

Walking With the Father Through 1 Thessalonians

Over the years, I've found my life changing and my faith deepening as I meet with our heavenly Father in His word. This has been especially true as I've been writing these devotionals and having to live what I write.

I long for you to be able to say the same as you read through this letter.

As I've gotten to know Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John through their letters, I'm overwhelmed by how they were changed by knowing and walking with their Lord. How much they must have longed for us to know Him as they did.

As John wrote in 1 John 2:3-6, he wants us to walk as Jesus did and believed that it was absolutely possible to do so. So how did Jesus walk? That's one secret our Father shares with us.

Blessings on your time as we take another walk with the Father,

Margie Martin

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This is Paul's first letter to this new church in Thessalonica and is considered to be the first letter he wrote that we find in the New Testament. Thessalonica was founded as a port and a commercial center and was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. Paul preached there for only three weeks on his second missionary journey and later wrote this letter and the next one to the believers who lived there.

This letter was written while Paul was in Corinth sometime during 51-53 A.D., probably within a year of having visited these believers in Thessalonica.

Silas's inclusion in the greeting was undoubtedly welcomed by the believers in this church since he had been Paul's primary assistant during their first visit to the city. But Timothy's name indicates the close relationship this young man must have quickly made with the Thessalonians, especially after his personal visit to them that Paul refers to in chapter 3.

For the history of this church, see Acts 17:1-9 for Paul's second missionary journey

For more information on the Thessalonians, see Acts 27:2 and Philippians 4:16



New Testament World

As you spend time in this letter, please take the time to talk with our Father about what He's showing you so you're not just gathering information. As you pray, you can use the space on each page to journal your thoughts or write Him a note.

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1 Thessalonians 1:1

“Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.”

I've had a very long week emotionally, mainly because I haven't made the time to sit down and start meeting with my Father in His Word. Coming to this verse in 1 Thessalonians is like taking a long drink of cool water on a hot and dry day. But there's not much here, is there? Just a greeting similar to those we've already seen in Paul's other letters. Even as I've thought and prayed about what to write, I've been having a sense of my soul and spirit being satisfied. I think it's because, as I'm sitting down to meet with God, He's lavishing Himself on me through His Spirit. Thank you, Father.

Which leads me to the thought for today: What does God want us to have? Let's look at some possibilities from the greeting:

1. He wants us to have a significant involvement in others' lives, but that quality of involvement will only come with years of walking closely with Him (*Paul, Silas, and Timothy*).
2. He wants us to be involved with a community of believers that has Jesus Christ as its head (*to the church of the Thessalonians*).
3. He wants us to know Him as the Creator of the universe, the One who keeps things going, AND as the One to whom we can go with any issue, problem, or joy since He loves being with us (*God the Father*).
4. He wants us to be under the authority of, identify with, and be saved by *the Lord Jesus Christ*.
5. He wants us to experience all of His resources (*grace*) in a troubled and troubling world (*peace*).
6. And He wants all of this for us (*to you*).

Do you have what God wants for you? Do you need to make some changes in your thinking or lifestyle so you can have what God wants for you today?

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1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

“You became imitators of us and of the Lord . . . and so you became a model to all the believers.”

As I was reading through these two paragraphs, many phrases and sentences jumped out at me. But the question that popped into my mind is “Who is my model? Whose life am I imitating?” No matter how independent we may think we are, I bet each of us has someone we use as a role model. Who is yours?

Paul commends the Thessalonians on how they watched Silas, Timothy, and himself while they were living among these new believers. Then the Thessalonians began to imitate the lifestyle of these men and of the Lord Himself. I think it’s amazing that not only did the Thessalonians see the similarities among these three men who had such different personalities, but they could also see that their way of living and interacting was the same as Jesus’. So let’s look at these two paragraphs again and see what we can discover as to what the Thessalonians saw to imitate in the lives of Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

- Their work was produced by faith.
- Their labor was prompted by love.
- Their endurance was inspired by hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- They were loved by God and chosen by Him.
- Their teaching of the gospel came with power, the Holy Spirit, and deep conviction.
- They welcomed with joy the message given by the Holy Spirit in spite of severe suffering.
- Their faith was in God.
- They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.
- They were waiting for God’s Son from heaven—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Two questions: who are you really imitating, and what would someone look like if he or she would be imitating you?

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1 Thessalonians 2:1-6a

“We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.”

Have you ever been in a situation where you were doing what you thought you were supposed to be doing and then experiencing people making life hard for you, insulting you, and opposing you, perhaps even to your face? How have you reacted? I tend to crawl into the proverbial hole and lick my wounds. You may be more assertive and lash out—if not to your offenders then perhaps to those around you who are nearest and dearest. Before Paul’s conversion, I bet he was more like the latter.

But in this section Paul models a third way of dealing with this opposition. Paul and his friends had willingly shared the Gospel with the Thessalonians even though they had just previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi. And what did they receive in return? Strong opposition by many but belief by some. How could Paul continue—persevere—in the face of such opposition with such little reward? Let’s look at some possible ideas:

- Paul chose to look at the success of some Thessalonians choosing to believe in Christ instead of looking at the riots that happened; therefore, his visit wasn’t a failure—God was involved and working in people’s hearts.
- Paul knew he was approved by God and was entrusted with the gospel, so he didn’t have to resort to saying untrue things to make listeners happy; he knew he didn’t have impure motives, he wasn’t trying to trick them.
- Paul wanted to please God who tests our hearts, and not men; therefore, God was responsible for the outcome.
- Paul never used flattery or put on a mask to cover up any greed.
- Paul wasn’t looking for praise from men, from the Thessalonians or from anyone else.

I think that persevering is another way to imitate Paul and the Lord Jesus Christ, don’t you? Now I’m almost looking forward to opposition so I can practice this way of responding. How about coming up with a game plan for yourself of how you want to respond to the opposition that is just around the corner?

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1 Thessalonians 2:6b-12

“ . . . we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you . . . because you had become so dear to us. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”

While this section deals primarily with how Paul conducted himself while he was with the Thessalonians, the analogy he uses to describe his behavior is parenting. Since we all know we're to work diligently at whatever the Lord gives us to do, I thought I'd take another look at this passage by seeing how Paul encourages us to parent—whether it's with our own children, our grandchildren, or our children in the faith.

Notice first that he was like both a mother and a father toward the Thessalonians:

Mother: Gentle, caring for, a love that shares life, emotionally close and endearing

Father: Encouraging, comforting, urging his child to go beyond both what is and what is comfortable

Now, you may not have had parents like this—all too many of us haven't—but this is the type of parent God wants all of us to be for the next generation. Jesus was this way when He was here on earth, and He is still available for this type of parenting in our lives through the Holy Spirit.

Ask Him to be what you feel you need from a parent, and I bet He'll begin to show you His parental love—probably through others, but especially in His Word.

Watch Jesus in the Gospels—He's what men, women, and children need.

Ask Him to make you a mother and father in the faith as you grow up in Him.

Now **watch** Him work in your life year after year after year.

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1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”

Probably one of the most important questions we have to answer is “How do I respond to the Word of God?”

When I was young and in school (eons ago), teachers knew their “stuff,” and we learned from them. It seems like learning has changed, though, and students over the past 20 years have had little confidence in their teachers—for a variety of reasons and probably some of them are very good! Over the years we’ve heard that we shouldn’t trust anyone over 30, 40, and then 50. We’ve heard “Challenge Authority!” We hear students today saying that if the material isn’t relevant, it’s not worth studying. They’ve become the ones to determine the relevance. While skepticism can be healthy, it does put us in a place where our evaluation of something is the only thing that counts.

So, how does this work when it comes to the Word of God? How do we respond when we read what God thinks is true or right? If we don’t understand or like it, do we dismiss it like everything else we read that we don’t like?

Let’s look at what Paul says about the Thessalonians. They:

Received the Word of God through men but as the living Word of God.

Accepted it as from God.

Believed it.

Were changed because it was at work in them.

Do you hold out God’s truth at arm’s length, evaluating it from your own perspective? Or do you receive it, accept it, believe it, and let it change you from the inside out—from attitudes to actions? Really?

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1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5

“Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”

In the United States we've grown up with the notion that we have the right to pursue happiness. I don't know about you, but when I try to make myself happy, I usually end up being miserable because I'm only thinking about myself. And if I do make myself happy, it doesn't last very long, and it certainly doesn't overflow to those around me.

Paul says that his glory and his joy (which is a fruit of the Spirit, like an apple is the fruit of an apple tree) are the Thessalonians themselves as they walk with Jesus.

However, I couldn't help but notice the circumstances Paul was in because of being involved with them: torn away from them physically, intensely longing to see them again, thwarted by Satan from seeing them, was so longing to hear about them that he was willing to be by himself for a period of time while Timothy went to see them, endured many trials, was persecuted, and afraid that through his own persecution the tempter had so tempted the Thessalonians that they'd left the faith.

What circumstances are you in? Are you overwhelmed, alone, under attack, away from those you love, deeply concerned for others? And has this been going on for a while?

I think the comfort and encouragement I received from this section is the knowledge and confidence that Jesus is going to come again. Whatever is going on will have an end—it won't continue forever. And Jesus Christ will set all things right and deal with Satan at the right time.

But what are we to be doing while we wait? Stew in our circumstances? No, I think we're to grow up in Jesus Christ and give ourselves to the work that He's doing around us. We're to live with God while we're under the pressure of our circumstances because this is how God is changing us to get us ready for His Kingdom.

Are you ready to persevere and become a kingdom person?

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1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

“But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love.”

Remember the father role we learned about earlier in 1 Thessalonians 2:12? Well, earlier this week I found myself taking this role in a group of women I meet with as I strongly urged them to live lives worthy of God. Afterwards I emotionally went through the experience Paul described in yesterday’s section until I was able to talk individually with each one and see how each was doing. Because of what I had said and my intensity in saying it, I was afraid I had lost them as friends and sisters in the Lord and had set them back spiritually.

So what did I learn from this experience, and how does it tie into today’s section? When Paul heard back from the Thessalonians through Timothy, he was overjoyed with their response to him (love) and especially to their continuing and deepening walk with the Lord (faith). I’m overjoyed as well. For I realized that no matter what I know or say or live out myself (or don’t), I’m not ultimately responsible for another person’s walk of faith. We each have to personally respond to, depend on, and walk with Jesus. Only He knows how to touch areas in our lives that need to be touched and come under His control. All we can do is share, love, listen, encourage, and live—just show up, so to speak, and live the life He’s called us to. And then He works as only He can work.

And what did I learn that I think Paul learned as well? God draws us and woos us into a love relationship with Him that results in faith and love. This relationship blooms through hard times, persecution, and times of not understanding what’s going on. God places His people strategically in the lives of others to encourage and promote growth. And He is faithful to grow us up right where we are.

Are you learning these lessons as well? Or are you stuck looking at the circumstances instead of honoring God who is working through them and because of them?

Faith and love were the hallmarks of Paul’s and the Thessalonians’ lives. Are they the hallmarks of your life also? What would faith look like in your circumstances? Who next to you does God want to love through you?

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1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

“Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this [live in order to please God] more and more . . . Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so [love each other and other believers you don’t know] more and more.”

So much to see in this section: all of the *we’s* in this letter, the instructions Paul gave them on how to live, then the instructions on how to live a life that will win the respect of outsiders, and finally we have the *more and mores*. Twice in this section Paul tells them they’re doing well but he doesn’t want them to be content with where they are but to do more and more. The *doing* isn’t what is most important to Paul. He’s more concerned with their motives, goals, and *how* they do what they do than he is with their activities.

The first more and more has to do with how to live in order to please God. So let’s look back in this letter and see how they were living:

- Their work was produced by faith.
- Their labor was promoted by love.
- Their endurance was inspired by hope in the Lord Jesus.
- Their lives were changed by the gospel.
- They welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit in spite of severe suffering.
- Their faith was known everywhere.
- They turned to God from idols.
- They chose to wait until Jesus returned for their reward and their rescue from the coming wrath.

And Paul wants them to do this more and more? What a challenge for us to follow!

The second more and more was a change in how they interacted with each other. They had become a family: by this time in the letter Paul has referred to them as brothers six times, and we’re not even finished reading. Paul refers to himself as a father and a mother. Four times he refers to God as our Father. These Thessalonians loved each other. They lived with each other. They encouraged each other in their walk of faith. Their lives had been changed by the gospel, and they were willing to live out the change.

Which more and more strikes you? Which one do you need to work on? How are you going to do it? How am I?

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1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

“Therefore encourage each other with these words.”

As a woman who is becoming an “older woman,” I am amazed and saddened by how we choose to believe lies. We have a society where older and wiser are almost four-letter words. In movies older male characters have “love” relationships with women who could be their daughters. In the gyms and plastic surgeons’ offices, we have women trying to have the bodies of twenty-year-olds. In the malls, we have young teens (and preteens) trying to look like rock stars, and their parents are letting them. And on the other side, we have thousands of men and women who exhibit no self-control and so are drinking, smoking, eating, and drugging themselves into an early death.

So what does this have to do with encouraging each other with the words that are in this section? Well, for me—today—it means that I will remember that Jesus Christ is coming back “with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God.” (v. 16) He’s coming back for me—whether I’m already dead or still alive—and will take me to be with Him, forever.

I want this truth to be in the forefront of my mind as I think, make decisions, and act because I want a seamless transition when I go from this world to His world. For all that He has done and is doing for me, what else could I do?

What is in the forefront of your thinking these days?

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1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

“ . . . for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night . . . so then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.”

With the popularity of the *Left Behind* series, many Christians—and non-Christians—are looking to the time when Jesus is coming back. This anticipation was also true when I was a young Christian in the early 1970's. And whether or not the topic is popular, Jesus *is* coming back.

So what are we to be doing and “being” while we wait? Many Thessalonians seemed to be ignoring their day-to-day responsibilities and sitting on a hill, so to speak, waiting for the grand event. We, on the other hand, can go in the other direction and live as though we have all the time in the world to live as we like and not deal with attitudes or actions that are contrary to the life God has for us.

So where are you—where am I—in this spectrum? How are we living? How is Christ's return working into our thinking and our actions?

Paul says we are to be self-controlled—or in control of our self—putting on faith and love as a breastplate to protect our hearts and emotions. We also need to put on the hope of salvation (confidence in God that He is going to do what He says He'll do) as a helmet to protect our minds and how we think. Notice that breastplates and helmets are what soldiers wear for war. And we are in a war; the outcome of the final battle is assured, but we have daily battles to fight, and our tactics and weapons are not of this world.

Is your heart or mind in a war? Do any of your relationships look like a battle? What's occupying your heart and mind? Which piece of God's armor do you need today?

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1 Thessalonians 5:12-24

“ . . . give thanks in all circumstances for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

All circumstances? Even being yelled at, being fired, robbery, a car accident, cancer, rape, death of a child or close friend or relative? How can we give thanks in these situations? Sure, Paul went through a lot, but

This isn’t easy, but Paul does add that this giving of thanks is “God’s will for us in Christ Jesus.” And Jesus went through a lot, including death for us when He didn’t deserve it. But why is giving thanks such a big deal? What could God want for us so much that He commands us to do such a hard thing as giving thanks in all circumstances?

The one answer that I’ve been able to come to—and am trying to put into practice—is that by giving thanks I’m acknowledging that God is involved in the circumstance, that He cares, that He’s close by, and that He’s powerful enough and loving enough to bring good out of bad, even devastating, situations.

I have to go back to the sovereignty of God, to the God that Job got to know because of the horrible circumstances he found himself in. I have to realize that life isn’t about me or my comforts and nice lifestyle. When I gave Jesus the right to be Lord of my life because He of being my Savior, He started me on a road that would bring Him glory and honor. But on that road His presence, comfort, love, and encouragement have always been available.

It also helps me to remember that I’ll never have to struggle against sin as much as Jesus did in the Garden when His struggle produced sweat drops of blood. He endured the struggle in the Garden and the cross for me.

What are your circumstances? I encourage you to list them.



Now, are you ready to give thanks for them and to get to know God in a whole new way by experiencing His presence, comfort, encouragement, love, and power to bring good out of bad, life out of death, and something into being that has never been?

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1 Thessalonians 5:25-28

“Brothers . . . us . . . all the brothers . . . all the brothers”

What a reminder at the end of this letter: Paul is writing to the whole church at Thessalonica *and* Paul himself is not alone—Silas and Timothy, and perhaps others, are with him.

Who is “with you” in your spiritual life? In this age of easy travel and virtual jobs, it’s all too easy to isolate ourselves from others, especially other believers. We have our little niche of work, exercise, weekly small group meeting, and family activities—but what else do we give ourselves to?

By ending this letter referring to group involvement, I think it’s wise to reflect on our community involvements with other believers. Are we lone ranger Christians (which isn’t God’s idea any way), or do we invite others into our lives on an ongoing basis? As our pastor says, “Who are we doing life with?”

This “doing life” with others isn’t easy and is often messy. But it’s one of the best ways to be able to identify our weak spots and tear down our strongholds of sin. How else can God get in and change our character so we reflect the life of Christ? How else can we learn to love and be loved? How else can we learn to take off our masks and become real?

It’s easy to protect ourselves but never change—but is that really the kind of life you want to offer to Jesus when He comes again? Is that what He died on the cross for?

Who are you doing life with? Who is doing life with you?
