

1

THESSALONIANS

CHILDREN OF THE LIGHT



Setting the Scene

What are you looking forward to?

The Christians in the church in Thessalonica were really looking forward to Jesus' return.

They had a lot of questions about it. They were waiting patiently, but Jesus was yet to come back. So what should they be doing? These questions occupied a lot of their thinking.

They were particularly concerned about those they knew who had died, or might die, before Jesus returned. Would those who had died be missing out on something good? This thought really upset the Thessalonians!

Paul, along with Silas and Timothy, writes to the church of the Thessalonians **to encourage them to continue to live as people awaiting the return of the risen Lord Jesus**, to live as "children of the light" (1 Thessalonians 5.5). So as we await the return of Jesus, 1 Thessalonians has plenty to say to encourage us too.

Check out Acts 17.1-10 to hear the story of Paul travelling to Thessalonica.

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 Thessalonians 1.9-10 (NIV)

1 Thessalonians 1

This letter was written to people who were really looking forward to the return of Jesus. They had a lot of questions about it, and it occupied a lot of their thinking!

Can you think of something you are looking forward to in the future that changes how you act in the present?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1.1-3

Who is this letter to? Who is it from?

What three things characterise the church in Thessalonica?

Can you think of examples of these things in our church?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1.4-5

What do you think Paul means when he says the gospel message came to them “not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction”?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1.6-8

What makes the Thessalonian church an example, or model, to other churches?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1.9-10

What past realities does Paul mention? What future realities are the Thessalonians looking forward to? How are these connected?

How has all this changed the way the Thessalonian Christians live in the present?

Skim back over chapter 1. What makes the Thessalonians such a great model of people who are waiting for “Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath”?

Think it over

As Christians, we belong to Jesus who is risen from the dead and rescues us, and we’re waiting for his return. According to this chapter of 1 Thessalonians what does it look like to ‘wait’ for Jesus?

How is the Thessalonian church an example to us?

If other churches were to look at us, what example, or model, would they see?

Spend some time noting examples that you have seen at BPC of the things below. Make a plan to “give thanks to God always” for these examples.

- work of faith
- labour of love
- steadfastness of hope
- full gospel conviction
- imitators of Jesus
- suffering with joy
- serving the living and true God

Prayer ideas

Praise God for Jesus who rescues us.

Thank God for the gospel that has come to us in power and in the Holy Spirit and in full conviction.

Pray for opportunities to encourage one another to wait for Jesus like the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 2.1-16

This part of 1 Thessalonians is all about speaking (2.1-12) and hearing (2.13-16).

What makes a good speaker? What makes a good listener?

Read Acts 17.1-10*

Background: After being beaten, imprisoned, and thrown out of the city of Philippi for preaching Jesus, Paul went to Thessalonica to preach Jesus there. After only a few weeks the Jewish leaders in Thessalonica incited a mob to attack Paul, and he was forced to escape to Berea.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2.1-12

Why did Paul persist in talking about Jesus when there was such strong pressure to stop?

List the things that *did not* motivate Paul as he shared the gospel with the Thessalonians (2.1-6).

What *did* motivate Paul as he shared the gospel with the Thessalonians (2.7-12)?

How would you summarise Paul's method of sharing the gospel?

What would it look like for us to share Jesus in the same way?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2.13-16

How did the Thessalonians hear Paul's declaration of the gospel?

What was the effect of hearing?

**If your group has time.*

What was the attitude of the Jewish leaders to hearing God's word?

What are the consequences of the two different responses to hearing God's word here (2.16)?

What would it look like for us to hear God's word like the Thessalonians?

Think it over

What attitudes do you need to cultivate in yourself so as to be all the more faithful as someone who has been "approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel"?

What does it look like when we hear God's word "not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God"?

What can we do (or stop doing) to encourage each other to be good speakers of the gospel?

What can we do (or stop doing) to encourage each other to be good hearers of the gospel?

Prayer ideas

Praise God for Jesus, God's word in the flesh, who saves sinners.

Thank God for the love and affection of those who shared Jesus with us.

Pray for opportunities to share Jesus, and to encourage one another to hear God's word.

1 Thessalonians 2.17-3.13

Ever been in a situation where you were worried about someone but you couldn't get in contact with them to find out how they were? How did it feel?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2.17-3.5

What is the context for this situation? Read Acts 17.1-10 if you are not sure.

What clues are there about how Paul feels about his separation from the Thessalonians?

What is Paul afraid of?

Read 1 Thessalonians 3.6-10

What news did Timothy report back to Paul and Silas?

What clues are there about how Paul feels now that he has heard this news?

Why do you think Paul is sharing his emotional roller-coaster with the Thessalonian Christians? What does he want to impress upon them?

Read 1 Thessalonians 3.11-13

Can you find reasons in what we have read so far (2.17-3.10) for Paul praying what he prays...

in verse 11?	in verse 12?	in verse 13?

Who makes our hearts blameless and holy before God?

Think it over

If it is God who establishes our faith, and brings love and holiness to our lives, can we slack off and not worry whether others at BPC are standing firm in faith in Jesus? How does Paul's example help us answer this question?

What might it look like for us to share Paul's concern for those who may be drifting away from Jesus?

What will it look like for us to have the same joy Paul had when he saw people standing firm in the Lord?

How does looking forward to Jesus' return shape the way we think about one another (see 2.19-20, 3.13)?

Prayer ideas

Praise God for making us blameless and holy through Jesus.

Thank God for people you know who are standing firm in the Lord.

Pray the Lord Jesus would make us increase and abound in love for one another and for all, so that he may establish our hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

1 Thessalonians 4.1-12

What is something you can never have too much of?

Paul says in this section of 1 Thessalonians you can never have too much holiness. He urges the Thessalonians to live to please God more and more.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4.1-2

Paul urges the Thessalonians to live to please God "more and more". Are they to do this to win God's favour, or in response to what God has already done for them? What clues are there in these verses to support your answer?

Is Paul asking them to do something new? What does this tell you about Paul's tone here?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4.3-8

In the first half of verse 3 Paul says God's will for the Thessalonians is their sanctification. Can you use verses 3 to 8 to come up with an explanation of what it means for the Thessalonians to be sanctified?

What did it look like for the Thessalonian Christians to belong to Jesus and be different to the world around them when it came to sexual purity?

What do verses 7 and 8 say we are doing if we are sexually immoral?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4.9-12

Another thing Paul wants the Thessalonians to do "more and more" is love one another. What kind of love do you think Paul has in mind?

Why might things like living quietly, minding your own affairs, and working with your hands, be good examples of this kind of love?

Think it over

What positive examples of living to please God have you seen recently at BPC?

What positive examples of sexual purity have you seen recently at BPC?

What positive examples of 'brotherly love' or 'sisterly love' have you seen recently at BPC?

As Christians, our lives are visibly different to the lives of non-Christians around us. We clearly belong to Jesus, and live to honour and obey him. Paul has talked about this in terms of sexual purity and love for one another, but in what other areas of life is this also true?

What can we do to encourage each other to do these things 'more and more'?

How can you, personally, do these things 'more and more'?

Prayer ideas

Praise God for calling us to belong to Christ Jesus, and giving us his Holy Spirit that makes us holy.
Thank God for people you know who are living to please God.
Pray we would live to please God more and more.

1 Thessalonians 4.13-5.28

What would it be like to know the future?

Paul writes this last part of 1 Thessalonians to remind the Thessalonian church they do know one thing about the future—in fact, it's the most important thing anyone can ever know about the future: Jesus will return.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18

Why did Paul write this—what worries or concerns might the Thessalonians have had?

What reassurances does Paul give that address these concerns?

How can we be sure those who died belonging to Jesus will rise with him?

How does this shape the way we think about death?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5.1-11

What do the Thessalonians already know?

What will the return of Jesus be like?

What will the return of Jesus be like for those who are taken by surprise by it?

As Christians we won't be taken by surprise, because we know Jesus will return. What does it look like to be awake and alert?

What part do faith, hope, and love play in our readiness for Jesus' return?

What is the reason for our faith, hope, and love?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5.12-28

How do these final verses flesh out Paul's instruction in 5.11?

Think it over

Do you think you live as a 'child of the light', ready and eager, awaiting the return of Jesus? Why, or why not?

In what ways is this part of 1 Thessalonians a comfort?

In what ways is this part of 1 Thessalonians a challenge?

Notice the similarity between 1 Thessalonians 4.18 and 1 Thessalonians 5.11. What practical things can you do to follow these instructions?

Prayer ideas

Praise God for the risen Lord Jesus, and the promise that all who belong to him will rise with him.
Thank God that we are not destined for wrath, but for salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.
Pray we would encourage one another in our hope.