

1st Thessalonians

Keeping a Watchful Eye

Reading through the book of 1st Thessalonians, I am especially struck by Paul's parental concern for the new believers there. Sprinkled throughout this letter, we hear his tender, nurturing love expressed for them; we read his words of instruction laid out carefully to guide them, and we sense his protective concern when he hears that oppositional forces are threatening to undo them.

Several summers ago I saw this kind of parental concern played out when a pair of robins set up house in the overgrown Forsythia bush outside my dining room window. For several days the female fluttered in and out of its branches in search of the right materials to lovingly build her nest. Then one day all of her busyness came to a halt and I discovered three telltale blue eggs within its walls. It was time for the "mama bird" to settle in, make herself at home and quietly care for her eggs.

That's when I noticed the male step in to assume his role of provider and protector. Just as the female had done before him, he now made frequent flights to and from the Forsythia to bring this expecting mother a juicy breakfast worm, a shriveled berry or a beetle for supper. And although he had grown accustomed to my presence out on the deck each day, occasionally he would fly past my head a tad closer than I'd prefer; just to let me know I was encroaching upon his territory.

Once the chicks were hatched, my son and I couldn't keep ourselves away from the dining room window. We found great humor in watching those tiny heads with huge beaks, thrown open unnaturally wide; wait there *impatiently* as both parents made nonstop flights to provide them with a morsel of food. Within a couple of weeks, however, their parent's agenda turned from feeding to flight instruction and before we blinked, the little fledglings and their parents had flown the coop. Truth be told, however, in spite of their parent's great care, my family sadly discovered one of those little ones lying dead in our yard. It's a tough world out there... and not just for robins.

Paul knew that if these new believers in Thessalonica were going to continue to survive despite the inevitable attacks on their faith, it was imperative that they be protectively nurtured and given guidance along the way. Do you know a fledgling believer? How might you love and nurture him in his journey with Christ?



Day One

°Joy to Paul's Heart

Day Two

°The Example Set
°Faithfully Following
°Anxiously Awaiting Word

Day Three

°The Good News
°A Life That Pleases God

Day Four

°Preparing for Christ's Coming

Day Five

°Parting Words

Day One



Ordinary people with commitment can make an extraordinary impact on their world.

Many people tend to associate commitment with their emotions. If they feel the right way, then they can follow through on their commitments. But true commitment doesn't work that way. It's not an emotion; it's a character quality that enables us to reach our goals. Human emotions go up and down all the time, but commitment has to be rock-solid.

People don't really know whether they are committed to something until they face adversity. Struggles strengthen a person's resolve. Adversity fosters commitment, and commitment fosters hard work.

Trouble seemed to follow Paul everywhere he went and his experience in Thessalonica was no different. In Acts 17:1-11, we are told that Paul hadn't preached more than a few times in the local synagogue before a riot ensued, and he had to be snuck out of town under the cover of nightfall. In all likelihood one would not expect this group of new believers to flourish after such a brief visit and in the midst of such opposition. Yet, as we will discover in our lesson today, God's hands are not tied by earthly obstacles of time or trouble.

Read 1st Thessalonians 1:1-10. Joy to Paul's Heart

1. When Timothy arrived in Corinth to reunite with Paul, he brought with him greatly anticipated news (**1st Thessalonians 3:5-6**) of how the new believers in Thessalonica were faring. Describe the various things you learn about this resilient group from these ten verses:

Take a minute to reread **verses 3-10** from *The Message* printed below. Highlight or underline the words or phrases that especially resonate with you.

Day and night you're in our prayers as we call to mind your work of faith, your labor of love and your patience of hope in following our Master, Jesus Christ, before God our Father. It is clear to us friends, that God not only loves you very much, but, also has put His hand on you for something special. When the Message we preached came to you, it wasn't just words. Something happened in you. The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions.

You paid careful attention to the way we lived among you, and determined to live that way yourselves. In imitating us, you imitated the Master. Although great trouble accompanied the Word, you were able to take great joy from the Holy Spirit! – taking the trouble with joy, the joy with trouble!

*Do you know that all over the provinces of both Macedonia and Achaia believers look up to you? The word has gotten around. Your lives are echoing the Master's Word, not only in the provinces but all over the place. The news of your faith in God is out. We don't even have to say anything anymore—**you're** the message! People come up and tell us how you received us with open arms, how you deserted the dead idols of your old life so you could embrace and serve God, the true God. They marvel at how expectantly you await the arrival of His Son ¹...*

Explain why the words or phrases you highlighted above stand out to you.

2. The folks in Thessalonica were an *inspiration*...an *example*...a *role model* for Christ-followers throughout the Roman world, and remarkably, even after a span of more than 2000 years, they continue to set a powerful example for us as well! How does their example inspire you as you walk in their shadow?

Day Two

Read 1st Thessalonians 2:1-12. The Example Set

3. In what ways did Paul, Silas and Timothy set the example *for which* the Thessalonians became *imitators* (1:6)?

4. Paul described his role amongst them as both a mother (2:7-8) *and* a father (2:11-12). Why do you think he made this distinction, and what importance does this have for us when we are called to lead and mentor others?

Read 1st Thessalonians 2:13-20. Faithfully Following

5. No one knew better than Paul how vulnerable a *battered* faith can be. How would his words in this passage have encouraged the persecuted believers?

Read 1st Thessalonians 3:1-5. Anxiously Awaiting Word

6. While Satan may have hindered Paul's ability to go back to the Thessalonians (2:18), how did Timothy's diversionary mission in 3:1-2 prove that, despite the obstacles Satan threw their way, *greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world?* (1st John 4:4) Why is this important for us to remember? (1st Thess. 3:4)



When it comes down to it, commitment is always a matter of choice.

How important is commitment to you? When things get tough, are you in the habit of standing firm? Or do you have a tendency to compromise or even quit? ²

The 17 Essentials Qualities of a Team Player

John C. Maxwell

Day Three



The Fallout of Sexual Misconduct

Just as an adulterous spouse robs his or her marriage partner of the trust, security and intimacy the couple shared before the adultery took place... so sexual misconduct poses a significant threat to the sense of kinship and unity within a community of believers and breaks down the ethical standards that ought to distinguish Christians from the world.³

NIV Application Commentary

Read 1st Thessalonians 3:6-13. The Good News

7. When Paul heard Timothy's report of the Thessalonians' steadfast belief, he did more than breathe a sigh of relief, he said in **verse 8** that the news caused him to *really live!* What do you think he meant by this?

What were Paul's three prayer concerns in **verses 11-13**, and why should we consider incorporating these into our own prayer life as well?

Read 1st Thessalonians 4:1-12. A Life That Pleases God

8. Following up his prayer for their purity, Paul continued his train of thought by urging the Thessalonians to live a *sanctified* life before God and those they came in contact with. What does it mean to live a *sanctified* life? (See also **Romans 12:1-2a**, **Ephesians 4:22-24** and **1 Peter 1:14-16**.)

9. Much like our day, the Greco-Roman culture held to very loose sexual mores/standards. No doubt they, like *our* contemporaries, felt that sex was a personal thing, and if it occurred between two consenting adults, it was really nobody else's business.

According to the following verses, what is the result or impact of sexual promiscuity on us, on others, **or** on our relationship with God?

1st Thessalonians 4:3-8

1st Corinthians 6:18-20

Day Four

Read 1st Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. Preparing for Christ's Coming

10. In the Greco-Roman world, death was viewed as *sleep from which there was no awakening*; therefore, it caused a sense of deep grief and hopelessness, much like today. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand that while *death brings sorrow and sorrow brings tears...we have hope beyond the grave...hope that ultimately brings comfort.* ⁴

According to **1st Thessalonians 4:14, 1st Corinthians 15:12-23 and Romans 8:11**, what is our hope and comfort when death comes calling?

How do **2nd Corinthians 5:1-8 and Philippians 1:21-23** explain what happens to the believer upon death?

What joy awaits those who *precede us in death* when as Christ's followers we are *caught up together* at the coming of the Savior according to **1st Thessalonians 4:15-17 and 1st Corinthians 15:42-44**?

What lies in store for those who are alive at His coming (**1st Corinthians 15:50-57**)?

*Our being caught up with Christ is what is commonly referred to as the "rapture." The Greek term Paul used is: "harpazo" which means "seized or snatched." The Latin term is "rapere" which means "raptured." This event holds a prominent place in the study of the last days. But it is not understood in the same way by all interpreters. Yet, even those of varying views about end-time events all hold firmly to the **biblical truth** of the **rapture**.*

*A seven-year Tribulation period prophesied in **Daniel 9:24-27** will usher in the last days. It is also referred to*



Hope is one of the Theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth "thrown in"; aim at earth and you will get neither. ⁵

Mere Christianity

C.S. Lewis



While the date and time of Christ's return is unknown, this future event ought not to take Jesus' followers by surprise. Those that live in the *Light* live in preparedness and are encouraged regardless if His coming happens in their lifetime or not. In order to be ready for that day they do everything in their power to protect the unity they have with their fellow-believers by respecting, loving, helping, refreshing and challenging one another as they watch for Christ's appearing. They also prepare for His coming by living joyfully, praying steadfastly, exhibiting an attitude of gratitude and clinging firmly to truth.

as the Great Tribulation and will be a time of intense trouble on the earth prior to the **Second Coming of Christ**.

- Those who hold to a **pre-tribulation** viewpoint believe the rapture will occur prior to the tribulation.
- Those who hold to a **mid-tribulation** viewpoint believe the rapture will come halfway through that seven year period.
- Those who hold to a **post-tribulation** viewpoint believe that Christ-followers will remain on earth during the tribulation period, with the rapture and Second Coming of Christ occurring separately yet simultaneously at the end of the seven year period. ⁶

11. Tying Jesus' own words in **Matthew 24:36-44 with 1st Thessalonians 5:1-3**, what do we learn about His return?

Day Five

Read 1st Thessalonians 5:12-28. Parting Words

12. How ought we to live in light of Jesus' return according to Paul's final thoughts?

13. Which of his instructions speaks to your heart most personally and how will you act on it this week?

Footnotes

- ¹**The Message** [NavPress Publishing Group] © 1993, 1994, 1995
- ²**John Maxwell** [Thomas Nelson, Inc.]
The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player ©2002
- ³**NIV Application Commentary** [Zondervan]
1 & 2 Thessalonians ©1998
- ⁴**The Living Insights Study Bible: NIV Translation** [Zondervan Publishing House] © 1996
- ⁵**C. S. Lewis** [Harper Collins/Harper One ISBN# 0060652926 - Collier Books/ MacMillan Publishing Co.: 866 Third Ave., NY, NY 10022]
Mere Christianity © 1943, 1945, 1952
- ⁶**Shepherd's Notes** [Broadman & Holman Publishers: Nashville, TN]
1 & 2 Thessalonians ©1998