary says, "In the NT, the word *ekklēsia*, which can refer to a

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“gathering” or assembly of people, is used specifically to refer to the community of Jesus’ followers.”¹⁰

Christians are supposed to be in a local church relationally connected to one another and under Bible teaching to grow in their faith and lovingly support one another. The New Testament knows nothing about Lone Ranger Christianity and, before sin entered the world, the only thing God said was not good was for us to be alone. This reality has become obvious since the COVID season in which many churches closed and people isolated at home, having ever since struggled with depression and mental health. God’s people need each other, especially when the culture is against them, as was the case in the days of 1 Thessalonians, as well as our own day.

The new Christians had suffered for their faith with joy and remained fully devoted to the Lord and the Scriptures as they “received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.” Paul also tells us they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Idols are part of powerful counterfeit demonic spirits, often including sin of every kind, especially sexual, which Paul speaks of in both of his letters to the church at Thessalonica. The new Christians were surrounded by the seduction of idolatry by the same spirits at work in our day in everything from entertainment to politics and government. As one Bible commentator says, “A variety of pagan deities were worshiped in Thessalonica. Archaeologists have discovered a temple dedicated to the Egyptian god Serapis [or Osiris the god of sexual fertility and the realm of the dead], where a board of some fourteen priests ensured that the rites of the Nile were performed diligently. Inscriptions unearthed from this temple indicate that the Egyptian goddess

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Isis, who is associated with culture and mysteries, was also worshiped here. Epigraphic evidence reveals that Dionysus, the god of wine and joy, was among the more influential religious cults in Thessalonica. The patron god of the city, however, was Cabirus... Other gods worshiped in Thessalonica included Aphrodite [goddess of sex], Demeter [sensual goddess of fertility and happiness], Zeus [supreme god of the environment], and Asclepius [the god of healing willing to save your body to damn your soul].”¹¹

To establish their new identity in Christ, they are told that they are “loved by God”, and “chosen” with God the Father acting much like a wonderful earthly father who adopts a child that he loves with his whole heart. The tone is incredibly warm and encouraging.

These new believers remained devoted to loving one another. There is very little correction throughout the letter, as it is instead filled with encouragement for what they are doing well and answers to questions they are struggling with. Too often, the only press that local churches receive is bad press. There always have been some truly healthy local churches and sadly they seem to never make the news. The church at Thessalonica is simply a wonderful local church known for its “work of faith and labor of love...steadfastness...example...[as]... the word of the Lord sounded forth from you...” (1:3,7-8)

The reason Paul is writing a letter is because he could not be present. A riot that threatened his life forced him to flee shortly after planting the church.^a As is always the case, when God builds up ministry, Satan recruits some troublemakers to try and tear it down. Making matters worse, these liars doing anti-ministry were speaking complete lies about Paul.

^a Acts 17:5-10

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One, they said he was a religious con man who lied to them about Jesus, took their money, and left town as a crook. Paul refutes this claim saying, “You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake” (1:5). Paul further defends himself against the false charge in the next chapter (2:1-12).

Two, they said Paul did not love them and abandoned them because he did not care. Paul refutes this claim saying, “We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2-3).

Three, they wrote a false letter pretending to be Paul, which caused great confusion among the new Christians.^a For these reasons, Paul writes a letter, which he commands be written to the whole church.^b Paul’s two letters to the church were intended to correct the false teaching that pretended to be from him. Timothy is also sent on Paul’s behalf to confirm both Paul’s character and doctrine as his most trustworthy coworker and spiritual son.^c

Paul closes his introduction by revealing the overarching theme of his letter, which is that Christians on earth must “wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1:10). This theme of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to raise the dead, judge the sinners, reward the saints, lift the curse, and unveil the Kingdom is consistent throughout the letter, helping God’s people have the long view of things as this is the closest we will ever be to Hell, while our enemies are as close to Heaven as they will ever be.

^a 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 ^b 1 Thessalonians 5:27 ^c 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:1

Dig Deeper.

1. Imagine yourself sitting with the believers in Thessalonica when the letter from Paul was first read to them as they gathered together. Slowly read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 and highlight each thing that is said that would have been an encouragement to you.
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 and make note of what is said about God and about you as a believer in Jesus Christ.
3. Look up 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 where enemies of the gospel wrote a counterfeit letter pretending to be Paul, which was a demonic spiritual warfare attack on the local church.

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. If anyone in the group is new, take some time to introduce yourselves and welcome anyone who is new to the group.
2. 1 Thessalonians is an ancient letter written to an ancient local church that is commended for being healthy, loving, and longsuffering. What are some of the most encouraging church experiences you have had? Why is it important to encourage believers rather than just criticize them?
3. What are some of the most encouraging things that stood out to you in 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10?
4. Paul talks about praying for the church (1:2). How can the group be praying for one another? Spend some time praying over the requests of each person.

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Week 2: More Giving. Less Taking.

Scripture to Read: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

1 Thessalonians 2:3-4 – For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

Commentary:

I grew up in a poor working-class neighborhood without any fancy stores. On the weekends, as a kid, I remember going to the swap meet on Saturdays. It was held in the parking lot of a giant drive-in movie theater. The entire complex was filled with rows of vendors selling most anything you could imagine.

I remember seeing some things that were fancy but selling for cheap. For example, brand new concert t-shirts, designer handbags and luggage, along with name brand clothing were all very cheaply priced. I asked my mom why these things were so much cheaper at the swap meet and she told me “they are fakes, these are not genuine”. At that moment, I suddenly learned what “knock off” meant.

What God creates, Satan counterfeits.

God is the Designer. Satan is the faker. And the entire world is one giant swap meet filled with knock offs.

This simple truth is the key to understanding spiritual warfare and having discernment, or the ability to distinguish between the two. The new Christians in Thessalonica were forced to discern between the following as examples:

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- People who are for God (1:1-5) vs people who are for Satan (2:18)
- Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy vs false teachers (1:1, 2:1-16)
- Paul's real letter vs false teachers' false letters (5:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3)
- People with the Holy Spirit vs people without the Holy Spirit (1:5, 5:12-22)
- People who believe the Bible vs people who do not believe the Bible (1:5, 2:13)
- People who turn from idols vs people who trust in idols (1:9)
- People who believe in Jesus Christ vs people who do not (1:9)
- People who suffer for Christ vs people who cause Christians to suffer (3:1-7)
- People who control desires (especially sexual) vs people who do not (4:1-5)
- People rewarded at Jesus' Second Coming vs people who will be punished (5:1-11)

In any battle, the ultimate goal is to eliminate the highest-ranking leader on the other side of the fight. In Thessalonica, this person was the Apostle Paul. Acts 17:1-9 is the historical record of how the church there was planted. Paul and his ministry team arrived in town, preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, many were saved in a revival, then a riot broke out trying to put down the revival, and Paul fled for his life, which explains why he sent Timothy and other leaders along with a letter – because he could not be physically present.

In Paul's absence, as is the case in every age, those who were anti-Christ were also anti-Paul. They began spreading lots of lies about him, which would have confused and concerned the new Christians who were

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saved under his preaching. History has confirmed that Paul has one of the most brilliant minds in human history. In this section of the letter, we also see that he has one of the most tender hearts. He is clear that the driving intent of his entire ministry is the glory of God, saying he wants “to please God”.

In math class, a good teacher will not allow a student to just present an answer, but also requires them to show their work. In showing their work, the teacher wants to see not only what their conclusion is, but why they came to that conclusion. In this section of the letter, Paul is showing his work and assuming the sovereignty of God over his afflictions, believing that everything he and the people are suffering is ultimately being used “by God who tests our hearts”. Sometimes, like Paul, when we have “suffered” in “conflict” and been “shamefully treated”, we can get bitter against those who wrong us, or even bitter against God. Paul’s example is incredibly helpful in our day when those who stand up for God get cut down by others. Instead of using his difficulties to make him bitter, Paul uses them to make him better. His motives become purer, and his heart becomes warmer as he begins thinking more about the people who are hurting than his own hurts, trying to set an example for them as their leader. The next time you hear negative gossip about a pastor, this chapter is a good reminder that leaders are imperfect people used by a perfect God and innocent until proven guilty. Paul explains his love in terms of his head, heart, and hands so that his convictions, emotions, and service were pure in the sight of God.

- Head – “...we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict...we have been approved by God to be

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- entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God..." (2:2,4)
- Heart – "...our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive...we never came with words of flattery...God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us...like a father with his children..." (2:3,5-8,11)
 - Hands – "...we never came...with a pretext for greed—God is witness...For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers." (2:5,9-10)

There is a common phrase that is helpful when trying to determine if information you receive is true or false: "Consider the source". Before you can discern what to believe, you must first determine who to believe. In this section, Paul shares his testimony as he does elsewhere to other churches.^o A few thousand years after 1-2 Thessalonians were written, we know a lot about Paul and nothing about the enemies he faced. We know about the people saved by the Holy Spirit under Paul's preaching of the gospel, and there

^o Acts 22:3-8,15-22; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Galatians 1:11-24; Philippians 3:1-11

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is no record of converts attributed to his critics. God has sustained the two letters Paul wrote as books of the Bible and has chosen to forever erase the false book penned by his foes. And, while we are aware of the church Paul planted and served in Thessalonica, there is no record of his enemies doing the same, as Paul was doing ministry and his agitators were doing anti-ministry. Today, nothing has changed. If someone is doing nothing for you but attacking the people and things God has used to bless you, consider the source.

Dig Deeper.

1. In addition to 1 Thessalonians 2, look up the places where Paul shares his testimony to validate his ministry (Acts 22:3-8,15-22; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Galatians 1:11-24; Philippians 3:1-11).
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 slowly and prayerfully, asking the Holy Spirit to help you see and feel what Paul is communicating from his perspective. What burden would you have felt as their founding pastor if you had to leave the young church during a crisis knowing that they were suffering and doubting your love for them?
3. In Paul's next letter, read his request for how the people who cannot be with him can minister to him (2 Thessalonians 3:1-5). Why is praying for Christian leaders who are under attack much better than entertaining gossip or even joining the mob?

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. A crisis separated Paul from the church he planted and loved (Acts 17:1-9). Have you ever been part of a church or ministry where the leader(s) were suddenly removed? What did you experience, and how does that help you understand the context of 1-2 Thessalonians?
2. What lies and wrong attacks have you seen come upon godly ministry leaders that sound a lot like Paul's "conflict" in which he "suffered... shamefully" in 1 Thessalonians 2?
3. How can the group be praying for your ministry leader(s) like Paul requests later in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5? How can you be praying for each other?

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Week 3: More Bible. Less Lies.

Scripture to Read: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

1 Thessalonians 2:13 – And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

Commentary:

As a newer Christian and very young pastor, I will never forget one interview that was conducted for a conference I was speaking at. A well-known musical artist who was topping the charts at the time included a lot of Scripture into their songwriting. When interviewed if they were a Christian, they basically said no. When asked why they knew so many Bible verses, they explained how, as a child, every time they did something wrong, their parents would punish them by making them read the Bible. As a result, they knew the Bible and hated it. This broke my heart.

Counselors commonly talk about two powerful forces at work in shaping who you are and how you process your past and prepare for your future.

Fear bonds are negative experiences that tie pain, or even evil, to a person, place, or thing. For example, a child with an abusive parent who never hugs them but only spansks them has a fear bond with that parent.

Joy bonds are positive experiences that tie positivity to a person, place, or thing. For example, when I was a little boy, my Grandpa George, who was very handy, built a large metal swing he painted green and yellow, placing an awning on to shade us from the

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sun. Whenever I went to his house, we would sit on the swing together, facing one another, eating ice cream while he asked me questions and told me fun stories. To this day, every time I see a photo of that swing, it brings back joy bonds.

One of the most tragic occurrences in Christian ministry is when the Word of God is weaponized to create fear bonds instead of joy bonds. As a Bible teacher, this bothers me at a deep level. Some people have had legalistic, law-based, non-relational, hypocritical religious people treat the Bible like a hammer to pound them like a nail. If you have had this experience from a pastor parent, I am very sorry. If you have experienced this from me as a Bible teacher, I am doubly sorry.

In 2 Corinthians 3:16, Paul speaks about the Word (or Law) of God saying, “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” The letter of the law is works-based, erroneous Bible teaching about what you must do to earn God’s favor, and how your failure will remove it from you. Fear-based Bible teaching produces fear bonds. The Spirit of the law is healthy Bible teaching that tells you how God works for you, in you, and through you to fulfill His law in your life by the power of the Holy Spirit. This kind of healthy Bible teaching produces joy bonds.

1 John 4:18 teaches that it is God’s love, not fear, that produces joy bonds, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us.” God loves us; His perfect love overrides our fear bonds and replaces them with joy bonds as we love Him because He loves us. This is the cycle of joy bonds rooted in a loving relationship with God.

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God saved me while reading the Bible in college. Soon, I joined a very wonderful church where the pastor was a gifted Bible teacher. He taught me all that God had done for me at the cross of Jesus Christ – that He had now adopted me as His son to be securely loved forever, placed the Holy Spirit within me to live by His power, surrounded me with a loving church family, and gave me His perfect Word to inform and transform all of my life. At that church, I took classes on how to study the Bible and how to apply it to my relationship with God, Grace (who would be my wife), our eventual five children, and everything else in life from my finances to my friendships. I was spiritually brought up on joy bonds in the Spirit with the Scriptures. I don't read the Bible because I have to; I read it because I love to. It is freedom and fun for me – like a great adventure to find the heart and will of God to live under God's blessing.

In 1-2 Thessalonians, Paul's enemies are trying to create fear bonds with the people – telling them their pastor was a con man who lied to them, stole from them, and abandoned them. Of course, these are all lies and not truth. Paul, in contrast, is focusing on joy bonds made possible by the Word of God as the source of all their joy bonds. There is joy in this section between the people and Jesus, the people and their pastor Paul, and the people and one another. This is because of God's Word, as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2:13,20, "we... thank God constantly...that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers...you are our glory and joy."

In another book I co-authored called *Doctrine*, we say the following about the Bible to help you read it,

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study it, believe it, obey it, and create joy bonds with the Holy Spirit, because this is the only book that you will ever read where the Author meets with you to teach it.

Scripture is God speaking his truth to us in human words. The New Testament writers claim that the Old Testament is sacred Scripture, which literally means “writing.” (Matt. 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56; Luke 24:25–32, 44–45; John 5:39; 10:35; Acts 17:2, 11; 18:28; Rom.1:2; 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; 15:4; 16:26; 1 Cor. 15:3–4; Gal. 3:8, 22; 4:30; 1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Tim. 3:16; James 4:5; 2 Pet. 1:20–21; 3:15–16.) The word Bible comes from the Greek word for book. Holy Bible means “Holy Book.” It was written in three languages (Hebrew, Greek, and a bit in Aramaic) over a period of more than fifteen hundred years by roughly forty authors (of varying ages and backgrounds) on three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe).

The Protestant Canon of the Bible contains 66 separate books. 39 books, approximately three-quarters of the Bible, are in the Old Testament, which is a record of God’s speaking and working in history from when he created Adam and Eve, up until about 450 BC. In the period between the two testaments, people waited for the coming of the Messiah into human history. The 27 books of the New Testament begin with the four Gospels, which record the life, death, burial, resurrection, and return to Heaven of Jesus, and then proceed to instruct Christians and churches about how to think and live for God.

The Bible is a library of books compiled as one Book, showing a divine unity and continuity. This point is illustrated by the fact that the New Testament has roughly 300 explicit Old Testament quotations, as well

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as upwards of 4,000 allusions to the Old Testament. In many ways, the Old Testament is a series of promises that God makes, and the New Testament is the record of their fulfillment, and the anticipation of the final fulfillment of the remaining promises at Jesus' Second Coming.

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time. The Old Testament was originally written on papyrus—a form of paper made out of reeds. By the time the New Testament was written, parchments (prepared animal skins) were also used. (2 Tim. 4:13.) The pages were put together into scrolls. (Ezra 6:2; Ps. 40:7; Luke 4:17, 20.)

Chapters and verses were added to provide addresses (not unlike those on our homes) that help us find particular sections. In 1205, Stephen Langton, a theology professor who became the archbishop of Canterbury, began using Bible chapters. In 1240, Cardinal Hugo of St. Cher published a Latin Bible with the 1,189 chapter divisions that exist today. Robert Stephanus, a Protestant book printer, was condemned as a heretic for printing Bibles. As he fled with his family to Geneva on horseback, he arbitrarily made verse divisions within Langton's chapter divisions. His system was used for the first English Bible (The Geneva New Testament of 1557) and became today's system of 31,173 verses. The Bible's chapters and verses were not applied with any consistent method and, while helpful, they are not authoritative. Because the Bible was not intended to be read in bits and pieces, reading verses out of context can lead to serious misunderstanding. Thus, rightly interpreting particular sections of Scripture requires paying attention both to the immediate context and the overall context of all of Scripture.

The opening line of Scripture introduces us to its

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Hero, God, who is revealed throughout the rest of the pages of Scripture. In the closing line of the New Testament, we are reminded that our hope is in “The grace of the Lord Jesus”. Thus, the written Word of God reveals to us the incarnate (“in human flesh”) Word of God, Jesus Christ. Without the written Word, we cannot rightly know the incarnate Word.

The Old and New Testament are about Jesus Christ – anyone can read the Bible, but only someone who reads it in the Spirit comes to this rightful conclusion. Some prefer the New Testament to the Old Testament because they wrongly believe that only the New Testament is about Jesus. However, Jesus Himself taught that the Old Testament was primarily about Him while arguing with the theologians in his day. In John 5:39-40 Jesus says, “You search the Scriptures [Old Testament] because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” The Bible is not just principles to live by, but a Person to live with.

Following His resurrection, Jesus opened the Old Testament to teach about Himself: “Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27.) Likewise, in speaking to his disciples, Jesus said, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” (Luke 24:44.) We then read that he “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” (Luke 24:45.) Jesus’ own words about Himself as the central message of the Old Testament are pointedly clear. He said in Matthew 5:17-18, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to

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abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” Jesus repeated this fact throughout his ministry by saying he “fulfilled” particular Scriptures. (e.g., Matt. 26:56; Luke 4:20–21; 22:37.) To correctly interpret Scripture, you will need to connect its verses, concepts, and events to Jesus.

Dig Deeper.

1. To learn more about revelation, and how God speaks to us, listen to the free lecture at bit.ly/3DGAyZJ.
2. If you want to read the entire chapter in Doctrine about “Revelation: God Speaks” visit bit.ly/3KqyBo9.

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. In your own words, discuss the difference between having fear bonds with Scripture and joy bonds.
2. Which members of the group have had some fear bonds with the Scriptures? Any examples they are willing to share might be very helpful.
3. Which members of the group have had some joy bonds with the Scriptures? Any examples they are willing to share might also be very helpful.
4. How can you be praying for each other, in general and specifically, for each person to enjoy God’s Word?

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Week 4: More Standing Up. Less Bowing Down.

Scripture to Read: 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

1 Thessalonians 3:7 – ...in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith.

Commentary:

What comes out of a bottle of ketchup when you squeeze it under pressure? Ketchup.

What comes out of a bottle of mustard when you squeeze it under pressure? Mustard.

What comes out of a tube of toothpaste when you squeeze it under pressure? Toothpaste.

What comes out of a Christian when you squeeze them under pressure? It depends. Entitlement, bitterness, anger, jealousy, cursing, and worse comes out of some Christians. Gratitude, forgiveness, joy, generosity, worship, and better comes out of other Christians.

The truth is, we often don't really know what is in us until we are squeezed under pressure. The squeezing and pressure on the outside reveal who we really are on the inside. For this reason, the worst seasons of life can be the best opportunity to grow in Christlikeness for two reasons. One, if what comes out of us is bad, we can repent, be forgiven, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to experience deep healing and change from the inside out. Two, if what comes out is good, we can rejoice, and see God use our test as our testimony to encourage others.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul is writing to new Christians who are being squeezed by the pressure of everything from demonic spiritual warfare, false religious teachers,

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intense pressure from a godless corrupt culture, and their own ignorance as they are new to God's Word without a lot of Bible teaching to fall back on. The letter explains the plight of Paul as the shepherd, and the people as the flock as "affliction...[surrounded by] idols... suffered...shamefully treated...much conflict... suffered the same things from [those] who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets...Satan hindered...suffer affliction...the tempter had tempted you...distress and affliction...evil..." The letter also explains their response as "steadfastness...hope in our Lord Jesus Christ... power...in the Holy Spirit...full conviction...joy of the Holy Spirit...an example to all the believers...faith...very dear... serv[ing] the living and true God...you received the word of God...faith and love...standing fast in the Lord... thanksgiving...joy...to please God...holiness...brotherly love...walk properly...children of light, children of the day... encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing...at peace..."

Paul loved the church he planted, but he had to leave it suddenly shortly after planting it due to mobs and a riot.^o In his absence, critics and enemies started a somewhat successful smear campaign to discredit Paul and destroy what he had taught them. Without the kind of communication technology we have today, Paul was not getting many updates and was concerned. So, Paul sent his faithful right-hand man, Timothy, along with other godly leaders who would continue the ministry they began, lead and feed the new Christian flock, and bring back a report to Paul about how they were faring.

These Christians knew little, but they obeyed and believed what they had been taught. Today, the opposite is sadly true. Most Christians know a lot but

^o Acts 17:1-9

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obey and believe little. The Bible repeatedly says that learning + obeying = blessing.

- In John 13:17, Jesus said, “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”
- In Luke 11:28, Jesus said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”
- In James 1:22, Jesus’ half-brother James said, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

When Paul receives the report about the church at Thessalonica, he hears how they were obeying what he had been teaching. Importantly, Paul had taught them that they were not just “destined” by God for salvation, but also for suffering (3:3). Paul did a good job teaching them that while God loved them, Satan hated them, and that while Heaven was their home, the world was their temporary residence. Until they are home with God, they will suffer a bit like Jesus in this world.

Teaching people how to suffer well is crucial, and the people were well-taught by Paul and applied what they had been told in the fires of daily trials. Paul says this very thing, “when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction...” (3:4). Admittedly, how to suffer is not a popular subject and can seem dour or even discouraging. However, since we are in a cursed fallen world run by an Enemy, we need to expect some affliction and be prepared for it.

This is an amazing report from new Christians who have not seen their pastor in some time but have been suffering for what felt like a long time. The new Christians were obeying what Paul and others had taught them from God’s Word, and he was overjoyed. Imagine a parent in the military who is deployed for months, unable to communicate with their family,

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worried sick about them as some had health struggles, and then they get the good news of a clean bill of health and that the whole family was thriving and you understand something of the tone of 1 Thessalonians 3. This explains Paul's exuberant statement, "Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love...we have been comforted about you through your faith...you are standing fast in the Lord. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God..." (3:6-9).

As you read the entire two letters Paul wrote them, you can see the themes of God's love, the Word of God, the example of Jesus, the power of the Spirit, and caring for one another as a church family as the bonds that hold them together in joy.

Despite what the Father of Lies shouts through the media and social media, not all Christians are hypocrites and not all churches are bad. While Paul longs to visit them, in the meantime, he comforts them with triple truths that should comfort us as well.

One, God is present with people we cannot be present with. Sometimes, the person we love is quarantined in the hospital, living far away, deployed with the military, or we are in a season when we want to be with them but for some reason cannot. This is a deep comfort to the believer, that when we are hurting, we are not alone, and when those we love are hurting, they are not alone.

Two, you can be with someone spiritually even when you cannot be with them physically. Paul does this by communication via letter – and we can add a phone call, text, email, and other technological means we have in our day. Paul also does this by praying saying, "we pray most earnestly night and day..." (3:10). Those who

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are deeply sensitive to the presence of the Holy Spirit will report that their soul can literally feel the power of prayer from people who are not with them physically but connected to them by the Holy Spirit spiritually.

Three, one day the bad will end, and good will begin and never end. Eventually, we will all die and go Home, or Jesus will return and bring Home to us. Either way, the broken world we live in has an expiration date and things won't be like this forever. Paul is telling them and us that there are some pains and perils for God's people in this life that are simply unavoidable. We cannot make life perfect on this side of glory any more than we can make ourselves perfect on this side of glory. Nothing is perfect until Jesus returns to do what only He can do – make all things perfectly new! Until that day, we need to have the long view of things and wait for the glorious day of “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (3:13).

Too often, we can wrongly think of the end of this life as a finish line. For the Christian, the end of this life is a starting line and everything we do and learn beforehand is to prepare us for the race that never ends. This is the long view of things made possible by Jesus' resurrection, which is the guarantee of our resurrection.

Dig Deeper.

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 carefully to learn more about Jesus' Second Coming.
2. In prayer, honestly ask the Holy Spirit if there is anything you have been unwilling to learn or obey, which has hindered His blessing in your life. If He brings a Scripture or example to mind, spend some time journaling out why you are stumbling in this area and how you can start

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moving ahead by practicing the equation that
learning + obeying = blessing.

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. How have you seen the process of learning + obeying = blessing work practically with some very specific examples in your own life?
2. This section talks about enduring “distress” and “affliction”. Distress is the emotional pressure brought on by the trials and troubles of life. Affliction is some trouble in life that feels oppressive and unsafe. Are there any things in your life currently that sound like a distress or affliction? How has your response been and how can it improve?
3. How can we pray for you?

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Week 5: More Holiness. Less Naughtiness.

Scripture to Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 – ...aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Commentary:

I was a very young pastor, new to ministry, and trying my best to teach the Bible to a bunch of brand new, even younger, college-age Christians. Most had not grown up in church, let alone a healthy home with a mother and father. Like most every new Christian, they had no idea what was acceptable and unacceptable behavior for a Christian or any idea where the Bible drew various moral lines. During the summers, I held an outdoor Bible study so that the punk rock kids would come, because they would not come unless they could smoke, and smoking in a room we were renting from a conservative church would not have been approved by the grandmothers on the building rental committee. So, we met outside, and the punk rock kids showed up with their cigarettes. I had prepared a nice Bible study and, within the first minute, I got interrupted by the new Christians who wanted to know if we could do Q&A instead. I said yes, wrongly assuming that I would be answering the typical questions ministry leaders are trained to answer – creation vs evolution, is the Bible trustworthy, how do we know there is a God, etc. Instead, pretty much every question was sexual and specific. After a parade of sex questions, I asked the group if they were trying to make this the most

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awkward Bible study in history of if they were truly genuine. They sincerely wanted to know what the Bible said, both the new Christians and the non-Christians. The handful of kids at the study who grew up in conservative Christian homes pretty much blushed the entire Bible study, did not blink, or make eye contact. Honestly, I don't think they even understood some of the questions.

Christianity started out largely as a Jewish movement with a handful of non-Jews (Gentiles) who adopted the Jewish language, customs, and cultures. There was little debate about what was right and wrong behavior because the Old Testament was the center of life for everything from personal morality to family systems, the legal system, entertainment, and even government. All that changed when Gentiles started worshipping the Jewish Jesus and wanting to learn the Bible. The Gentiles brought a flood of new questions to be answered, ones that had been long settled among the Jewish people. This is the backdrop for this section of Paul's letter to the church at Thessalonica as he says, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God..." (4:3-5).

The New Testament was written in the language of Greek, and that culture predominated the Roman Empire. The sexual anarchy in that day was very much like our own. Older men were encouraged to groom young boys for sex. The cities in which Christianity spread were filled with perverted sexuality married to demonic spirituality. This included temples in cities like Corinth where the demonic fertility goddess Aphrodite had over a thousand male and female prostitutes

waiting to have sex without limits. This explains why Paul's letter to the Corinthians instructs them that Christians cannot have sex with a close relative, person of the same sex, engage in orgies, fornicate by living and sleeping together before marriage, commit adulterous sex outside of marriage, abandon their God-given sex and gender by cross-dressing, or return to having sex at the pagan temples. These new Christians in Paul's day were used to the same kind of gender spectrum tolerance and diversity sex ed curriculum in the name of pride that inundates people in our own day.

The passions of sex are like a fire, and marriage is the hearth that God created to contain it. Whenever it is taken out of the hearth of marriage, sex starts burning down our relationship with God, marriage, family, health, and culture.

Some things are legal with the government but sinful with God. In the Bible, sexual sin includes homosexuality, erotica, bestiality, bisexuality, fornication, friends with benefits, adultery, swinging, prostitution, incest, rape, polygamy, polyandry, sinful lust, pornography, pedophilia, sexually touching someone else (besides your spouse) in any way with or without clothes on, and sexually viewing or talking to someone else including via technology. The Bible often uses the word "porneia" from which we get our English word pornography as a bit of a catch-all category for various sexual sins. The Bible does this because sinners tend to find new ways to sexually sin, and God wants us to deal with our hearts honestly because they lead our hands sinfully. Anything outside of one husband with one wife is a sin.

God's divine design for married sex is solely one husband and one wife. Anyone else involved in any way

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is sinful and harmful. God made our bodies male and female for sexual pleasure, and for the Christian, God is the authority over our bodies and what we do, and do not do, with them. Worship is not just the songs we sing in church, but decisions we make with our bodies. Elsewhere, Paul writes in Romans 12:1-2, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed...”

The Bible is not anti-sex. The Bible is pro-marriage and pro-sex within marriage.

If you want to learn more about what the Bible says about sex, my wife Grace and I wrote a book called “Real Romance: Sex in the Song of Songs” that you can find, along with a sermon series at RealFaith.com. In that book, we explain that people see sex in one of three ways:

1. Sex as god – For some people, they lack sexual boundaries and control and their sexual urges rule over them like their functional god – what they sacrifice their body and energy to as a form of worship. In this section of 1 Thessalonians, Paul is explaining this very sin.
2. Sex as gross – For some people, because of prudish, unhealthy Bible teaching, an overly conservative upbringing, and/or sexual addiction or abuse, sex is seen as something gross, off putting, and base.
3. Sex as gift – According to the Bible, sex is a gift from God to be enjoyed by a married couple within the confines of the Scriptures and limits of their conscience.

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This gift of heterosexual married sex was given by God for six reasons:

1. Pleasure (Song of Songs)
2. Children (Genesis 1:28)
3. Oneness (Genesis 2:24)
4. Knowledge (Genesis 4:1)
5. Protection (1 Corinthians 7:2-5)
6. Comfort (2 Samuel 12:24)

Imagine if this lesson were not heeded? These new Christians would be living together before marriage, having children out of wedlock, committing adultery, and living lives of sexual addiction and brokenness. In our day, the cultural avalanche against most any restriction on sexuality has created a completely broken culture with people who are suffering because of everything from sexual addiction to sexual abuse. Consider for a moment that if everyone on the earth obeyed the Bible just in their sexuality, we would have no more sexual assault, no more sexual addiction, no more out of wedlock pregnancies, no more need for widespread abortion, no pornography, no sex trafficking, and no more adultery. This kind of rebellion is inexcusable for God's people, as Paul tells the Thessalonians "whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you" (4:8).

Not only are Christians called to live a countercultural life sexually, they are called to do the same in every area of life "For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness" (4:7). Holiness means set apart, distinct, belonging to God who is holy. A Bible Dictionary says, "The biblical concept of 'holiness' is grounded in the idea of being set apart and transcendently distinctive. When the Bible claims that God is holy, it means primarily that he is radically

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distinctive in sphere, in character, and in requirements... As a quality or attribute of God, the term also carries the sense of ‘morally good’ and ‘ethically pure.’”¹²

In closing this section, Paul encourages believers to “love” in a world filled with hate (4:9), “live quietly” in a world filled with conflict (4:11), “mind your own affairs” in a world filled with gossip and busy bodying (especially online) (4:11), “and to work with your hands” instead of being entitled and a burden to others expecting them to pay your bills and provide for your needs (4:11). The goal of Christians and their churches is to “walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one” (4:12). If we are dependent on God, and care for one another as God’s church family, the results will be freedom and health. We will be free to live our lives as God instructs, and healthy because we are not following the same self-destructive patterns in the greater culture that lead to what is skyrocketing addiction, depression, brokenness, mental health, debt, and hopelessness. If we live as God’s countercultural people, the goal is not to look down on lost people who do not yet know Jesus, but to invite them into our homes, lives, and churches to see that there is a better and healthier way of life that is made possible only by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Dig Deeper.

Look up the reasons why God made sex for heterosexual marriage:

1. Pleasure (Song of Songs)
2. Children (Genesis 1:28)
3. Oneness (Genesis 2:24)
4. Knowledge (Genesis 4:1)
5. Protection (1 Corinthians 7:2-5)
6. Comfort (2 Samuel 12:24)

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Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. Paul commends this church for loving one another well. How do you feel that is going in your church or ministry? How could you help improve healthy relationships and a welcoming environment?
2. How would people simply become healthier if they followed the wisdom in this section of Scripture? Practically, in what ways would our culture and the quality of people's lives simply improve dramatically?
3. Who do you know that needs to be invited to your home or church to see the difference that life with Jesus makes? Spend some time praying for them and then invite them to do just that.

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Week 6: More Second Coming. Less Second-guessing.

Scripture to Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

1 Thessalonians 4:16 – For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Commentary:

On television, there are two ways to get the news.

One is the daily updates of what is happening in real time. The daily news tends to create a lot of anxiety and speculation because the outcome is open-ended. When we are uncertain what the future holds, it often causes anxiety in the present.

The other way to get the news is with biographies or the History Channel with footage and reporting of events in the distant past that are long settled. People tend not to get anxious watching, for example, old footage of World War II as compared to current geopolitical events that could culminate in World War III.

For God, everything is the History Channel, and nothing is the nightly news. God created time and can work in time but is not bound by time. God sees everything in its finished state and invites us to trust Him for a happily-ever-after ending for all of His people. To walk with Jesus is to march in the angelic army with the God who overcomes the world. We are to believe this by “our faith” until we see it by sight, as God does.

Roughly 25% of the Bible was prophecy when it was written. Prophecy is when God, who knows and

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rules the future, reveals it to His people so that they can live with less anxiety because they know the end of History. The storyline of the Bible is that Jesus came once in humility to save sinners, and that Jesus is coming again in glory to raise the dead, fill Heaven and Hell, defeat Satan and demons, lift the curse, and rule and reign forever and ever. When God finished creating our world and our parents in Genesis 1-2, He said everything was good and everyone was very good. Since sin entered the world, God has not abandoned His original divine design. God will return everything and everyone to the state of Genesis 1-2.

Knowing all of this helps Christians waiting for Jesus' Second Coming to obey the most common command in all the Bible, "fear not". We can live by faith, not fear, because we know that Jesus is over everything and everything, is our good Lord, and has a perfect plan to work out all things for the good of those who love Him.

The new Christians in Thessalonica were struggling with the same things we are. They had a corrupt government, bankrupt culture, enemies and critics, and as new Christians, a lot of questions.

One question they had was what happened to believing family and friends who had died before the Second Coming of Jesus? We've all lost people we care about, and their passing opens up a lot of questions. Paul says that believers who die before Jesus returns are not "dead" but rather "asleep". His analogy is that their body is laying in the ground like our body sleeps at night, and that their soul has gone to be with the Lord until the soul and body are rejoined at the resurrection. Paul explains that Jesus will descend from His Heavenly throne, along with His angelic army, and believers will rise from the dead as

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Jesus rose from death. Paul says that knowing about Jesus' Second Coming and how history will end allows believers to "encourage one another with these words" (4:18). To encourage someone is to pour courage into them. When we know that there is eternal life, we know that, if our life here was not that great, when we die, life really begins. If we suffer in this life, we know that we will be rewarded forever in Jesus' Kingdom. If we were sick or unhealthy in this life, we know that we will be completely healed forever one day. If we miss loved ones who have gone Home, we have a forever reunion to look forward to. All of this should encourage us and pour courage into us to live this life fully and freely for Jesus!

Paul then says, "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord" (4:17). From this and other Scriptures^a, some Christians teach the rapture. Just like Jesus ascended to Heaven^b, when He descends, we seem to also ascend to meet Him. A Theological Dictionary says, "The Latin verb rapio means 'to snatch, or seize.' The English word rapture, derived from it, has a double usage. Generally it means 'ecstatic delight,' but in popular theology it means 'the catching up' of the church to meet the Lord at His second coming."¹³

When We Die, Our Body Goes into the Ground and Our Soul Goes to the Lord

- 2 Corinthians 5:8 – ...we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.
- Philippians 1:21,23 – ...to live is Christ, and to die is gain...to depart and be with Christ...is far better.

^a Daniel 7:13; Matthew 24:30-31, 40; 1 Corinthians 15:1 ^b Acts 1:6-11

Jesus Rose From Death and Raises the Dead

- John 11:25-26 – Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

The Curse Will Be Lifted Forever

- Isaiah 65:17 – ...I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.
- Acts 3:21 – ...the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets...
- Romans 8:18-22 – ...the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth...
- 2 Peter 3:13 – ...we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Heaven and Earth Come Together Forever

- John 14:1-3 – “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms...And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also...”
- 2 Corinthians 5:1 – For we know that if the tent

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that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

- Hebrews 11:16 – ...they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.
- Revelation 21:1-3, 23-25,27 – ...I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them”...the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there...But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

We Will See Jesus Face-to-Face

- 1 Corinthians 13:12 – For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.
- Revelation 22:4 – They will see his face...

Like a kid excited to open their presents, knowing all that will happen when Jesus returns, Christians have always asked, “When is Jesus coming back?” If you want to study this more, it is called “eschatology”, which is the study of the end times. There is great debate among Christians who love Jesus and believe the Bible on the details surrounding His return. Since

we won't really know until He does return, it can be fun to delve into this area of Bible study but is nothing we should divide over. The Thessalonians had this very sort of question, and Paul's answer is that he does not know because only the Lord knows when He will return. Paul does teach, however, that there will be birth pains. Paul is quoting Jesus Christ.

In my book *New Days Old Demons*, I write, "...the words of Jesus from Matthew 24:8 kept echoing in my mind, 'All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.' In context, Jesus is talking about the signs of the end of the age, what the world will be like as we get closer to the persecution of God's people and increase of evil before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In this section of Scripture, Jesus foretells the destruction of the Temple, which happened in 70 A.D., which would be followed by false christs that were counterfeit anti-Christ; the increase of political conflict and wars lead by evil rulers of godless nations; and physical and natural disasters referred to as 'famines' and 'earthquakes'. Following all of this will be the outlawing of Christian faith, tribulation, martyrdom, and increasing hatred of believers, and mass apostasy as numerous people fall away from the faith...When Jesus uses the language of 'birth pains', He is saying that history will be born again just as believers are. When we were born, our mothers experienced great pain and pressure that slowly increased until the suffering was unbearable. But, out of this suffering came birth and new life. Jesus is saying that the closer we get to the end of this age and the beginning of the age to come, the birth pains will get more frequent and intense."

Paul's encouragement is to live life prepared to meet Jesus any day. We never know if we will die today or if Jesus will return. So, we should live every day ready

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to meet our Lord face-to-face.

Lastly, we do not know when Jesus will return, but the Bible does tell us what will be happening just before He does. 2 Timothy 3:1–5 summarizes the “last days” saying, “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”

Our only hope is Jesus Christ. Thankfully, He is guaranteed to return before it’s too late and will make all believers and all creation perfect forever!

Dig Deeper.

1. In this section, Paul is answering some of the questions that the new Christians had about Heaven. There is an entire sermon series answering the most common questions about Heaven for free here: bit.ly/3KpkOhy.
2. To learn more about what happens after we die, read 1 Corinthians 15.

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. Who are you most looking forward to meeting in the Kingdom of God?
2. What are you most looking forward to experiencing in the Kingdom of God?
3. The Thessalonians had a lot of questions about what happens when we die and what happens after we rise. What questions do you have?
4. How can we pray for you?

MORE HEAVEN. LESS HELL.

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Week 7: More Grace. Less Grief.

Scripture to Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

1 Thessalonians 5:16 – Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit.

Commentary:

When you go in to visit your doctor, say for your annual checkup, it is guaranteed that before your session ends, he will hand you a list of things that you need to put into practice so that you can be healthy. A good doctor will include hydration, nutrition, sabbath, supplements, and other very practical recommendations for healthy living.

The end of many New Testament letters is a bit like that. The author wants to give the Christians who read His words some next steps in their walk with God. The hope is that these become healthy habits, a normal and natural part of the daily routine.

Too often, we are unhealthy in our body because of bad habits. The same is true of our soul. For example, how many of us would not skip meals for a month but would skip Bible reading? Or how many of us would not miss a week of drinking fluid, but would miss a week of praying to God?

God cares about our body and soul. So, Paul ends this letter with some very practical and helpful healthy habits for a strong soul. Here is a summary:

1. Respect godly leaders who lead and feed you in love.
2. Live at peace together and don't tolerate ongoing

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- conflict, strife, division, or factions.
3. Admonish the idle to take responsibility and get activated owning their own life.
 4. Encourage the fainthearted who are in a tough season and walk alongside them.
 5. Help the weak so that those who are immature, addicted, discouraged, or broken are not abandoned but rather loved by God's church family.
 6. Be patient with everyone because we all have our faults flaws and failures and are a work in progress.
 7. Don't allow bitterness and vengeance to cause you to respond to evil with evil, be like Jesus and respond to evil with good and let Jesus deal with the evildoers.
 8. Rejoice always because no matter how bad it is, God is present and there is grace and blessing if you look hard enough.
 9. Pray without ceasing so that talking to God is a natural part of everyday life as you grow that relationship with your Father as His child.
 10. Give thanks for what you are learning and who you are becoming even when the days are dark, and the grief is deep, because God is not punishing you but rather preparing you for the next season of life.
 11. Do not quench the Holy Spirit with your traditions, legalisms, bad theology, fear, control issues, unrepentance, or unbelief but rather set your sail for His wind to take you wherever He wants you to go.
 12. Do not despise prophetic words from godly people who are filled with the Spirit and helping you learn God's Word and find God's will.

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13. Do not be gullible or naïve believing everything, but instead test everything by the Word of God, people of God, and Spirit of God so you can toss what is bad and keep what is good.
14. Abstain from every form of evil, including your private sins, secret sins, and things you tend to tolerate or make excuses for that you know are wrong.
15. Pray for your pastors and church leaders who are doing all they can to lead and feed you in love.
16. Treat one another with love like a family.
17. Have the Bible be the center of your church meetings to hear a Word from God by learning the Word of God.

This is quite a list! If we do what Paul says, we will become healthier, stronger, more joyful, unified, helpful, and better people in every area of our life. Everyone around us will benefit from who we are becoming, and we will enjoy our life even on the worst days.

Importantly, these kinds of things are not our works, or what we do to earn God's love and favor. Instead, these kinds of things are graces, because God works for us, in us, and through us. I teach this all the time to the wonderful people at our church. God did a work for us through the perfect life, substitutionary death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ that we can access by faith. God does a work in us by the Holy Spirit, giving us a new nature, new heart, new mind, and new desires to obey Him. God does a work through us by the Holy Spirit, or what the Bible calls the "fruit of the Spirit". Jesus says the same thing, saying that He is the vine, and we are the branches.

Paul established all of this in the opening lines of his letter. Paul said Christians are "loved by God, that

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he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1:4-5)

We need to remember all of this so that we do not read the last chapter in isolation and turn it into a legalistic list by which we judge one another. The list is last because if we are living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, these are the things we want to do because we love Jesus and want to be more like Him by grace. I always told our five kids growing up that Christianity is not about what you have to do, but rather what you get to do. You don't have to read your Bible; God loves you so much He wrote a book for you and wants to meet with you to help you learn it. You get to learn from God when you read the Bible! You don't have to pray; you have a Father who is perfect and chose to adopt you as His child and He is always wanting to speak to you and hear from you. You get to communicate with Him in prayer!

Do you see the difference? Healthy Christianity is a lot more about building a relationship than building a resume by keeping rules.

In conclusion, Paul encourages the original readers and every reader since to look up to Jesus Christ ruling and reigning in glory over everyone and everything. Like finding north on a compass, the key to living the Christian life is always looking up to Jesus Christ, who is alive right now and coming at any time. He is our hope for today and our answer for tomorrow. Paul closes the book in 5:23-24,28 saying, "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it...The grace

of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

Dig Deeper.

1. Read all of 1 Thessalonians carefully and prayerfully in one sitting making note of anything the Holy Spirit emphasizes for you.
2. Spend some time in prayer thanking God for this book of the Bible, and talking to Him about anything that you feel you need to.

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. Which things on the list would you say the Holy Spirit has grown you in? What things on the list do you need to invite the Holy Spirit to help you grow in?
2. What have been some of your biggest personal takeaways from your study of 1 Thessalonians?
3. When you get to Heaven and meet Paul, are there any things in 1 Thessalonians you want to ask him what he meant?
4. How can we pray for you?

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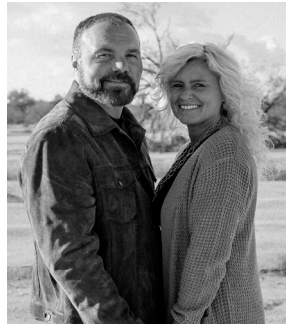
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ABOUT MARK DRISCOLL & REALFAITH

With Pastor Mark, it's all about Jesus! He is a spiritual leader, prolific author, and compelling speaker, but at his core, he is a family man. Mark and his wife Grace have been married and doing vocational ministry together since 1993 and, along with their five kids, planted Trinity Church in Scottsdale, Arizona as a family ministry.

Pastor Mark, Grace, and their oldest daughter, Ashley, also started RealFaith Ministries, which contains a mountain of Bible teaching for men, women, couples, parents, pastors, leaders, Spanish speakers, and more, which you can access by visiting **RealFaith.com** or downloading the **RealFaith app**.



With a master's degree in exegetical theology from Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, he has spent the better part of his life teaching verse-by-verse through books of the Bible, contextualizing its timeless truths and never shying away from challenging, convicting passages that speak to the heart of current cultural dilemmas.

Together, Mark and Grace have co-authored *Win Your War*, *Real Marriage*, and *Real Romance: Sex in the Song of Songs* and he co-authored a father-daughter project called *Pray Like Jesus* with his daughter, Ashley. Pastor Mark has also written numerous other books including

Spirit-Filled Jesus, Who Do You Think You Are?, Vintage Jesus, and Doctrine.

If you have any prayer requests for us, questions for future Ask Pastor Mark or Dear Grace videos, or a testimony regarding how God has used this and other resources to help you learn God's Word, we would love to hear from you at **hello@realfaith.com**.

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