



# *1 THESSALONIANS*

SERIES GUIDE



RED DOOR RESOURCES

# SERIES OUTLINE

PLEASE READ AHEAD AND PRAY FOR YOUR RED DOOR FAMILY

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<b>TEXT</b>	<b>SUNDAY</b>	<b>SERMON TITLE</b>
Acts 17:1-15	11 July	Turning the World Upside Down
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10	18 July	Faith, Love & Hope
1 Thessalonians 2:1-12	25 July	Decrease Was His Glory
1 Thessalonians 2:13-16	1 August	Welcoming the Word
1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13	8 August	Anxious Apostle
1 Thessalonians 3:11-4:12	15 August	God of Sex, Labour of Love
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	22 August	The Return of the King
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11	29 August	We Belong to the Day
1 Thessalonians 5:14-18	5 September	Living the Gospel (Fluently)
1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 19-28	12 September	Farewell From Paul (& Phil)

# TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

WEEK ONE | ACTS 17:1-15

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## THE BIG IDEA

In response to a vision from God (Acts 16:8-10) Paul re-routes his second missionary journey and takes the gospel to Europe for the first time. In the region of Macedonia (Northern Greece), a new church is planted in the capital city of Thessalonica... and all hell breaks loose!

## KEY TEACHING POINTS

**Same Old Story Acts 17:1-4** Paul may have arrived on a new continent, but his strategy is unchanged - he opens the Bible and preaches the gospel: Jesus is the Messiah who suffered, died and rose again. While he was always keen to contextualise his ministry (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23), Paul never deviated from the essential content of the gospel message.

**Riot in the City Acts 17:5-7** Missionaries sometimes report an inordinate negative response to their gospel work - particularly when they begin a new ministry in a new location. That inordinate response is seen here, as an assembled mob causes a riot in the city as the first converts come to Christ. They accuse the missionaries of

*turning the world upside down* - which is a wonderful description of the outworking of the gospel. If only we had more Christians turning the world upside down!

Cleverly, the antagonists accuse Paul and his friends of proclaiming "another king - Jesus". In Thessalonica, there would have been signs everywhere proclaiming "Caesar is Lord". The Roman ruler's expectation of absolute fealty, to the point of being worshipped as divine, made the preaching of 'Jesus as Lord' a dangerous business - punishable by death.

**Escape Acts 17:8-14** In light of this very real threat, the new church at Thessalonica sent Paul and Silas (known as 'Silvanus' in 1 Thess.) away to Berea and then on to Athens. Even as they escaped for their safety, they spent time sharing the gospel with very similar results: some people were saved, some people were enraged!

**Safety in the South Acts 17:15** Ultimately, Paul, Silas (joined by Timothy) find safety in southern Greece, spending a good amount of time in Athens and Corinth. It's from here that Paul writes - with anxiety for their wellbeing - to his very young church in Thessalonica.

# FAITH, LOVE & HOPE

WEEK TWO | 1 THESSALONIANS 1

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## THE BIG IDEA

Faith, Love, and Hope are the fruits of genuine conversion. Indeed, the French theologian John Calvin, went as far to say: *Faith, Love, and Hope is a brief definition of true Christianity*. In the context of this passage, faith means trusting the *faithfulness* of God; Love means working for the benefit of those around us; and Hope means persevering patiently as we wait for the Second Coming.

## KEY TEACHING POINTS

**The Fruit of Gospel Living 1:1-3** As Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy remember their brothers and sisters in Thessalonica, three attributes of that young church race to the front of their minds:

1. Their work produced by faith;
2. Their labor motivated by love;
3. Their endurance inspired by hope.

It's interesting that the attributes that require effort - work, labour, endurance - are themselves produced by attributes of the heart - faith, love, hope. This is so

important for us to remember because we are prone to emphasise either *work* or *heart* at the expense of the other. In the economy of the gospel, both go together.

**The Root of Gospel Living 1:4-5** This beautiful demonstration of gospel living is impossible without God first doing his work of regeneration. Where faith, love, and hope are true evidences of salvation, the electing (choosing) love of God is the ultimate foundation. To put it another way, without God first choosing us in love, we would never be able to exhibit the attributes of faith, love, and hope (cf. Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:1-10).

**Am I Really Saved? 1:6-10** As he looks for more reasons to praise God for the salvation of the Thessalonians, Paul mentions at least six more evidences of their salvation:

1. They imitate Jesus (v6);
2. They persevere in persecution (v6);
3. They welcome the gospel with joy (v6);
4. They preach the word of God everywhere (v7-8);
5. They turn away (repent) from idols to serve Jesus (v9);
6. They wait patiently for his return (v9-10)

# DECREASE WAS HIS GLORY

WEEK THREE | 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12

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## THE BIG IDEA

In the Greco-Roman world of antiquity, it (literally) paid to be a travelling speaker. Orators would travel from town-to-town, presenting the latest philosophical or theological ideas, and it was common for these men to be rewarded with sex, money, and praise. It seems that some in Thessalonica were accusing Paul of being the kind of guy who came to town for the rewards, and left as soon as it got tough. In this passage, he makes his defence.

## KEY TEACHING POINTS

**Paid in Beatings 2:1-3** Paul's first defence is logical: if he was in this 'business' for the rewards, why would he carry on preaching after that got him beaten and thrown in prison just down the road in Philippi? It's a good general rule: if your job gets you paid in punches rather than praise, you're probably not in it for the glory.

**Gospel Preachers Aren't Glory-Seekers 2:4-6** Every preacher of God's word should have this passage memorised! It's a vital corrective to the excesses of the 'celebrity preacher' culture we see in our own day.

It's true that we can never have perfectly pure motives - all of us have base desires that (to some degree) drive our service of Jesus. Paul's point is that the core motivator for our ministry ought to be the glory of God - not self (v5-6).

An antidote to selfish ministry is to remember 2:4

1. We have been approved by God;
2. We have been entrusted with the gospel;
3. So we speak, not to please people, but rather God (who knows the true motivation of our hearts).

**Loved Like Mum & Dad 2:7-12** Paul is sometimes caricatured as some kind of macho mission machine, but the reality is very different. When searching for a metaphor for his ministry, he invokes the image of a nursing mother (v7), and a comforting father (v11).

**Word & Works 2:8** Whereas we tend towards one form of ministry over the other: sharing the gospel (word) or sharing our lives (works), this missionary team did both. Indeed, any truly gospel-centred ministry does both. In so doing, we follow the example of our Lord Jesus who preached the good news, and gave himself for all.

# WELCOMING THE WORD

WEEK FOUR | 1 THESSALONIANS 2:13-16

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## THE BIG IDEA

When Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy thank God for the Thessalonians, they remember two great evidences of the genuine faith of their fledgling church: 1. They received the message of the gospel as the very words of God; and 2. They were prepared to suffer for being followers of Jesus.

## KEY TEACHING POINTS

**The Word Works 2:13** Our friend, Peter Adam, says that the Bible is not merely authoritative over us (telling us what to do) but has authority to change us (transforming us from within).

So it was in Thessalonica. The word that was received and welcomed, was 'working effectively' in their community. One result of this was the growth in faith, love, and hope that Paul had mentioned previously.

The Bible builds us in these key areas as it shows us a picture of a God who saves us and is able to be trusted (faith); a God who is merciful and gracious - even to the point of death (love); and a God who has a plan to

redeem and renew all things - and who will bring that plan to completion in the second coming of Jesus (hope).

In response to seeing this self-revelation of God, we are both *called and empowered* to live as image-bearers, rightly reflecting the glory of God.

**Suffering Works Too 2:14-16** Even as they grow in faith, love, and hope, the believers in Thessalonica are suffering bitterly. Paradoxically, this encourages Paul, who remembers the way the Christians in Judea likewise suffered (in fact, he - Saul of Tarsus - was at one time responsible for their suffering!).

The reason this encourages him is because it is evidence that their faith is genuine. If it wasn't, they would simply go back to worshiping the pagan gods and catch a break.

Finally, Paul knows that rather than being evidence that God doesn't love us, or that we're not truly saved, suffering actually proves and purifies our faith, making it stronger than it was before (1 Peter 1:5-7). God therefore uses both his word, and the circumstances of a broken world, to make us more like Jesus.

# ANXIOUS APOSTLE

WEEK FIVE | 1 THESSALONIANS 2:17-3:13

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## THE BIG IDEA

Paul is in Athens - 500 km south of Thessalonica - and he's anxious. He knows the new believers there are suffering, because all faithful Christians will (3:3-4). So he sends Timothy to check it out, and is overjoyed when he gets the report. Satan is at large, but Jesus is Lord!

## KEY TEACHING POINTS

**Stressed-Out Shepherd 2:17-20** The Apostle speaks of being *forced to leave* - literally "orphaned" from the church. This tearing away has made him very anxious for the faith of his new converts. He's tried to return, but Satan keeps getting in his way. We don't know how exactly, but as is often the case, God uses even evil things for the good of his people. For example, without Paul being kept from returning to Thessalonica, we wouldn't have this letter!

**Timothy Goes North 3:1-5** Paul's big fear is that the Thessalonians will be tempted to leave the way of Jesus. The fact that they are suffering persecution might mean they are tempted to give up - or at least to compromise their allegiance to King Jesus by stepping back into some

of their former Pagan ways.

If this young church ultimately turns away from the faith, then the whole mission to Thessalonica will be ruined (3:5). With this in mind, he sends his young co-worker, Timothy, to check things out.

**This Just In 3:6-10** Good news! Timothy returns with an encouraging report, and Paul joyfully and immediately begins writing the letter we are studying.

He is particularly pleased to hear of their faith and love. As we have noted, these are real evidences of God's persevering grace in their community. It's interesting, though, that he doesn't mention the third of his triad: hope. This might be because they were struggling to comprehend the intricacies of Jesus' second coming (cf. 4:13).

**Thoughts & Prayers 3:11-13** This heartfelt prayer knits together the two halves of the letter. Paul introduces some of the key themes of chapters 4&5: the love that believers are to have for one another, the call to live in holiness (not immorality), and the hope of Jesus' second coming.



# GOD OF SEX, LABOUR OF LOVE

WEEK SIX | 1 THESSALONIANS 3:11-4:12

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## THE BIG IDEA

Because Jesus is Lord, he has authority to give commands for every area of our lives. This can cause irritation for people like us who are shaped to value personal freedom and self-gratification. Unlike other rulers, however, Jesus' commands are only for our flourishing.

## KEY TEACHING POINTS

**Please God 4:1-2** You might find it hard to imagine that you can please God. Some of us feel like he must be pretty repulsed by us most of the time! And yet, here Paul says that we can, in fact, live in a way that pleases God as we take seriously his commands and live in obedience.

**God of Sex 4:3-8** God longs for us to become the sort of humans who truly reflect his image. That's what Paul means when he says that sanctification is God's will for us. This holiness of living echoes the calling of the Temple Priests to be purified in order to do their ministry.

As with the Old Covenant Temple, we as believers now have God's Spirit dwelling within us! Thus, all Christians

are now temples of God, and so holiness of life is our natural calling (1 Cor. 6:19-20). This is in stark contrast to the pagan temples of Thessalonica, which doubled as brothels for religious prostitution.

Paul's instructions might be uncomfortable, but they're not unclear! 1. No sexual practice outside the union of husband and wife (v.3). 2. Maintain *self*-control (v.4-5) because sex is not about *self*. 3. No cheating (v.6a) by adultery or abuse. These are God's commands (v6b-7) and he will back them up with judgement, because to reject his commands is to reject God himself (v.8).

**Labour of Love 4:9-12** The church is most beautiful when it functions like a family, which is why Paul keeps referring to the Thessalonians as 'brothers and sisters'. As such, the church is called to look out for one another and to provide for those in need.

In order to meet the needs of the poor and those unable to support themselves, believers will need to work diligently. This, along with their purity of life, will speak volumes to those outside the church (v12).



# THE RETURN OF THE KING

WEEK SEVEN | 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

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## THE BIG IDEA

The Thessalonians weren't sure about what happened to Christians who die because Paul didn't have the chance to complete his teaching there (3:10). So when some died, they responded with a sense of hopelessness (4:13). Would their friends miss out on Jesus' Second Coming?

## KEY TEACHING POINTS

**Rising From Sleep 4:13-14** Paul begins with the most important truth: *Jesus died and rose again*. It's on this basis, he says, that deceased loved ones will also rise from 'sleep' (i.e. death) when Jesus returns.

**When Jesus Shows Up 4:15-17** Describing the cataclysmic moment when Jesus returns is not an easy task! Some have (in my view) misunderstood this passage to mean that Jesus will actually return twice:

1. A secret return to 'rapture' his people, so that believers will suddenly vanish without any warning and those left behind won't know what happened to them; and
2. The *actual* Second Coming, when Jesus will conduct

the final judgment and usher in the New Creation.

There are several reasons to reject the idea of a two-stage return: First and foremost, this doctrine is not explicitly taught anywhere in the Scriptures. Second, it was not broadly held in the church until the 19<sup>th</sup> century rise of premillennial dispensationalism in America.

In contrast to the picture of Jesus secretly returning to earth and making a quick escape with his people back to Heaven, Paul actually describes one where King Jesus meets his people 'in the clouds' and then the whole company actually return to the earth where Jesus rules and makes all things new. Thus, his return, our resurrection, the final judgement, and the renewal of all things happen in one cataclysmic event: The Day of the Lord! (c.f. 5:1-11)

**Paul's Point 4:18** Paul's purpose here isn't to predict the future, but to encourage the church! He wants them to know that their dead loved ones won't miss out. Therefore, arguments about the precise details of the Second Coming completely miss the point he's trying to make.

# WE BELONG TO THE DAY

WEEK EIGHT | 1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

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## THE BIG IDEA

Paul uses a mixture of images to illustrate his teaching about how to live in light of Jesus' second coming. Ultimately, he wants the church to remain alert (v6) conscious of their calling to live in anticipation of the Day of the Lord - just as Jesus instructed his own disciples 20 years previously (Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39; 21:34-35).

## KEY TEACHING POINTS

**Living in the Light: Posture 5:1-5** Because the second coming of Jesus is central to our faith, Christians should live each day in light of eternity. This should give us a distinctive approach to daily life.

Some rely on the present state of society, or politics, or prosperity to provide comfort and hope (those who say 'peace and security'). These people often scoff at the thought of a coming judgment, or 'pie-in-the-sky' heaven. In contrast, Christians rest assured of God's redemptive plan, and live in light of the second coming of Jesus. We know that it's only then that we will finally and fully experience peace on earth.

**Living in the Light: Practise 5:6-8** This doesn't mean Christians should be indifferent to those who 'live in darkness' (unbelievers), or the plight of the earth that God is going to renew - rather, our role is to prepare for the second coming by making the most of the time that we have.

We do this by turning away from our old 'night-time' lives, characterised by foolish living. Instead, we hold fast to the gospel message, putting on the armour of faith, love, and hope - which Paul has frequently referred to as key indicators of genuine faith in Jesus.

In this way, the practise of 'living in the light' could be summarised as making every effort, by God's grace, to make all of life all about Jesus!

**Living in the Light: Promise 5:9-11** Thus equipped, we can be confident, even if we die (v.10), that we will not face God's judgement and wrath, but be welcomed into the New Creation to live with Jesus upon his return.

The gospel promises that Jesus' death was sufficient: because he died, we will live.

# LIVING THE GOSPEL (FLUENTLY)

WEEK NINE | 1 THESSALONIANS 5:14-18

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## THE BIG IDEA

Like a foreign language we desire to speak fluently, living full of faith, love, and hope - living the gospel - doesn't happen overnight. We learn as we go. And as with learning a foreign language, there are some key rules to learn which will help us live the gospel fluently.

(Note: for v.12-13 see Week Ten)

## KEY TEACHING POINTS

I really like how Tom Wright renders our passage in his New Testament for Everyone (NTE) translation:

*14 And, my dear family, we beg you to warn those who step out of line. Console the downcast; help the weak, be warm-hearted and patient towards everybody. 15 Make sure nobody pays anyone back evil for evil. Instead, always find the way to do good to one another, and to everybody.*

*16 Always celebrate,*

*17 never stop praying;*

*18 in everything be thankful*

*(this is God's will for you in the Messiah Jesus);*

**Red Door Mission 5:14-15** After addressing the role played by the leaders of the church, Paul turns to the shared responsibility of the whole community to shepherd and disciple one another. This includes warning, comforting, helping, forbearing, forgiving, and generally love one another!

At our church, we see this as our primary mission: we exist to be a community of people helping people make all of life all about Jesus. This isn't something that happens passively, rather we must 'pursue it' (v.15).

**Paradoxical Partying 5:16-18** Paul understood that the Thessalonians were suffering. His own experience of the Christian life was completely shot-through with it. And yet, he wants his young church to learn how to party in the midst of it.

Prolonged suffering can have the effect of dulling us to God's goodness and grace. The antidote to this is to celebrate, pray, and give thanks consistently - in good times and bad - knowing that God's favour doesn't waver irrespective of our circumstances.

# FAREWELL FROM PAUL (& PHIL)

WEEK TEN | 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-13; 19-28

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## THE BIG IDEA

It's with a heavy heart that we come to two endings:

1. The final week of our 1 Thessalonians series, and
2. The final Sunday before Phil and Petra Pike move interstate. It's fitting that Phil will preach this sermon after many years of faithful service together with Petra.

## KEY TEACHING POINTS

**Love Your Leaders 5:12-13** Continuing from last week's message on living the gospel fluently, Paul exhorts the church to love those whom God has given to lead. These were likely new converts themselves, and so needed a good amount of support. Accordingly, Paul wants the believers to give attention, affection, and appropriate financial reward (that's probably what 'love' means in v.13; cf. 4:9-12).

**Judging Prophecy 5:19-22** The church is called to evaluate prophecy in light of apostolic teaching (cf. 2 Thess. 2:15). Therefore we should expect all prophetic words to be in absolute conformity with Scripture. Taking into account what Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, we

should also measure prophetic words by their tendency to edify or build up (1 Cor. 14:3), along with the overall test of love (1 Cor. 13). Finally, we should always share the prophetic word with others in our community who have skill and experience in evaluating prophetic revelation.

**He Who Calls You is Faithful 5:23-28** Paul's prayer that God would sanctify his friends completely - spirit, soul, and body - might seem like wishful thinking. We only need to look to our own feeble attempts at holiness to see what a big job that would be!

But therein lies the point. It's not us working alone, doing our best, that will see us kept sound and blameless at Jesus' second coming. We have work to do, for sure. It's an all-of-life commitment to follow Jesus, and one that requires daily effort. But ultimately, our hope rests not on ourselves, or our church, but on the God who calls us.

***He is faithful; he will do it!***

This faith in God's trustworthiness comforts us when the time comes to farewell much-loved brothers and sisters. In our grief, we can be assured of God's loving provision for them, and for us.



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