

1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

Last week we set the stage for the book of Thessalonians by looking at just the first three verses where we see that Paul, greatly relieved to hear that the young believers there were remaining faithful in the midst of all their difficulties and sufferings. So he begins by complimenting them Their continued efforts in the work of the Lord, was **“A CAUSE FOR PRAISE.”**

He praises them for their good work of faith, for their love that labored selflessly through pain and difficulty and their hope that gave them stick-to-itiveness.

*And so today, we continue in verse 4 where Paul talks about how this cause for praise **all began for them!** “Where it all Begins”*

It all starts somewhere! And, when it comes to the walk of faith...

I. It Always Begins with God.

It began with God. God reached out to these people in His love and grace.

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 NIV, *“For we know, brothers and sisters, **loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.**”*

We know that you are loved by God and that He has chosen you.

Last week in my introduction, I mentioned that this was the second missionary journey of Paul. He had set out from the Church of Antioch, which was his home base, westward.

However, while heading further westward Paul was prevented by the Holy Spirit from going in two different directions and then specifically directed to go toward Thessalonica. Look what it says in...

Acts 16:6-10 NIV, *“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been **kept by the Holy Spirit** from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, **but the Spirit of Jesus** would not allow them to. **So they passed by** Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once*

*to leave for Macedonia, **concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.***”

The Holy Spirit, the spirit of Jesus and God the Father, made sure that Paul and his companions went **to them** with the Gospel.

That is why Paul was clear on how their faith had begun. It began with God!

And that is how it works for each one of us too!

And in the same way that God is fighting a way to get through to you with His message of love, there is an enemy trying to thwart that effort.

We see that was the case here too. Think about the opposition Paul and His companions had to endure to get the gospel to these folks.

It all started way back in Acts 15, before Paul and Barnabus are getting ready to head out. A disagreement splits the missionary team in half threatening to foil the 2nd journey. Barnabus refuses to go and takes off in another direction.

But Paul remains firm in his resolve to go further west to the gentiles. So he takes Silas with him and sets out. After passing through some of the areas they had visited on their first missionary journey, they pass by Lystra to pick up Timothy heading toward Asia. But God directs them away from Asia and toward a leading city in Macedonia called Philippi.

Upon entering the city, they are met by a demon possessed slave girl who follows them around for days interrupting them as they preach the gospel. Paul finally turns to her and casts the demon out. Her owners, who made all kinds of money on her divination business, got so upset that they incited hatred against them that resulted in them being stripped naked, beaten with rods, flogged and thrown into a dark dungeon with their feet in stocks.

But God saves them mightily out of their situation. The believers there convince Paul and the crew to leave and head to Thessalonica. The Jews there were antagonistic toward the message and went out and rounded up some brutes from the marketplace who formed a mob and headed off to Jason's house where Paul and Silas and Timothy were staying. When they didn't find them, they dragged their host, Jason, out into the street and off to city hall where they made accusations against all Christians.

So the believers there led the three under darkness of night from Thessalonica to Berea where their message is widely received. But when the Jews back in Thessalonica heard about that, they traveled to Berea to incite another mob to accost them there.

This is how it works folks. God loves people. God wants people to hear the Good News of what He did for them through Jesus. God leads believers to reach out to others. When they follow that leading, the enemy tries to stop that process at all costs. He tries to discourage those God sends and inhibit those they are sent to from hearing!

Paul is saying, brothers and sisters of Thessalonica, God loved you and sent us to you because He chose that you should hear the Gospel and become a part of His new kingdom advance.

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 NIV, *“For we know, brothers and sisters, **loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.**”*

So it all started with God!

Paul is reminding these people of how God came into their lives—how God moved upon their hearts and made himself known to them.

And then he continues by complimenting...

II. Their Open Receptivity to the Lord.

Look at how he continues in verse 6.

1 Thessalonians 1:6 NIV, *“You **became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.**”*

Yes Paul is saying something about how the three of them ministered but he is also saying something about their receptivity.

They saw God working in Paul and they followed his example. **You became imitators of us.** That is part of the discipleship process—seeing God at work in someone else and hungering for more of God ourselves and choosing to follow the example God has given us. Notice how Paul says you became imitators of us **and of the Lord.**

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 NIV, Paul says, *“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”*

We should never tell people to follow us if we aren't following Christ. That would simply be the blind leading the blind.

But God's call on your life and my life is that we follow good examples. We learn from those who are sincerely following the Lord. We don't just listen to their words as some interesting suggestions. We set our course in the same direction they are going - toward the Lord.

The key is to follow those ***who follow the Lord*** not just charismatic personalities that tickle our ears and suit our fancies.

Why is this follow example so important? Well, *“when the going gets tough we need the example and encouragement of the tough in Christ to empower us to get going.”*

We need to be receptive to the Lord and those whom God sends our way. In saying that, I realize how easy it is to follow the wrong people. Let's face it people are flawed.

So how do you keep from being led astray when you don't have much Christian experience under your belt?

Well, this missionary endeavor in Thessalonica that ended them up in Berea tells us the secret to knowing when someone you are following is indeed following the Lord!

Acts 17:11 NIV, *“Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and **examined the Scriptures every day** to see if what Paul said was true.”*

So, Christians, follow others as they follow Jesus and make sure what they are exemplifying is backed biblically!

That kind of receptivity will always be met with a powerful accompanying of joy through the Holy Spirit despite your circumstances.

1 Thessalonians 1:6 NIV, *“You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering **with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.**”*

These Thessalonians were paying a heavy price for their faith. They were being ostracized by their friends, it was probably costing them financially, and their families may have been rejecting them. But instead of becoming bitter they just got better. They received the word of the Lord and in their receptivity toward God the joy of the Holy Spirit flooded their souls.

When life does not go the way we want it to—when there are disappointments and discouragements—there is the temptation to close our hearts to the word—to isolate ourselves from church and other believers and wallow in self-pity and wonder why God allows such things.

Don't do it! Find a mature believer to talk to. Share your pain and let them encourage you from their wealth of experience. Then go home and search out what they advise in the Bible. And the Holy Spirit will get you through your difficulty in ways that will astonish you.

Joy in times of difficulty, I know it's a paradox the world cannot understand. In the midst of pain and suffering the Holy Spirit can give a joy that carries us through it all.

Paul commends them for their willingness to be influenced by their witness. And that produced a greater harvest than the Thessalonians realized. So Paul finishes by showing how their receptivity resulted in...

III. God beginning His process of **reaching out to others through them.**

They followed Paul's example as he followed the Lord. Now they have become an example for others. They were motivated by faith, love, and hope and that caused them to be a living testimony of the grace of God. Their lifestyle heralded the Good News. People saw their faith by the way they lived.

1 Thessalonians 1:7-9a NIV says, "*And so you became **a model** to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. **The Lord's message rang out from you** not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has **become known everywhere**. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for **they themselves report** what kind of reception you gave us...*"

Outreach has two sides to it. On the one hand, we believe the message strongly enough that it motivates the way we live and model our faith. People can tell by the way we live that we genuinely believe in the Lord and embrace Him.

The other side is this. We “*speak forth the message*” of God’s grace. “*The Lord’s message rang out from you...*”

At some point we have to say to others what it is we believe and why. If we just try to live it without ever saying it we will have admirers perhaps see few new believers. For the gospel is a message that has to be spoken or shared.

If we speak it but don’t live it we will have little credibility. These Thessalonians are complimented for both living it and telling it.

Look at their testimony, the people whose lives have been impacted are reporting your story. “*they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*”

What was the message they were repeating?

1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10 NIV, “***They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.***”

1. You turned from something.

If your experience in Christ does not turn you from something, there is real cause for concern. It’s not enough to just assent to Jesus’ resurrection. Biblical belief produces change. It will cause us to turn from. These people turned from their idols. There are things we need to turn from.

2. You turned to God. There was a commitment of their lives to a person—to the Lordship of Christ. They were not just trying to get God’s support for their dreams and plans. They were dedicating themselves to God’s will for their lives.

3. You are expectantly waiting for his Son from Heaven.

Do you live looking forward to the coming of the Lord?

Are we waiting, hoping, expecting the coming of the Lord or are we just looking forward to a better house, a happy retirement, a new car, or our next vacation.

We should all live with the hope and prayer that He would come back ever so quickly. And at the same time, living in such a way that we plan wisely on how we will positively impact the kingdom tomorrow.

Look closely at Paul's description of Jesus in this context, "who rescues us from the coming wrath." **Jesus is our rescuer.**

We have been entrusted with work to do under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are to be about our Father's business. We are to be pursuing the Great Commission. Why? Because one day there will be a reckoning. All the injustice in the world will be reckoned for. All sin will have a consequence.

And so, all people will have to give an account. If you embrace God's love for you and accept the good news of Jesus' payment for your sin, then that account is closed. And if that happens it changes your life here as we see in the case of the Thessalonians. But it also saves you from the wrath to come.

I want that peace for my friends and family too, don't you? The whole package!

Colossians 4:5 ESV, *"Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time."*

Praise God, there is a Rescuer and the world needs Him!

In Closing:

In these verses we have some tools we can use to measure our lives by.

Does my life cause others to thank God?

Do they see in me work produced by faith, labor prompted by love, and endurance inspired by hope?

Am I an example to others?

Have I turned from things that displease God?

Have I turned to God with whole-hearted commitment?

Am I longing for His appearing or distracted by all kinds of other things?

Invitation