

STAND: A Study of 1 Thessalonians

SE Online

Spring 2025 Bible Study

STAND: A Study in 1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 3:8: **“It gives us new life to know that you are standing firm in the Lord.”**

One of the very first skills a baby learns is how to stand. The months of cooing and crawling culminate in a glorious instant when the child pulls themselves up and stands on their own two feet. It's a moment so significant that we post it on social media and write it down in baby books. We even mark the occasion with a new identifier. Once a child can stand, they're no longer an infant; they're a toddler. Learning how to stand changes everything. Before you can walk, before you can jog, before you can run – you must first figure out how to stand.

The ability to stand is something we learn so early in life that we mostly take it for granted. Many of us are so used to it that we forget how much strength it takes. Your muscles have to be able to bear your weight. Your joints have to work with coordination and balance. All the while, gravity is constantly trying to pull you down to the ground. Standing may sound basic, but that doesn't mean it's easy.

The church in Thessalonica was a young church. In fact, the apostle Paul had only been able to minister in the city for three weeks before he was forced to flee. This left the fledgling church with a solid, yet incomplete, footing. As one of the first churches in Macedonia, they had few examples to turn to. There were no conferences or cohorts to teach them best practices or instruct them in Christian living. This baby church was just trying to figure out how to stand on its own two feet.

Unfortunately, everything around them kept conspiring to knock them down. The persecution that had forced Paul to leave had set its sights on this young church. Moreover, the constant threat of false teachers and divisions had already attempted to knock the legs out from under these young Christians. It's hard to stand when everything around you seems designed to put you on your back.

With all those cards stacked against them, you'd think the Thessalonian church would have folded. The uncertainty inside the church and the persecution from outside could have caused them to collapse. And yet, when Paul sat down to write his first letter to this church, he saw a church that was flourishing and faithful. The Thessalonians hadn't crumpled under the pressure. Instead, they had risen to every challenge.

Today's church faces many of the same pressures the Thessalonians faced. The challenges that exist – both within us and without us – threaten to knock us to the ground. We want to walk with Jesus. We want to run the race set out for us. But before we can do anything else, we must first figure out how to STAND.

Week One: Stand on Mission (1 Thess. 1)

Skye Jethani: *“Some great goal – understood to be initiated by God and carried forward by us – defines everything or everyone. An individual is either on the mission, the object of the mission, an obstacle to the mission, an aid to the mission, or [someone] who should be on mission.”*

If you were to flip through your Bible, you’d probably think the story of the church in Thessalonica begins in Acts 17. After all, that’s when Paul and his companions first enter the great city. Yet, the genesis of the Thessalonian church actually appears a chapter earlier. Acts 16 tells us that Paul and Silas met an unexpected roadblock on their missionary journey. Though they had wanted to travel East to Asia, the Holy Spirit prevented them from doing so. It seems He had made other travel arrangements. A divinely timed vision in the night compelled the missionaries westward into Macedonia.

After a brief ministry in Philippi, the team set their sights on Thessalonica. The city gave them a strategic location from which to continue their ministry in Macedonia. Not only was Thessalonica a bustling port city, but it also sat directly on the *Via Egnatia*, the 1100-mile road that stretched across the Roman Empire. Thessalonica was the perfect location for the Gospel to begin its spread across the region. But, as Paul and his team would soon discover, it’s not the place that matters so much as the people.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3: "This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. We are writing to the church in Thessalonica, to you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May God give you grace and peace. We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly. As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ."

- **“This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy.”**
 - Paul’s customary greeting here highlights the team dynamic in his ministry. The letter to the Thessalonians isn’t just from Paul, as though he worked and wrote alone. Timothy and Silas had both labored to get the Thessalonian church started, and their collaboration with Paul in this letter shows their continued concern and investment in this congregation.
 - One of the things that makes this letter to the Thessalonians so interesting is that it is one of the earliest Pauline epistles. The two letters to the church in Thessalonica (along with Galatians) were likely written somewhere between 48-51 A.D. They, therefore, give us some of the earliest glimpses of Paul’s developing theology.
- **“We are writing to the church in Thessalonica...”**
 - The city of Thessalonica was no insignificant city. With a population nearing 200,000 people, it was one of the largest in the Macedonian region. More than that, the city’s allegiance to Caesar Augustus after the death of Julius Caesar

gave them a favored status in the Empire, leading to Thessalonica being named a Free City in 42 A.D.

- Mark Howell: *“For all its assets, Thessalonica was a lost city. The Greeks filled the temples, the Jews attended the synagogue, and the Romans paid homage to Caesar, but a pervasive spiritual darkness covered the city.”*
- Paul doesn’t just mention the believers’ physical location; he also has their spiritual reality in view. He reminds them that they **“belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** They may physically be in the city of Thessalonica, but they belong in heaven. No matter where we are from, our ultimate identity is fixed in Christ.
- **“...we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have...”**
 - The **“work produced by faith, labor prompted by love, and endurance inspired by hope”** (NIV) form a praiseworthy triplet in Paul’s imagination. The Thessalonians believers were able to work hard for the Gospel and endure the persecution of their countrymen because they were motivated by the faith, love, and hope that grows out of the Gospel.
 - This mention of faith, hope, and love as motivating factors in the Christian’s life previews the famous words Paul will write to the church in Corinth almost five years later: **“Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love”** (1 Corinthians 13:13).

1 Thessalonians 1:4-7: **“We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people. For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you. So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord. As a result, you have become an example to all the believers in Greece—throughout both Macedonia and Achaia.”**

- **“...it was not only with words but also with power...”**
 - The Gospel has its own power to impact and change lives. It’s not just a set of doctrines and beliefs; the Gospel is our dynamic partner in the mission. Paul pictures the Gospel almost as a co-laborer alongside us, working side-by-side as we share the Good News of Jesus.
 - Throughout this chapter, Paul lays out three distinct ways we share the Gospel with the people around us:
 - PROCLAMATION: At its core, the Gospel is good news. In order for any kind of news to be shared, it must be told to other people. Whether we do that through the spoken or written word, the Gospel requires us to actually tell people what we have seen and experienced.
 - POWER: As we noted above, the Gospel contains a power all of its own. As the writer of Hebrews said: **“For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting**

between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.” We never share the Gospel on our own. The power of both the Scriptures and the Spirit are always with us.

- **PRACTICE:** The transforming Gospel brings about transformed lives. As we live out the Gospel, our day-to-day practices will help other people to see the difference Jesus has made in our lives. Paul will praise the Thessalonians for this a bit later, when he writes that their example – their faith expressed in faithfulness – has echoed out into the rest of Macedonia and Achaia.
- **“...in spite of the severe suffering it brought you.”**
 - Paul will speak about this suffering more in-depth in the next chapter. For now, it’s worth noting that the Gospel brought almost immediate suffering into the lives of the Thessalonians. Three weeks into Paul’s ministry, a great persecution broke out in the city. The mob eventually stretched to the door of the city council before it abated. These Christians had known suffering almost from the moment they were converted.
- **“You imitated both us and the Lord.”**
 - Children learn from example. By observing and imitating their parents, they learn how life is supposed to work. The same is true spiritually. As this church came to know Jesus, they looked to the model Paul, Silas, and Timothy had provided. They not only learned from their teaching, but they took their example to heart. As Paul will encourage them throughout this letter (I Thessalonians 3:8-9; 4:10-11), they simply needed to continue on the path they had already started on.
 - 1 Corinthians 11:1: **“And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.”**

- This chapter focuses a lot on the “spiritual genealogy” of the Thessalonian church. Paul brought them the Gospel and they shared it with the surrounding region. What does your “spiritual genealogy” look like? Who first shared the Gospel with you?

1 Thessalonians 1:8-10: **“And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don’t need to tell them about it, for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God. And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God’s Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.”**

- **“...for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God.”**
 - The Thessalonians not only received the Gospel with power, but they also shared it with enthusiasm! The word Paul uses for “ringing out” literally means an “echo” across the region. The Thessalonians’ faith reverberated across Macedonia – and the churches that heard of their faithfulness were encouraged and strengthened by the resolve of these believers.

- The Thessalonians had resolved not to be a terminal link in the spread of the Gospel. They wanted to share the Word they had received. The early persecution they experienced could have been a roadblock to the Gospel. Instead, they turned it into a megaphone!
- **“...how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God. And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God’s Son...”**
 - The sequence Paul presents here speaks to the nature of the Christian life. The Thessalonians had turned from idols to serve God and to wait for His Son. This Turn → Serve → Wait progression gives us a preview of some of the subjects Paul will unpack throughout this letter. The next few chapters of 1 Thessalonians will focus on how the Thessalonians can turn their affections more towards God and one another. Towards the end of the letter, Paul will talk at length about Jesus’ return and how our hope in that day transforms this day.
 - In a sense, the “Turn → Serve → Wait” sequence also helps each of us to understand our own faith journeys. The Gospel calls us to turn away from those false sources of life we’ve put our trust in so that we can serve and follow the Living God. As we do that, we find our hope is moved from those false “idols” to the future Kingdom and Coming of His Son. The life of faith is the progressive journey of moving our trust and hope from the kingdoms of this world to the Kingdom of God.

- What are some of the “idols” that have captured your attention and imagination? How has the Gospel turned your heart from those things and set your affections more on Jesus and His Kingdom?

Almost two millennia after the founding of the church, the Gospel continues to ring out across the world. Every day, new people come to faith in Jesus Christ. The church of the present owes so much to the church of the past. We stand here today because the men and women who came before us were faithful. They were faithful to share their faith across the generations. They were faithful to stand strong in the face of persecution. They were faithful to make sure that the spread of the Gospel didn’t stop with them. From the church in Thessalonica to the church in Louisville, Kentucky, we are a part of a great legacy of faith.

What will future generations have to say about the legacy we leave behind? The story of Jesus’ church didn’t begin with us – and we can’t let it end with us!

Ligon Duncan: “One of the ways that you know that the gospel has taken hold of your heart is that you care about the gospel taking hold of other people’s hearts. If you don’t care about the spread of the gospel – if you don’t care about other people coming to faith in Christ as the gospel changes their hearts and lives—it’s doubtful that your life has ever truly been changed by the gospel; because those who have been transformed by the grace of God – who have grasped the undeserved, Christ-bought forgiveness of God – want everybody to experience that.”

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was your biggest takeaway from the video teaching time? What's one big application/insight you walked away with?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10. As you read the opening chapter of this letter, what stands out to you? How would you characterize Paul's relationship with this church? How does their example continue to speak to us today?
3. Can you trace any of your "spiritual genealogy"? How did you come to faith? Who first shared the Gospel with you? In what ways has their example continued to motivate you forward on your faith journey?
4. Sharing the Gospel is a matter of Proclamation, Power, and Practice. The things we say and the way we live share the Gospel with others. Which of these areas is the hardest for you? Why? What's one step you can take this week to share your faith with another person?
5. Towards the end of the chapter, Paul talks about the sequence "Turn → Serve → Wait." How has this progression defined your own spiritual life? What were some of the "idols" you have been tempted to put your trust in? How has Jesus helped you move your hope to His Kingdom instead?
6. As you close, reread 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3. What did Paul remember about this church? When people think of you, what do you want them to remember about your life? What kind of example do you want to leave behind? Close your time in prayer asking God to show you each how to build that kind of lasting legacy.

Week Two: Stand with Integrity (1 Thess. 2:1-16)

Paul David Tripp: *“Our hope is not that we will always get it right but that God will never forsake his sanctifying work. We may be willing to compromise, but he never will be. We may give way to fear, but he has no fear. We may be swindled into not seeing things clearly and accurately, but his view of us is always perfect. His presence and work in and through us is our hope, and because it is, we can commit ourselves to doing better.”*

Paul’s initial ministry in Thessalonica lasted less than a month. After spending three Sabbath days preaching the Gospel in the local synagogue, the religious leaders had heard enough. They started a riot in the city, culminating in a believer named Jason having to stand in front of the city council. While Jason was eventually released, it became clear that the mob would not be satisfied until they had Paul and Silas in their possession. Fearing for his safety, the Thessalonians quickly and quietly escorted the evangelists to Berea, the next city on their missionary journey.

Paul and Silas’ sudden departure created a leadership vacuum in the young church. Opportunistic false teachers quickly swooped in and attempted to corrupt their doctrine and faith. More than that, they tried to undermine Paul’s ministry in the city. They claimed that he had abandoned the church at the first sign of trouble. To hear them tell it, Paul didn’t really care about the Thessalonian Christians. He only cared about himself. They accused him of trying to increase his own fame and line his own pockets. Rather than ignoring these false accusations, Paul decided to set the record straight.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-6: “You yourselves know, dear brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not a failure. You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi just before we came to you and how much we suffered there. Yet our God gave us the courage to declare his Good News to you boldly, in spite of great opposition. So you can see we were not preaching with any deceit or impure motives or trickery. For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts. Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you well know. And God is our witness that we were not pretending to be your friends just to get your money! As for human praise, we have never sought it from you or anyone else.”

- **“You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi...”**
 - The Gospel’s foothold in Macedonia did not come without cost. Paul and Silas encountered persecution in nearly every city they set foot in. In Philippi, they were imprisoned after healing a demon-possessed girl. Their night in jail ended when God miraculously shook the prison doors off their hinges. The city officials then asked the missionaries to leave (Acts 16:16-40). Their abrupt departure from Philippi put Paul and Silas on a collision course with Thessalonica.
- **“...we were not preaching with any deceit or impure motives or trickery.”**

- Paul uses a triffecta of words to highlight different aspects of his team’s integrity. When they preached to the Thessalonians, they did so without any hint of impurity or impropriety:
 - **“DECEIT”** → The word used here carries the idea of self-deception. Paul and Silas preached out of a conviction that the message they carried was true. They hadn’t been deceived by a false gospel or convinced themselves to embrace a lie. Their ministry grew out of a sincere conviction of the Gospel’s trustworthiness.
 - **“IMPURE MOTIVES”** → The word Paul has in mind here is a general word for impurity, often with a sexual connotation. It wasn’t uncommon in that day for itinerant cult leaders to make their way from city to city, seducing lonely and vulnerable women along the way. The missionary team in Thessalonica hadn’t chased after any financial or physical benefits, distinguishing them from these kind of charlatans.
 - **“TRICKERY”** → This final word speaks of outright dishonesty. Paul and Silas hadn’t lied to the Thessalonians. They hadn’t spun elaborate fairy tales or fables. They hadn’t tried to convince the Thessalonian believers to devote their lives to a lie. Paul’s ministry team wanted this church to join them in a life of true faith and faithfulness.
- **“Our purpose is to please God, not people.”**
 - This refrain echoes throughout the book of Acts. When standing trial in front of the Sanhedrin in Acts 4, Peter and John challenged the Jewish ruling authorities with a similar sentiment: **“Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than Him?”** (Acts 4:19). Like the apostles before them, Paul and Silas were chasing the applause of heaven rather than the applause of men.

- Look again at those three words Paul uses to describe the kinds of impure motives his team shunned. Which of those temptations do you struggle with the most? Why?

1 Thessalonians 2:7-13: “As apostles of Christ we certainly had a right to make some demands of you, but instead we were like children among you. Or we were like a mother feeding and caring for her own children. We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God’s Good News but our own lives, too. Don’t you remember, dear brothers and sisters, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled to earn a living so that we would not be a burden to any of you as we preached God’s Good News to you. You yourselves are our witnesses—and so is God—that we were devout and honest and faultless toward all of you believers. And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children. We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you to share in his Kingdom and glory. Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received his message from us, you didn’t think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God—which, of course, it is. And this word continues to work in you who believe.”

- **“...we were like children among you.”**
 - Familial language fills this section of the letter. Paul first says that the missionaries were like children among the Thessalonians. Then, he compares their efforts to a mother feeding her young child. Later, he will tell them that they **“treated each of you as a father treats his own children.”** Paul’s ministry among the Thessalonians was filled with affection and care. He didn’t enter the city trying to build a following; he was looking to build a family.
 - This concept of the church as a family permeates the letters to the Thessalonian church. All told, Paul will address the church as his “brothers and sisters” a total of 27 times across the two letters – 18 times in 1 Thessalonians alone!
 - Michael W. Holmes: *“For some believers, the loss of family relationships was part of the price of accepting the Gospel. In this light Paul’s extensive use of parental and family images is significant. Through the use of such language, he essentially portrays the congregation as a new family, whose relationships substitute for those that have been broken or lost.”*
- **“We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you...”**
 - Once again, Paul stacks three words together to speak of his ministry to the Thessalonians. Each of these terms helps paint a picture of how Paul pastored the churches he planted on his missionary journeys:
 - **“PLEADED”** → The word used here is the same word used to describe the Holy Spirit as our “Counselor” or “Advocate.” Paul likely uses the word here less in its comforting sense and more in the sense of giving advice (or even warning someone of danger). He spoke to the Thessalonians about the very real spiritual dangers in this physical world.
 - **“ENCOURAGED”** → Carries the idea of comforting and reassuring a person to stay on the right path. Throughout these letters, Paul will challenge the Thessalonians believers to stay true to what they know and continue on the path of holiness that has been set before them.
 - **“URGED”** → Paul here uses the word that describes a “witness” (and from which we get the word “martyr”). As they taught the Thessalonians, Paul’s team shared the things they had seen and experienced. They urged these new believers forward by sharing their own experiences of Jesus and what He had done in their lives.
- **“Therefore, we never stop thanking God...”**
 - 1 Thessalonians 2:13 marks the second of three “thanksgivings” in the letter. Here, Paul offers thanks that the Thessalonians accepted the Word of God when they first heard it. This fits with the thanksgiving he offers in other parts of the letter, as he expresses his gratitude for these believers:
 - 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3: **“We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly. As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have...”**

- **1 Thessalonians 3:9: “How we thank God for you! Because of you we have great joy as we enter God’s presence.”**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways is the church like a family? What does this mean for the ways we treat one another? How have you experienced this kind of relationship in your own life? |
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1 Thessalonians 2:14-16: “And then, dear brothers and sisters, you suffered persecution from your own countrymen. In this way, you imitated the believers in God’s churches in Judea who, because of their belief in Christ Jesus, suffered from their own people, the Jews. For some of the Jews killed the prophets, and some even killed the Lord Jesus. Now they have persecuted us, too. They fail to please God and work against all humanity as they try to keep us from preaching the Good News of salvation to the Gentiles. By doing this, they continue to pile up their sins. But the anger of God has caught up with them at last.”

- **“...you imitated the believers in God’s churches...”**
 - Paul has spent much of this chapter talking about some of the internal struggles that can fight against our integrity. Here, he turns his attention to the external forces closing in around the Thessalonians. The persecution that had sprung up in their city didn’t end when Paul and Silas left. The church had been dealing with difficulty since their inception.
 - Paul reminds the Christians in Thessalonica that their suffering makes them a part of a great heritage. The early church suffered when they began preaching the Gospel. Acts is filled with the stories of how the early Christians faced suffering from both the Jewish authorities and the Roman government. More importantly, the Thessalonians’ suffering identifies them with Jesus Himself. Their suffering is just another way in which they are following His example.
- **“For some of the Jews...”**
 - These words may sound abrasive to our modern ears. There have even been some who have used passages like this one to accuse Paul of anti-Semitism. There are a couple things we must keep in mind, however:
 - Paul was speaking about a specific group of people in a specific place at a specific time. The opposition in Thessalonica had been started by the synagogue leaders. Paul is not speaking about Jewish people broadly, but about a particular group of instigators.
 - Paul had a great concern and love for the Jewish people. As a Jew himself, Paul often talked about how He would give anything he could in order for his people to come to faith in Christ (see Romans 9:1-3; 10:1).
- **“But the anger of God has caught up with them at last.”**
 - Paul doesn’t encourage the Thessalonians to take vengeance on their own. Instead, he encourages them to trust in the justice of God. They need not stand up to their oppressors, because they can have confidence that God will one day make all things right. This hope comes more into focus in 2 Thessalonians.

- **2 Thessalonians 1:6-7: “God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.”**

The word ‘integrity’ comes from the same word from which we get the terms ‘integer’ and ‘integrated.’ At its root, it refers to something that is whole. There are any number of ways this world can divide and dis-integrate our souls. Sometimes, those pressures come from outside of us. We deal with slander, gossip, and persecution. The things others say about us – not to mention the actions they take against us – have a way of cutting us in two. Other times, the blades come from within. Our own sinfulness and selfishness threatens to tear us apart from the inside. No one wants to live a divided life. Walking with integrity, then, requires us to have an eye on what’s going on around us and within us. In those times when we feel like our soul is full of holes, we can turn to the one who promises to make us whole.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was your biggest takeaway from the video teaching time? What’s one big application/insight you walked away with?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12? How does Paul describe his ministry among the Thessalonians? What words would you use to describe his integrity in leading this church? Is this same kind of integrity common in our world today? Why or why not?
3. What familial words does Paul use to describe his relationship with the Thessalonians? What do each of these references teach us about what relationships should look like in the church? Have you experienced these kinds of relationships in the church? In what ways is the church like a family?
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16. What kind of persecution had the Thessalonians endured since they first came to faith? How did this persecution identify them with both the early church and with Jesus? What are some of the sources of opposition the church faces today? How do we stand firm in the face of those things?
5. This passage speaks of both the internal and external threats to our integrity. He can be tempted to compromise because of our own sinful desires and because of the sinful actions of people around us. Which of these temptations is the greatest in your spiritual life? Why? How do we stand firm from the attacks from within us and outside us?
6. As you close, reread 1 Thessalonians 2:13. What does Paul thank God for in the lives of the Thessalonians? What assurance does he offer them in the last sentence? Close your time together in prayer, asking God to give you each the same assurance that His Word will continue its work in your life.

Week Three: Stand for Love (1 Thess. 2:17-3:13)

Ligon Duncan: *We cannot grow in grace, and cannot become more mature in Christ, without one another. We can't grow to Christian maturity apart from one another because so much of our growth is in our relationships with one another—in the heartbreak of being let down and having to forgive; in the difficulty of having to walk alongside friends in Christ who are under enormous burdens; in the give and take of normal life where we defer to one another and seek to serve one another and bear with one another, and all of those other dynamics of life.*

Paul's letters to the church in Thessalonica are undoubtedly his most affectionate. From his opening words of thanksgiving to his repeated desire to get back and see them in person, Paul is not shy about his love and delight in this congregation. It's clear he doesn't see this church as an organization or club; the church in Thessalonica is his family. Paul loves them like a brother. He encourages and nurtures them like a mother. He challenges and disciplines them like a father. In everything he does and writes, Paul wanted to see his church family thrive and flourish in their faith.

It's easy for us to think of church as a place where we go. In fact, when we hear the word 'church,' most of us probably think of a steepled building where people gather for weekly worship and the occasional special service. But, the church isn't a place to go; it's a family to belong to. We weren't created to do life alone. We weren't meant to live life in isolation. We were born into families that were supposed to care for us as we grew up. Those built-in communities shape and form the people we become. In the same way, God gave us a spiritual family in the church. Just as our physical families help us to grow and mature, so too does this spiritual family help us become who we are meant to be in Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:17-30: "Dear brothers and sisters, after we were separated from you for a little while (though our hearts never left you), we tried very hard to come back because of our intense longing to see you again. We wanted very much to come to you, and I, Paul, tried again and again, but Satan prevented us. After all, what gives us hope and joy, and what will be our proud reward and crown as we stand before our Lord Jesus when he returns? It is you! Yes, you are our pride and joy."

- **"...but Satan prevented us."**
 - Oddly enough, the story of the church in Thessalonica began with an interruption to Paul's plans. He intended to take his team to preach the Gospel in Asia, a move the Holy Spirit prevented (Acts 16:6). A vision of a Macedonian man asking for help prompted Paul to change his itinerary and go to the region of Macedonia (of which Thessalonica was the capital).
 - Here, Paul blames the delay in his return not on the Spirit, but on Satan. It's unclear why Paul attributes this delay to the Enemy, though it may have to do with his persecutors chasing him around Macedonia (Acts 17:13). Other commentators have suggested that the delay may have to do with Paul's "thorn

in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7), though Paul makes no explicit mention of that affliction here.

- **“...what will be our proud reward and crown?”**
 - The picture Paul imagines here is as profound as it is beautiful. He imagines standing before Jesus and boasting about the Thessalonians and what they have meant to Him. More than that, he tells this church that they are his “reward” in the Lord. His love for this congregation was so deep that it was as though they were his own personal reward for serving Jesus.
 - Chris Davis: *“Paul’s “boast” or being “proud” or “crown of boasting” translates the word kauchēma. It is a word Paul uses to describe sinful boasting as well as godly boasting. The latter carries all of the exultation and pride of sinful boasting with none of the corrupted self-focus. This may be difficult for us to imagine, since our smallest and simplest acts can be infiltrated by self-exaltation. But if you have ever seen the moment when a new mother shows her parents their grandchild for the first time, you know that guileless, grateful joy that characterizes the good kind of kauchēma.”*

1 Thessalonians 3:1-8: “Finally, when we could stand it no longer, we decided to stay alone in Athens, and we sent Timothy to visit you. He is our brother and God’s co-worker in proclaiming the Good News of Christ. We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, and to keep you from being shaken by the troubles you were going through. But you know that we are destined for such troubles. Even while we were with you, we warned you that troubles would soon come—and they did, as you well know. That is why, when I could bear it no longer, I sent Timothy to find out whether your faith was still strong. I was afraid that the tempter had gotten the best of you and that our work had been useless. But now Timothy has just returned, bringing us good news about your faith and love. He reports that you always remember our visit with joy and that you want to see us as much as we want to see you. So we have been greatly encouraged in the midst of our troubles and suffering, dear brothers and sisters, because you have remained strong in your faith. It gives us new life to know that you are standing firm in the Lord.”

- **“...we sent Timothy to visit you.”**
 - Acts 16:1-3: **“Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey...”**
 - At this point, Timothy was somewhere around 20-years-old. A relatively new addition to Paul’s missionary companions, Timothy had recently joined the team when they passed through Lystra only a few months prior. Though he was young, his maturity in both life and faith made him a trusted companion. Even now, so early in his ministry, Paul and Silas entrusted him with visiting the Thessalonians when they could not.
- **“...bringing us good news...”**

- Paul's use of the phrase "good news" here is one of the most intriguing features of these letters. Paul uses the Greek word for 'Gospel' to talk about the good report that Timothy brought back from Thessalonica. This is the only time in the New Testament where the term "gospel" is used to describe something other than the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul was so encouraged by the report from this beloved congregation that it was as though he was hearing the Gospel message anew!
- **"It gives us new life to know that you are standing firm in the Lord."**
 - Another hallmark of this letter is the fact that Paul so often commends the Thessalonian Christians, encouraging them to stand in their faith and continue walking in their current path. He reassures them that, even in his absence, they are firmly standing in the faith and in the Lord (see also 1 Thess. 1:2-3; 3:12; 4:1, 9-10; 5:11). This theme continues in 2 Thessalonians, as well!
 - 2 Thessalonians 2:14-15: **"He called you to salvation when we told you the Good News; now you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. With all these things in mind, dear brothers and sisters, stand firm and keep a strong grip on the teaching we passed on to you both in person and by letter."**

- Who is one person in your life who could use an encouraging word/message? Using Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 3 as a guide, send them an encouraging card.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13: **"How we thank God for you! Because of you we have great joy as we enter God's presence. Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill the gaps in your faith. May God our Father and our Lord Jesus bring us to you very soon. And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows. May He, as a result, make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy as you stand before God our Father when our Lord Jesus comes again with all his holy people. Amen."**

- **"Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God...to fill the gaps in your faith."**
 - This final section in chapter 3 records Paul's genuine and heartfelt prayer for the believers in Thessalonica. He prays, first and foremost, for the opportunity to see them face-to-face again. Though he and Silas have been thwarted from returning to the city, they want to return so that they can continue to disciple and instruct the church.
 - Despite the fact that Paul has encouraged this congregation about their progress and growth in the faith, he still sees the need for additional instruction and training. His three-week ministry in the city had left him unable to answer all their questions and clarify some of their doctrinal beliefs. For example, their misunderstandings about the Second Coming (2 Thess. 2:2) originated from some opportunistic false teachers who claimed that the Day of the Lord had already come.
- **"And may the Lord make your love for one another...grow and overflow."**

- Paul's second request in this prayer asks that God make this church a reservoir of love – not just for one another, but for everyone! Paul prays that the Thessalonians will overflow with the same kind of affection he has for them. Just as he encouraged them to emulate him in mission, Paul now encourages them to follow his example in love.
- Michael Holmes: *"If we do not pray for others out of a genuine love for them, why not? Is it because we secretly despise them, hold something against them, are bitter or resentful, or view them as a threat? Or are we simply too self-centered to care about them? Whatever the reason, [this prayer] calls us to personal repentance."*
- **"May He... make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy."**
 - As we've seen throughout this letter, Paul once again uses a trio of words to make his point. This time, he uses describes how He wants God to work in the hearts of the Thessalonian believers.
 - **STRONG** → The Greek word used here is the word from which we derive 'steroid.' With all the stressors surrounding the Thessalonian church, Paul prays that their hearts would be Divinely fortified and strengthened.
 - **BLAMELESS** → Though not a legal term in Greek, this word carries the idea of living "without fault." It's a word used throughout the New Testament to describe things/people without any moral blemish or imperfection.
 - **HOLY** → Elsewhere, in 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul will use this word to describe a purity of both body and soul: **"Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete holiness because we fear God."**
 - These three words not only reflect Paul's heart for the church, they also speak to the themes he will unpack through the remainder of the letter. His prayer that the Thessalonians would be "blameless" and "holy" anticipates the holiness commands in chapters 4 and 5. More importantly, his desire that they would **"stand before God our Father when our Lord Jesus comes again"** anticipates the focus on the Second Coming that will dominate the back half of this letter.

It's hard for us to quantify love. Part of the reason is that we use the word 'love' to describe everything from our closest relationships to our favorite foods. We also struggle to understand love because we live in a world bereft of its purest examples. We've seen relationships fall apart and splinter. We know what it's like to have love turn cold. At worst, we've seen love used as a weapon, nothing more than a manipulative tool. But Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians remind us of what love should be. More than that, they remind us of what the church should be. The church should be defined by love. Everything we do – every interaction we have, every ministry we launch, every step we take – ought to be saturated with our love for God and one another. For the church to be a place of love, we must first be people of love.

- How does Paul's prayer in this chapter compare with your prayers? What's one element of his prayer that you could incorporate into your own prayer life?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was your biggest takeaway from the video teaching time? What's one big application/insight you walked away with?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:8. What stands out to you about Paul's loving words to the Thessalonian church? What words/phrases describe the depth of relationship there? What relationships in your life have come closest to this kind of love and affection?
3. How would you define the word 'love'? What are some of the biblical pictures/ideals of love that come to your mind? What does this kind of love look like in practice? How would the church today be different if we practiced this kind of love?
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13. What does Paul pray for the Thessalonian believers? How do these prayers compare/contrast to the prayers you pray to God? What are some of the qualities of his prayer you would want to incorporate in your own prayer life?
5. Family imagery permeates this letter. How should the church function like a family? What are some of the obstacles that keep us from loving each other this way? How can our family of origin affect the way we understand the church?
6. As you close, look back over the prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13. What's one request from that prayer you'd like your Group to pray over you? Close together in prayer, asking God to bring these same qualities into the lives of each member of your Group.

Week Four: Stand in Holiness (1 Thess. 4:1-12; 5:12-22)

Michael Horton: *"Where most people think that the goal of religion is to get people to become something that they are not, the Scriptures call believers to become more and more what they already are in Christ."*

Human beings have an incredible capacity for carelessness. We're just thoughtless and irresponsible sometimes. We're careless with our words. We're careless with our actions. We're careless with our finances. We're careless with our thoughts. It's not that we mean to do bad things or that we set out to cause other people harm. We're just careless sometimes. If you were to think about the biggest regret in your life, it's probably something you did carelessly. You weren't vigilant. You didn't think it through. You opened your mouth without checking with your brain. There is a carelessness that can creep into our lives if we're not careful. We often pay a price when we're not paying attention.

Contrast that with the Bible's words about holiness. Though the idea of holiness can often overwhelm us, it's not as complicated as we sometimes make it out to be. At its core, the Bible's call to holiness is simply an invitation to pay attention. Consider the decisions we make. Think about the way we're living. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:10, holiness is the call to **"carefully determine what pleases the Lord."** In the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul reminded this young church that holiness is the remedy to the haphazard ways we're tempted to waste our lives.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8: "Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You live this way already, and we encourage you to do so even more. For you remember what we taught you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin. Then each of you will control his own body and live in holiness and honor - not in lustful passion like the pagans who do not know God and his ways. Never harm or cheat a fellow believer in this matter by violating his wife, for the Lord avenges all such sins, as we have solemnly warned you before. God has called us to live holy lives, not impure lives. Therefore, anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human teaching but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you."

- **"You remember what we taught you by the authority of the Lord Jesus."**
 - Paul reminds the Thessalonians that every holiness command finds its authority in the person and power of Jesus Himself. While many of these commands were specifically reiterated in Jesus' own teaching, even those that have no explicit parallel in the Gospel originate in Jesus' own character.
 - Appealing to the Lordship of Jesus in these commands was particularly significant to the Thessalonian church. After all, their proclamation of Jesus as Lord was what began their persecution by the city officials:
 - **Acts 17:6-7: "Not finding them there, they dragged out Jason and some of the other believers instead and took them before the city council."**

‘Paul and Silas have caused trouble all over the world,’ they shouted, ‘and now they are here disturbing our city, too. And Jason has welcomed them into his home. They are all guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, named Jesus.’”

- Interestingly, Paul does not shy away from this accusation in his two letters to the Thessalonians. These letters contain 46 uses of the title ‘Lord’ to describe Jesus – 20% of all uses of the term in the Pauline corpus. Paul wants the Thessalonians to know that the charge levied against them is true. Christians do worship another King – King Jesus! The holiness commands, then, are part of the way they express His Lordship over their lives.
- **“...stay away from all sexual sin.”**
 - The holiness commands begin with a call to sexual purity. While that may surprise us, sexual promiscuity was celebrated across much of the Roman Empire – particularly among men! Many of the pagan cults utilized temple prostitutes, making sexual immorality a part of their very worship. The sexual ethic proclaimed in the Gospel stood in stark contrast to the sensual ethos of that day – as well as ours.
 - Paul may begin here for a couple of reasons. For starters, his call to faithfulness in marriage helps protect the unity of the church. Nothing would cause division and disunity in the church quicker than widespread infidelity and immorality. More than that, Paul mentions in his first letter to the Corinthian church that sexual sin carries unique consequences:
 - **1 Corinthians 6:18: “Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body.”**

- What does the word ‘holy’ mean to you? How do the holiness commands in this letter invite us into a more intentional way of living? How do they help remind us that Jesus is our King?

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12: “But we don’t need to write to you about the importance of loving each other, for God himself has taught you to love one another. Indeed, you already show your love for all the believers throughout Macedonia. Even so, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you to love them even more. Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. Then people who are not believers will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others.”

- **“...the importance of loving each other...”**
 - Paul casts holiness as not just an issue of loving God, but of loving other people. The way they lived would show both their devotion to Jesus and their devotion to one another. Practicing holiness, then, isn’t just about attitudes and actions; it’s about our affection for Jesus and His Bride.

- An interesting example of this may come from within the Thessalonian church. Years after writing this letter to the Thessalonian church, Paul will write one of his final letters to Timothy. In 2 Timothy 4:10, Paul laments the spiritual status of a man named Demas. Though Demas had been his friend and traveling companion, his love for the Gospel had grown cold:
 - **2 Timothy 4:10: “Demas has deserted me because he loves the things of this life and has gone to Thessalonica...”**
- Given that Demas is mentioned along with Aristarchus – who came from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4; Philemon 24) – it seems likely that Demas, too, hailed from this city. His return to Thessalonica may represent a return home. His love for the comforts of this world exceeded His love for both Paul and the Gospel.
- **“Make it your goal to live a quiet life...”**
 - While Paul certainly had a way of making noise in whatever city he visited, he’s clear on the fact that Christians should first seek to live lives of quiet, everyday holiness. The moment may come for bold proclamation and even courageous confrontation. But Christians should first be concerned with living lives that show people what faithfulness looks like in our daily interactions in the home, in the workplace, and in the community.
 - **Titus 3:1-2: “Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good. They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone.”**
- **“...you will not need to depend on others.”**
 - As Paul will talk about later in 1 Thessalonians 5 (not to mention in 2 Thessalonians), confusion about the Second Coming of Jesus seems to have led to some strife in the congregation. Believing that the arrival of Jesus was imminent, some believers had abandoned work and neglected to do anything to provide for themselves. Paul reminds the believers that they should take care of their own needs and not become a burden to their fellow Christians.
 - **2 Thessalonians 3:10-12: “Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: ‘Those unwilling to work will not get to eat.’ Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and meddling in other people’s business. We command such people and urge them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and work to earn their own living.”**
 - Interestingly, the word Paul uses for ‘idle’ isn’t a word having to do exclusively with laziness. Rather, the word was used to describe a soldier who was out of step with the rest of his company. By working and providing for their own needs, these idle believers will “get in step” with the rest of their brothers and sisters.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-22: Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord’s work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other. Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. See that no one

pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people. Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. Stay away from every kind of evil."

- **"Honor those who are your leaders..."**
 - In his final batch of instructions to the church, Paul commands them to show proper respect and obedience to their leaders. As shepherds of the congregation, the early church leaders were tasked with discipling and caring for the church. More than that, in a time of intense persecution, the leaders of the church were often the first to experience hardship. Paul tells the church not to add any more difficulty to their already difficult task.
 - Hebrews 13:7, 17: **"Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and follow the example of their faith... Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow."**
- **"...for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus."**
 - We often complicate God's will. We want to know His specific will for our lives so that we can navigate the challenging decisions we face. Yet, Paul helps simplify our view of God's will in this passage. God's general will for our lives can be summed up in three short commands. Following these general commands in our everyday lives can help lead us in the specific decisions we need help with:
 - **"Always Be Joyful"** → Notice that Paul doesn't say it's God's will for them to be happy. Rather, he commands them to exhibit joy despite their circumstances. To a church in the midst of suffering and persecution, this might have seemed like a difficult assignment.
 - **"Never Stop Praying"** → Prayer isn't something we just do when we wake up or when we go to bed. The attitude of prayer should be an ongoing and continual part of our lives. God wants to share every moment of every day with us.
 - **"Be Thankful in All Circumstances"** → Paul identifies gratitude as part of God's will for our lives. A lack of gratitude can turn us into entitled, bitter people. By practicing the discipline of gratitude, we recognize God's gifts in our lives and train our eyes to see what we have more than what we lack.
- **"Do not stifle the Holy Spirit."**
 - The Greek text literally says, "Do not quench the Holy Spirit." The imagery clearly suggests throwing water on a fire to extinguish the flame. This seems to call back to the imagery on the Day of Pentecost of the Holy Spirit descending on the apostles like "tongues of fire" (Acts 2:3).
 - Intriguingly, the book of Acts had not yet been written when Paul composed his letter to the Thessalonians. The story was clearly part of the oral tradition of the

early church. At the very least, it was already known to Luke, the author of Acts and frequent traveling companion of Paul.

- Based on 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, what does God's will look like in your life? How can you begin to practically live that out this week?

If you don't know where you're going, it doesn't matter how you get there. You can step out your door and move in any direction you please. But, if you have a destination in mind, the route you take absolutely matters. You make an itinerary. You plan every turn. You want to be intentional in where you go. Your destination determines your journey. As Christ-followers, we know our journeys end with Jesus. Paul has made it clear throughout this letter that our faith journey begins and ends with Him. If He is our destination, then our life's journey ought to lead us closer and closer to Him. We chase holiness because the whole arc of our life is drawing us toward Jesus. The destination is being with Him; the journey is becoming like Him.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was your biggest takeaway from the video teaching time? What's one big application/insight you walked away with?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12. What stands out to you in these holiness commands? How does Paul make holiness something practical for us? In what ways does living out these commands differentiate us from the world around us?
3. Paul talks about these commands as issues of both Lordship and love. How does holy living show that Jesus is our Lord? How does it reveal our love for Him? How does our pursuit of holiness help us to love our neighbors better?
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22. Paul gives us a bunch of miscellaneous commands in these verses. As a Group, make a list of the commands here. Do you see any common thread between them? How do these commands help us visualize what everyday holiness looks like?
5. Reread 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Which three commands does Paul talk about in conjunction with God's will? How would you state those commands in your own words? What are some ways you tend to overcomplicate/overthink God's will? How can these three commands help you simplify how you live out His plan for your life?
6. As you close, pray those three commands from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Ask God to show you each how to live out His will in your day-to-day lives. Pray that He would equip you this week to know His will and to live out of that knowledge.

Week Five: Stand upon Hope (1 Thess. 4:13-5:11; 5:23-28)

Daniel Nayeri: *“Life is only disappointing if there is nothing after it. Otherwise, life is our time in a craftsman's hands – the way a piece of wood is carved into a spoon by a carpenter or reeds are woven by a basket weaver. We grow into whatever we allow to be made of us, and we're sold – like the spoon or the basket. Our afterlife isn't the market or the workshop. It's in the home of our master, whatever master we have spent our lives serving.”*

We spend most of our lives waiting. Every adolescent longs for the day when they finally turn 16 and get their driver's license. We countdown the years, the months, the days (and sometimes even the hours) until our wedding day, our big vacation, our retirement party, or the birth of a child. No matter our stage of life, we have something we're waiting for. We like to live in expectation. We like to imagine that our life is going to somehow be better once we reach that milestone, finish that project, or make that purchase. At the end of the day, all of these longings come down to one short word: HOPE. We hope our lives aren't always going to be the way they are right now.

The church in Thessalonica had seen their reservoirs of hope dry up. Their lives – both physically and spiritually – were filled with adversity and suffering. They watched as their brothers and sisters in Christ were dragged into prison for their faith. Worse, they stood helpless as some in their faith community paid the ultimate price for their allegiance to Jesus. Their suffering wasn't just in spite of their faith; it was explicitly because of it! Paul needed to remind them that the faith that had brought them so much trouble was, in fact, the source of their ultimate triumph.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: "And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died. We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. So encourage each other with these words."

- **“...we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died...”**
 - It seems as though the Thessalonians were troubled by the deaths of some of the believers in the city. Whether due to persecution or natural causes, this congregation had recently lost some of its members to the grave. As a result, the church was confused about the nature of their hope. Had those who had died not been worthy of eternal life? Had they missed out on the resurrection? Paul wrote to help the church understand that the hope of eternal life transcends death.

- Evidently, the instruction in this letter wouldn't be enough to soothe their worries. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Paul will further unpack the events surrounding Jesus' return – including a somewhat confusing passage about the “man of lawlessness.” They were concerned enough about this subject that Paul felt it necessary to write them about it a second time.
- **“For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven...”**
 - This passage speaks of a personal, incarnate return of Jesus Christ to this earth. Paul pictures the scene in imagery that would have been easily understood by his original audience. In that day, when a visiting dignitary would come into a city, the city officials would send out a delegation to meet the visitors while they were still a few miles outside town. This delegation would welcome the dignitary and his convoy and escort them back into the city. Paul imagines Jesus as the visiting dignitary, along with all those who have died in Christ. Living believers are caught up in the air to welcome Jesus' arrival and accompany Him back to the earth – where He will institute a new heavens and new earth!
- **“So encourage each other...”**
 - We live in a time where “End Times” discussions can be pretty divisive. There are any number of ideas of what Jesus' return is going to look like and the exact events that will lead us to that day. Paul, however, reminds us that these teachings aren't given to confuse or confound us. They are given for our encouragement and edification.
 - How do these words encourage us? While the following list is by no means exhaustive, the reality of heaven reminds us of at least three important truths:
 - Life is Eternal → There's something within the human heart that longs for eternity. We want to live forever. Though we have grown accustomed to death, there's something in us that knows it isn't natural. Paul succinctly reminds us of our eternal destiny when he says, **“We will be with the Lord forever.”** We find eternal life in and with Jesus Christ.
 - Pain is Temporary → The hope of heaven is the hope of a world with **“no more death or sorrow or crying or pain”** (Rev. 21:4). Our eternal reality helps keep our present chaos in perspective. When all is said and done, today's pain will be no more than a blip in our eternal life story. As Paul would later write in 2 Corinthians 4:17: **“For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!”**
 - God is Sovereign → All of history is moving towards something. As Christians, we believe that something is a Someone. Human history will conclude and culminate with the arrival of Jesus Christ. God is guiding all events toward the return of His Son. That means history isn't random. The things that happen to us don't happen by chance. They happen by His sovereign choice.

- What are you most looking forward to in heaven? How does the reality of that hope change the way you approach life today?

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11: “Now concerning how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters, we don’t really need to write you. For you know quite well that the day of the Lord’s return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. When people are saying, “Everything is peaceful and secure,” then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman’s labor pains begin. And there will be no escape. But you aren’t in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won’t be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief. For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don’t belong to darkness and night. So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation. For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.”

- **“...like a thief in the night.”**
 - Paul borrows this imagery from Jesus’ very own words in Matthew 24:42-44: **“So you, too, must keep watch! For you don’t know what day your Lord is coming. Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would keep watch and not permit his house to be broken into. You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.”**
 - The implication here is that Christians should be watchful and ready for Jesus’ return. If a homeowner knew a thief was coming, he would keep an eye on his house to keep it from being broken into. Paul adds an additional image to this concept by comparing the Second Coming to a woman in labor pains. Just as you can anticipate the birth of a baby over the nine months of pregnancy, so should Christians live with a sense of hopeful anticipation for the arrival of Jesus!
- **“For you are all children of the light and of the day...”**
 - If you knew a thief was coming at some point in the night, you would use the daylight hours to get ready for him. Since we know Jesus is coming back, we should want to spend our lives preparing to meet Him. Do our choices today reflect our hope in the Day of His return?
 - Cameron Cole: *“Washing dishes for your spouse, listening to your roommate, baking cookies for your neighbor, extending kindness to people in the checkout line, and offering a prayer for a grieving friend... The regular deeds of regular people on regular days possess so much eternal potential and meaning! The Lord sees, recognizes, and rewards all of them in heaven.”*
- **“...we can live with Him forever.”**
 - This simple phrase reminds us of the main draw of heaven. Though our minds instinctively picture the streets of gold and the pearly gates, heaven is primarily

pictured in relational terms. In heaven, we enjoy a personal and deep relationship with Jesus. We will eternally see Him. More than that, we have the hope that we will be with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ for all eternity. The kind of relationships we longed for on this earth will be eternally possible!

- The modern imagination has no trouble imagining eternal life. Even those who grew up with no religious tradition have some concept of what heaven is supposedly like. Roman culture, however, had only a limited concept of the afterlife. Most would have pictured Hades as a kind of shadow world where any sort of existence was gloomy and ethereal. The Jewish people had their own concept of Sheol, a place where the dead had limited awareness and consciousness. The idea of a personal, eternal, and vibrant heaven would have been a new kind of hope for these believers, regardless of their heritage.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-28: "Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful. Dear brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all the brothers and sisters with a sacred kiss. I command you in the name of the Lord to read this letter to all the brothers and sisters. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

- **"Now may the God of peace... May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ..."**
 - In 1 Thessalonians 1:1, Paul opened the letter with his traditional epistolary greeting: **"May God give you grace and peace."** This greeting combines the two traditional greetings of his day. Jewish people would often use the greeting "peace" (*'Shalom'*), while Greeks would use the word "grace" (*'Charis'*) in their welcome. The use of this combined greeting reminds us of both the diversity and unity of the early church.
- **"...your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless..."**
 - The letter ends with a final challenge towards holy living. Paul prays that the Thessalonians will be kept wholly holy until the day of Christ's return. The fullness of this holiness is illustrated in the fact that Paul uses two words in the Greek that carry the idea of wholeness. While the NLT condenses this with one mention of 'whole,' the NIV captures the idea by translating the phrase as **"...sanctify you through and through."**
 - As he has throughout this letter, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they are not without help on their quest for personal holiness: **"God will make this happen..."** We don't have to stand under our own power. Rather, God empowers us every step of the way. The power by which we are saved is the same power by which we stand.
 - Ligon Duncan: *"The whole of the Christian life hangs upon God's grace, God's promise, God's power, God's faithfulness. When we feel that we are losing in the*

fight against sin, we can be encouraged: God is working in our life right now. We can live with boldness and assurance because he is faithful."

- How have you seen God's work in your own life? How was He at work in your salvation story? How does He continue to work in your sanctification story?

James K.A. Smith: *"The Christian life is like living in escrow: the Creator has retaken possession, but we're waiting for closing."*

What are you waiting for? We can spend our lives waiting for any number of things. Only in Jesus do we find something worth waiting a lifetime for. He is the antidote to all our dis-ease, the joy for all our sorrows, the fullness for all our longings. The day of His return isn't the End; it's just the beginning of God's eternal story! The reality of that day changes the way we live on this day. We wait for Him because we know He's the One who will make all things right. We walk out in faith because we know every step brings us closer to Him. We stand firm because we know there's a day coming when we will meet Him in the air. Nothing we do for Him could ever come close to what He's going to do for us on the day He returns. So... what are you waiting for?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was your biggest takeaway from the video teaching time? What's one big application/insight you walked away with?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. As you read this description of Jesus' return, what stands out to you? What are you most looking forward to seeing on that day? How would these words have comforted the Thessalonians? How do they comfort us?
3. Think of some times in your life when you were forced to wait. What was that like? What were you waiting for? How does that waiting compare/contrast with the waiting Paul tells us to do in this passage? How do we know Jesus is worth waiting for?
4. Why do we often allow "End Times" discussions to become so nerve-racking and divisive? How do we use these teachings to encourage and edify one another? In what ways can a proper view of the End help us in our day-to-day lives?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. How does Paul apply this teaching on the Second Coming? What does it mean for us to live as "children of the day"? What does it look like for us to live in a way that is prepared for Jesus return?
6. As you close, reflect on Paul's closing to the letter. How does it make you feel to know that God will work to complete His work in you? Close together in prayer asking God to continue His work in you until the day of Christ's return?