

OUR HOPE

1 THESSALONIANS

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INTRODUCTION

Paul and two coworkers (Silas and Timothy) wrote the letter known as 1 Thessalonians around the year A.D. 50. That means this letter was one of the first, or perhaps the first, book of the New Testament written. Paul wrote it during what is usually called his second missionary journey. On this journey, God led him into Greece for the first time. Paul spent about two years in a city called Corinth, in southern Greece, and he may have written 1 Thessalonians not long after he arrived there.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy founded the church at Thessalonica just a few months before they wrote this letter. But they had been forced to leave quickly because of opposition (Acts 17:1–9). They had only spent a couple months in Thessalonica at most. As a result, Paul was uneasy about whether the Thessalonian believers were firmly grounded in their faith. He and Silas sent the young Timothy back to find out how they were doing and to solidify their Christian faith further.

After Timothy returned with good news, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to follow up with the people. The first three chapters of this letter rehearse Paul’s fledgling relationship with the church. Then, in the remaining chapters, Paul tried to further solidify their understanding of some basics, including the need to stay away from sexual immorality and the nature of the resurrection. First Thessalonians gives readers a great glimpse into some of the elementary teaching Paul gave to new converts, as well as the early part of his writing ministry.

Thessalonica was located north of Greece in an area known, both then and now, as Macedonia. The fact that Paul only referred to one church suggests a group of probably no more than fifty people that could meet in a large, single house. But they most likely met in smaller groups as well, in tenements or even outside. Since the audience had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9), they must have been mostly non-Jews or Gentiles, although it is certainly possible some were Jews as well. Some of these Gentiles may have visited Jewish synagogues before believing Jesus was king, although interestingly, 1 Thessalonians does not reference the Old Testament Scriptures. It is therefore possible that they knew next to nothing about Judaism before believing.

This book presents six weeks of Bible studies on 1 Thessalonians. On average, each week covers a little less than a chapter of this letter and follows a particular theme. Within each week, there are five days of reflection on the text, often on no more than a verse or two. The aim is to experience life transformation by studying the words God revealed to the Thessalonians through Paul, Silas, and Timothy. The goal is to hear God speak to you through Scripture and then live faithfully to his Word through the power of the Holy Spirit.

WEEK 1

BECOMING MODEL CHRISTIANS

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

“You became imitators of us and of the Lord . . .
And so you became a model to all the believers . . . your faith
in God has become known everywhere.”

—1 THESSALONIANS 1:6-8

DAY 1

GRACE AND PEACE

1 Thessalonians 1:1

INTRODUCTION

If we are to come anywhere close to being model Christians, we have to have God’s grace, his undeserved power in our lives. Paul begins every one of his letters with this wish for grace, along with the customary Jewish wish for peace.

ENGAGE

Many of us have a tendency to read the instructions of Scripture and try to do them in our own power. If we do not measure up, we either try harder or give up. It is so easy to read over these simple words of “grace and peace” at the beginning of all Paul’s letters. But grace—God’s undeserved love and empowerment—is the only way we will become like Christ. We cannot do it ourselves. Grace is also the truest

path to lasting peace with others. Grace and peace certainly apply to individual Christians, but Paul’s primary focus was on God’s grace and peace for an entire community of faith.

EXAMINE

It was customary to begin an ancient Greek letter with the word *chairein*, usually translated, “greetings.” Meanwhile, “peace” was a customary Jewish greeting. Paul’s standard greeting, “grace and peace,” seems to combine these two greetings and give them a special Christian twist. *Grace* (*charis*) was a very similar word to the standard Greek greeting (*chairein*), to which Paul then added the Jewish *peace*. So the combination brings together Jew and non-Jew in a way that expresses Paul’s mission in a nutshell. Paul understood his calling to be an ambassador to non-Jews, to see the whole world reconciled to God so that non-Jews and Jews might be part of the people of God.

What might the blessings of grace and peace look like within a group as opposed to an individual’s life?

EXPLORE

For some, learning that God offers the power we need to live out the Christian life is enough to release a flood of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It can catalyze a new phase of rest and peace in our Christian walk. Others know this truth but do not know how to tap into the Spirit’s power. You may need a stronger connection with the body of Christ in order to release God’s grace and peace into your life. Have you set aside

time to meet with other believers in prayer and spiritual discipline? Have you made yourself accountable to loving brothers and sisters in your Christian community?

Why is this a difficult thing to do in a world of individualism and self-reliance?

“He giveth more grace when the
burdens grow greater.”

—ANNIE JOHNSON FLINT

PRAYER

Father, help me see areas of my life where I have not fully tapped into your grace and peace. Help me find grace and peace in the community of faith around me.