

GROWING PAINS

1 THESSALONIANS



Bible Studies for Ashfield Presbyterian Church
ashfieldpresbyterian.org.au

INTRODUCTION

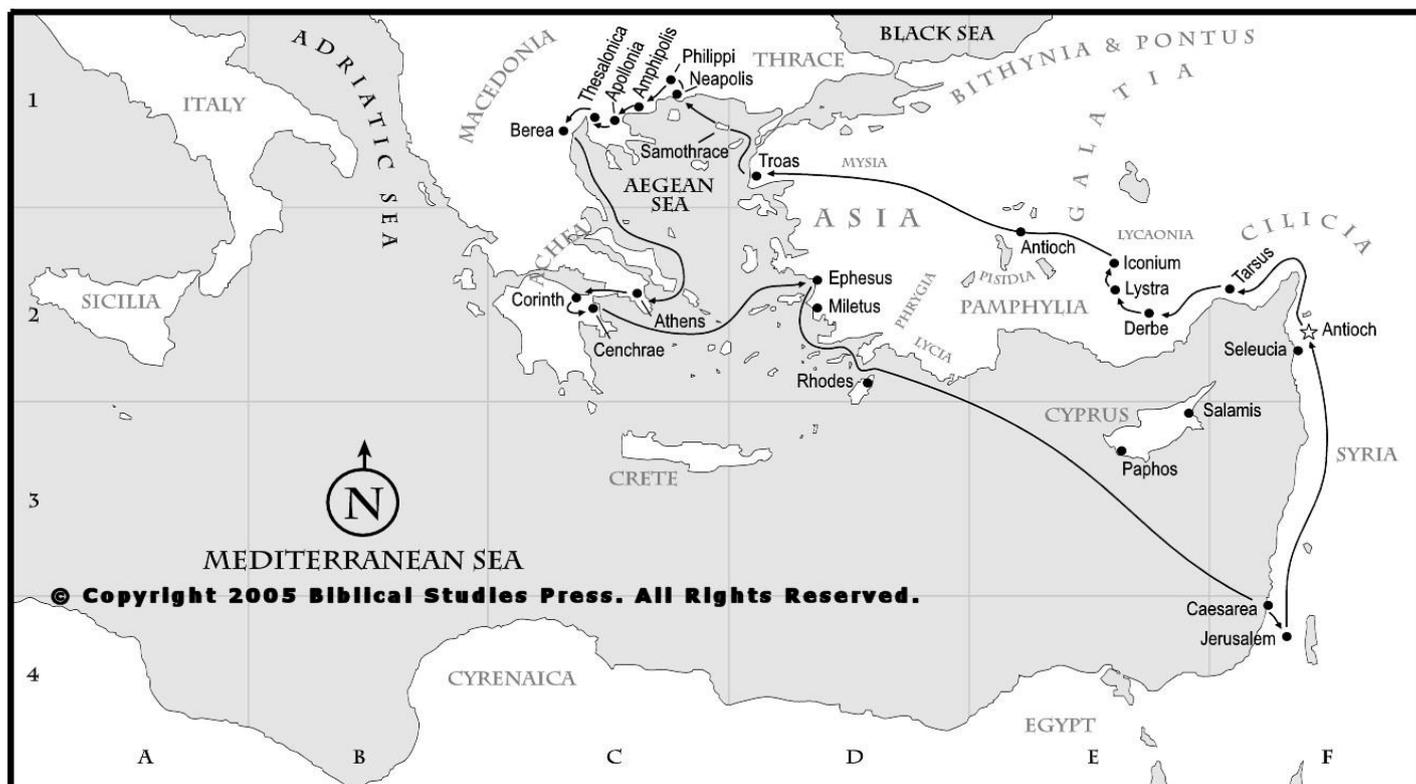
In the year A.D. 50, Paul entered Thessalonica while on his second missionary journey. Thessalonica was the largest city in Macedonia, with a population of about 200,000, and was a bustling seaport.

He preached there for three weeks, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ, and was able to persuade some Jews and a large number of God-fearing Greeks. However, a group of jealous Jews incited a riot against Paul, claiming that he was proclaiming another ruler in opposition to the Roman emperor, and he was forced to leave town (Acts 17:1-10).

Because of Paul's concern for this young church, he sent his co-worker, Timothy, to learn how the Thessalonians were doing (1 Thess 3:2). Timothy reported that their remained strong but that they continued to be persecuted by those who had banished Paul. Timothy also brought back questions that Paul had not had time to answer during his short stay.

First Thessalonians is Paul's letter offering encouragement and answering questions. It was written from Corinth only a few months after Paul had left Thessalonica.

In I Thessalonians Paul offers encouragement in four major areas: (1) How can I be sure that I will be with Jesus after death? (2) How can I be sure that Jesus is coming again? (3) How can I be sure that Jesus hasn't forgotten me when I am suffering persecution? (4) How can I be sure that my life is pleasing to God?



1 THESSALONIANS 1: A MODEL FAITH, A MODEL LIFE

A lighthouse has become a common analogy for a church. Just as a lighthouse stands in a dark and dangerous spot flashing its message of warning and pointing to safe harbour, a church should also be a prominent and unmistakable sign to the community in which it exists. How can you help your church or fellowship group become such a shining light? This passage describes how the church in Thessalonica was able to do it.

1. What is the reputation of your church throughout the community?
2. **Read I Thessalonians I.** What facts convinced Paul that the Thessalonians' faith was genuine?
3. Paul writes that he remembers the Thessalonians' "work produced by faith," "labour prompted by love" and "endurance inspired by hope" (v. 3). How do you think he could tell that faith, love and hope were behind their actions?
4. Who do you know that has demonstrated this kind of faith?

How has this inspired you?

5. What role has the Holy Spirit played in the Thessalonians' faith (vv. 5-6)?

How has the Holy Spirit brought this about for you?

6. What role did Paul, Silas and Timothy have in the Thessalonians' conversion (v. 6)?
7. When is it wise and when is it unwise to imitate another Christian (vv. 6-7)?

8. What were the results of the Thessalonians' strong faith (vv. 8-10)?

9. How can your faith (and the faith of your church or home group) become more of a witness to others?

10. How would this chapter have been an encouragement to the Thessalonians?

How is it an encouragement to you?

Prayer

Ask to be made a genuine witness, and pray for the witness of your church.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-16: A ROYAL INVITATION

What thoughts come to your mind when you hear the word evangelism? Pushy people trying to get you to see things their way? Guilt for not saying enough about Jesus? People swarming down the aisles at a gigantic rally? Or friends sharing the excitement of the good news with each other? For Paul, evangelism was always delightful and exciting. In this passage he tells us why talking about Christ is such a positive experience for him.

1. How do you feel about telling others about your faith? Has it been a positive or negative experience? Explain.
2. **Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16.** What excuses might Paul have had not to preach to the Thessalonians (vv. 1-2)?
3. What attitudes enable Paul to continue preaching despite opposition (vv. 3-6)?

What does this teach you about proper and improper reasons for witnessing to others?

4. How was Paul like a mother caring for her little children (7-9)?
5. In what specific ways can gentleness and caring become more a part of your evangelistic efforts?
6. Paul claims to have been "holy, righteous and blameless" (v. 10) among the Thessalonians. If this is important, how can imperfect people dare to do evangelism?
7. How is a father dealing with his children a good example of an evangelist (vv. 11-12)?

8. What difficulties did the Thessalonians face in sharing their faith with others (14-16)?

What encouragement does Paul give them not to give up?

9. In what ways have you found evangelism to be difficult?

10. What ideas and encouragement from this passage can help you to overcome these difficulties?

Prayer

Ask God to give you encouragement to be a gentle evangelist.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:17-3:13: OUT OF SIGHT, NOT OUT OF MIND

It's all very well for churches to have a wide open FRONT door. But many churches don't think about the BACK door. Many people stop coming to church because they don't feel loved. It's no good getting people INTO church if they don't STAY. How can your church become a place where love will "increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else" (1Th 3:12)? This passage provides some practical examples.

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how loved do you feel by the members of your church or fellowship group? Why did you give that ranking?
2. **Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13.** What evidence do you find in this passage that Paul really did love the Thessalonians (2:17, 20; 3:2, 5, 10)?
3. What phrases does Paul use to express his love (2:17-18; 3:5)?
4. How do you most often express your love for others?

What ideas from this passage can help you become better at expressing love?

5. What fears caused Paul to send Timothy to Thessalonica (3:2-5)?
6. How had Paul prepared the Thessalonians for hardship (3:4)?

What further help do you think Timothy might have given during his visit?

7. How can you show love to people who are suffering?
8. Why was Timothy's report such good news to Paul (3:6-8)?
9. What are Paul's desires for the Thessalonians (3:10-13)?

How do these desires reflect Paul's love and caring?

10. How might Paul's example have helped the Thessalonians' love to "increase and overflow" (3:12)?
11. How can you (as an individual or group) help love increase within your church or fellowship group?

Prayer

Ask God to help you show love to someone in your church this week.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-12: ON BEING DIFFERENT

All of us want to please the people we love the most. That is why a wife will surprise her husband with his favourite meal, a husband will plan a special evening at a concert he knows will excite his wife, or a child will pick a bouquet of dandelions to present to Mom and Dad. What can Christians do to please God, whom they love so dearly? This passage offers some ideas.

1. If a Christian brother or sister asked you for advice on how to make their life more pleasing to God, what is the first thing you would say?
2. **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12.** Why would Paul give these instructions on holy living to people whom he says are already living a life which pleases God (vv. 1,10)?
3. Why is it important for us to keep reminding ourselves of how we ought to live (3)?
- 4.
5. What clues does this passage give as to how Paul would define sexual immorality (vv. 3-6)?
- 6.
7. What reasons does Paul give for avoiding sexual immorality (5-8)?
8. How does sexual immorality "wrong" or "take advantage of" a brother (v. 6)?
9. How can this passage help you resist sexual temptation?
10. In 9-10 Paul commends the Thessalonians for their love. What could a group with such a reputation do to love each other even more?

How can these ideas be applied to your church?

11. Verses 11 and 12 were directed toward members of the church who had quit working and were relying on the kindness of their fellow Christians to provide them with necessities. Why would Paul have been concerned about the effect this attitude was having on outsiders?

12. What do unbelievers notice about your work habits that attracts them to Christ?

What work habits detract from your Christian witness?

13. Paul has given commands in this passage concerning sexual immorality, love for fellow Christians and work. What can you do this week to become more obedient in one of these areas?

Prayer

Give your life to the Lord, praying that it will be made pleasing to him.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-5:11: LIVING WITH THE END IN SIGHT

A crisis occurred in the Thessalonian church when one of their members died. Since they had expected to all be alive when Christ returned, they were now confused. Did this mean their friend would miss out on Christ's coming? Had this person died because God was angry with them? How much longer would it be before Christ finally did return? Maybe you have fears about what will happen when you die or when Christ returns. In this passage, Paul seeks to calm our fears and encourage us to look forward to the day we meet our Maker.

1. What fears do you have about death?
2. **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11.** In what ways is grief different for a Christian than it is for a non-Christian (4:13)?
3. What sequence of events does Paul say will occur when Christ returns (4:16-17)?
4. How would Paul's words have encouraged the Thessalonians?

How can they help you face your own fears about death?

5. What is the "day of the Lord" (2)?
6. Why are the examples of a thief (5:2) and labour pains (5:3) good analogies of what will happen on the day of the Lord?
7. What kinds of reactions can we expect to see from non-Christians when Christ returns (3)?

How will Christians react (4-6)?

8. What dangers are associated with living in darkness (5:5-7)?

9. What instructions does Paul give for living in the light (5:8)?

10. Paul tells us that our defensive weapons against darkness are faith, love and hope (v. 8). What are some practical ways in which these virtues can defend you?

11. What is God's plan for us (9-11)?

12. How can you prepare for the day of the Lord?

Prayer

Pray that you will be made ready for the day of the Lord.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-28: JOY IN THE JOURNEY

Any group of people needs rules for getting along, and the church is no exception. Paul so wants the Thessalonians to "live in peace with each other" (1Th 5:13) that he closes his first letter to them with several instructions on how they can do this. These are instructions that have never gone out of date and can still be used to end the quarrels, hurt feelings and resentments in your church or fellowship group.

1. If you had the power to make one rule for helping people get along, what would it be?
2. **Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28.** What does it mean for someone to be "over you in the Lord" (v. 12)?

What can you do to show your regard for such a person in your church?

3. The instructions Paul gives to all the "brothers" in 14-15 sound very much like the kind of things you would expect only a leader to do. What does this teach you about the responsibilities of every member of the church?
4. How can you warn a person about something they are doing wrong (v. 14) or prevent them from taking revenge (v. 15) and still live in peace with them?
5. What does it mean to be joyful "always," pray "continually" and give thanks "in all circumstances" (vv. 16-18)?
6. 19-22 teach about a Christian's relationship with the Holy Spirit. How might a person treat prophecy with contempt?
7. How can you test things like prophecy or teaching to find out if they are good or evil (vv. 19-22)?
8. How can a greater openness to the Spirit improve human relationships within a group of Christians?

9. Look through the passage again and pick out the actions and attitudes (stated or implied) which are displeasing to God. What are they?

What does God do to keep you from these sins (23-24)?

10. When have you found God faithful in keeping you from sin (v. 24)?

Prayer

Follow the discipline of giving thanks in all circumstances by finding as many things in your life as you can to be thankful for.